Love The World

John 3:16

Small Group Study Guide
From the Gospel of John
How Do We Love the World?
How to Use this Study Guide

Love the whole world? That’s impossible! Only God can do that! Thank God, He did in Jesus. The most famous verse in the Bible is “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16). Later, Jesus tells his disciples, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). Jesus wants to love our small corner of the world through us. And He doesn’t want us to do this alone. We are better when we do this together. That’s why Jesus began his ministry by calling a small group of twelve believers. Today, the same Lord wants to send you and your small group into the world. Over the next seven weeks, the Spirit will use the Gospel of John to teach us how to love people who are rejected, discouraged, outcast, invisible, and grieving. Each session will include three sections:

**Love God** – If we want to love like Jesus we need to start where He did every morning in prayer to His Heavenly Father. Each study begins and ends with a time of soaking in His presence and lifting up our prayers. Get your group into the habit of spending more time in prayer and worship than just a brief opening and closing.

**Grow in Grace** – Here we will uncover truths from seven one-on-one encounters with Jesus in the Gospel of John. As you discuss these questions, try to forget all your assumptions about Jesus and imagine you are one of the twelve disciples hearing all of this for the very first time.

**Share with Others** – Here’s where you take your first steps to go out and love the world. Bible study is not about information but transformation … and that takes action. What will you do with what you learn each week? Use this time to plan how your group will participate, either individually or together, in “The Church Has Left the Building.”

**As an experiment of going outside the Building** we strongly encourage every small group to hold their meetings not at the church building or in members’ homes but out in a public place – such as Starbucks, Einstein’s, a restaurant, the mall, the public library, etc… It will dramatically change the way you study and even create curiosity from those who pass by. You may also want to share on Facebook, Twitter or some other social media the insights you receive and the progress you are making in your spiritual growth.

This study guide is meant to be your servant, not your master. So please don’t feel you have to race through the session; the point is to take your time to let God guide you. It’s not necessary to “go around the circle” before you move on to the next question. Your group will enjoy deeper, sharing and discussion if people don’t feel pressured to speak up. You don’t need to discuss every question but it is important to cover at least something in each section. Special thanks go to Leah Miller, Greg Penza, Kelli Regan, Martha Stringer and Gloria Yi who created these studies.

Ready? Let’s Love the World!
Week 1: Loving the Seeker  
Read John 3:1-21

Love God – As we begin this study of God’s love for the world, let’s open by expressing our love for God through prayer. During a moment of silence, let everyone think how they would complete this sentence: “I love you God…” Now pray your sentence prayers of love to God.

Grow in Grace
1. Who is one of the most interesting people you’ve met? What was the visit like?

2. John 3:1-2 Nicodemus is a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish High Council. Why does he visit Jesus at night? What is his purpose? To gather information or evidence about Jesus? To lay a trap? To learn more about this new Rabbi?

3. John 3:3-4 What do you think Jesus means when He says you must be ‘born again’ to see the kingdom of God? An alternate translation is “born from above.” Do you think this changes the meaning? Based on Nicodemus’ response, is he defensive, curious, or confused?

4. John 3:5-15 How do these verses explain what it means to be born again? What is the water, the Spirit and the wind? What does Jesus mean by “the Son of Man must be lifted up”?

5. John 3:16-17 Why are these famous verses often shared with seekers – people who are curious about God? Why do they appear in this meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus? Have you ever shared them with someone who is a seeker?

6. John 3:18-21 Why are some people drawn to the Light while others avoid it? Was there a time in your life when you wandered in the dark? Was there a time you searched for or saw the Light?

Share with Others
1. What are some doubts which prevent people from believing in God? What do you do when the topic of religion comes up in a conversation? Have you ever shared your faith in Jesus with someone? What happened?

2. Martin Luther called John 3:16 “The heart of the Bible, the Gospel in miniature.” How might we use this one verse to explain the Good News to a seeker? Is there someone with whom you could share the Good News?

3. The Church Has Left the Building – in a few weeks we will go out to bless our community. Have you signed up for a mission project yet? Who can you invite to go with you?

Love God – In your closing prayer time ask God to help you with any troubling doubts or difficulties. You can also pray for seekers you know. Ask God to give you an opportunity to share the Good News with them and invite them to worship or your small group.
Week 2: Loving the Rejected
Read: John 4:1-26

Love God- During the opening time of silence, take a moment to write down all the barriers God has broken down for you. Pray out loud expressing your gratitude to God for breaking down these walls.

Grow in Grace
1. John 4:4 Jesus was on his way from Judea back to Galilee. Because of their mutual hatred, Jews usually avoided the direct route through Samaritan territory. Scripture says, however, that Jesus “needed” to go through Samaria. Why do you think he needed to go? What mission did Jesus have in Samaria?

2. John 4:7 Generally women came in groups to draw water either early or later in the day to avoid the heat. Why did the Samaritan woman come alone at the hottest part of the day?

3. Often times we live into the labels others put on for us, whether they are welcomed or not. What kinds of labels do you think the people of this town placed on this woman? Why? How would you feel if you’d been through as many relationships as this woman?

4. John 4:9 What social and religious barriers does Jesus break by his simple request for a drink? Why did Jesus break the social protocol to speak with the woman?

5. Jesus does not confront her with the truth about God or her life. Discuss how Jesus gently leads her to these discoveries with invitation and curiosity. How might you use this approach to counsel someone who is troubled or to lead someone one to Christ?

6. John 4:13-15 Jesus makes a distinction between well water that only temporarily satisfies our physical thirst, and living water, which eternally satisfies our spiritual thirst. God gives each of us a thirst for a personal relationship with Him that can only be satisfied by receiving His living water. How would quenching this woman’s spiritual thirst redirect her from sin to Jesus, and transform her life? How have you seen this change in others or yourself?

Share with Others
1. Did your parents tell you not to associate with people of certain social classes or ethnicities? How did you feel about it? How does the fact that we are all sinners in need of a Savior help to remove our prejudices?

2. What do people use, instead of God’s living water, to satisfy their thirst? What changes occur within our spirits when we receive God’s living water? How would you explain this to others who may be mistaken like the Samaritan woman?

3. The Church Has Left the Building – there are many who struggle with emotional rejection or spiritual thirst. As you choose a mission project, consider doing something that provides God’s living water to someone like this woman.

Love God- In your closing prayer time, ask God for eyes to see the barriers that separate you and others and for the compassion and courage to break down those barriers so that you may offer others this living water.
Week 3: Loving the Discouraged
Read John 5:1-15

Love God —Recall ways God brought healing and restoration into your life—physical, emotional and spiritual. Then think about the areas where you are still broken, hopeless or paralyzed. As you “lay” in that place imagine Jesus asking, “Do you want to get well?” Spend a few minutes thinking about your answer to this question and write down your thoughts.

Grow in Grace
1. The man had been an invalid for 38 years. What might have been his state of mind? Quality of life? Daily existence?

2. John 5:3-7 The man didn’t do anything to deserve to be healed: he didn’t know who Jesus was, didn’t have faith and didn’t even ask to be healed. Yet despite the many other disabled people at the pool that day, why do you think Jesus chose to heal this man. What does this show us about God’s character?

3. John 5:6 In scripture the Greek word used for “well”—hygies—also means “freed from suffering,” “completely restored,” “cured,” and “made whole.” Knowing this, what do you think Jesus really means when He asks the man, “Do you want to get well?”

4. Several times in the gospels Jesus asks a similar question: “What do you want me to do for you?” (See Mark 10:35-38; Matthew 20:29-34; John 1:35-39). If Jesus already knows the answer, why does He ask this question? What can we learn about Jesus—and ourselves—from these encounters?

5. What reasons could the man have for NOT wanting to be completely healed? Why, and in what ways, do we sometimes choose to stay in our own misery?

6. John 5:8-12 Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath and then broke Jewish law by asking the man to pick up his mat and walk. The Jewish leaders focus on the man’s mat-carrying law-breaking, not his miraculous healing. Why? What does this show us about who they think God is? What does it show us about human nature?

Share with Others
1. We all know someone (and it might be you) like the crippled man, whose self-defeating attitude says, “Yeah, but …” How does Jesus reply to that?

2. The man didn’t come to Jesus and ask to be healed. Jesus went to him, understood his brokenness and healed him completely. How can you go into the world to show grace, mercy and love as Jesus did?

3. The Church Has Left the Building – in a few weeks we’ll go out to offer help to people who, like this paralyzed man, need physical, emotional, and/or spiritual healing. Have you signed up for a project?

Love God —As you close in prayer, remember that Jesus doesn’t ask, “Do you want to get well?” the way a friend, counselor, or even brilliant surgeon does. He asks as Creator, Savior, Son of God for whom nothing is impossible and no one is insignificant. And He asks us not because we deserve it, but because He loves us—totally and completely.
Week 4: Loving the Outcast
Read John 7:53-8:11

Nothing is more humiliating than being caught in an act of disobedience! Whether it's a child with his hand in the cookie jar or an adult driving over the speed limit, we all know the sinking feeling of being caught. In John 8, a woman is caught in the most awkward of situations—in the very act of adultery. The way Jesus responds to her may surprise you.

Love God

Think of a time when you hurt someone and that person was willing to forgive you. How did it feel to be forgiven? Spend time in prayer as a group thanking God for extending His forgiveness to you.

Grow in Grace

1. What do we know about the character and motives of those who bring this woman to Jesus? Who do they really want to judge?

2. While it is obvious that the woman is guilty of breaking the law, what other elements of injustice can you find in this situation?

3. The Pharisees and teachers were often very self-righteous. Why do you think they went away rather than stoning the woman (vv. 7-9)? According to the story, what should the Christian response to sin be?

4. How would you describe Jesus' attitude toward the woman (vv. 10-11)?

5. What does he command the woman to do?

Share with Others

1. What can we learn from this passage about Christ’s attitude toward us—even when we feel awful about ourselves?

2. What should our response to Christ's forgiveness and mercy be? What can the woman do to avoid falling into the same sin? What can you do in your life?

3. How do we offer Christ's forgiveness and mercy to those who are singled out in society?

4. Who do you know who is trapped in sin that you can speak with and offer Christ's love to?

5. The Church Has Left the Building – have you signed up for a project yet? Consider trying a project that will take you to people who’ve been rejected by others.

Love God During your closing prayer, ask God to show you who needs encouragement, forgiveness, and deliverance.
Week 5: Loving the Invisible
Read John 9: 1-12

**Love God** – The iconic hymn “Amazing Grace” proclaims that forgiveness and redemption are possible regardless of sins committed. With a message that the soul can be delivered from despair through the mercy of God, "Amazing Grace" is one of the most recognizable songs in the English-speaking world. Start your prayer time by reciting (or singing) the first verse in unison.

**Grow in Grace**
1. Talk about a time you missed or thought you misplaced something only to find later it was right in “plain sight”. Why do you think you couldn’t see it? How did you feel when it was missing? When it was found?

2. John 9:1-2 It was a common assumption at this time to think God punished sin by causing physical afflictions. If someone had something wrong, they must not be right with God. Talk about being blinded by judgment. What happens when we begin to think that way?

3. John 9:3-5 The Disciples saw the blind man as a theological debate. Jesus saw someone in whom the work of God could be made known. It’s easier to sit back and debate the theological ramifications of bad decisions that other human beings make. It is much harder to see how you can make a difference in the lives of people who are hurting. Think of some examples where the church struggles between judgment and healing. Where do you struggle?

4. John 9:6-9 The neighbors didn’t recognize the formerly blind man. Some didn’t believe it was him. Others demanded to know who healed him. Are you skeptical when others claim they received healing or a revelation from God? How does that skepticism hold us back?

5. John 9:10-12 There are 37 recorded healing miracles by Jesus in the Gospels. Read these passages: Luke 5:17-26 and Luke 8:42-48. Compare and contrast the individual healed and the response of the crowd with the John passage. Nothing is mentioned in this story about the blind man’s faith being the reason for his healing. Discuss what did require some faith on his part in order to be healed.

**Share with Others**
1. People may argue with what you believe, but they can't reasonably argue against how your life changed since you believed in Jesus. That's your testimony. Like the man who was blind but now can see, you can tell others how God changed your life. Have you thought about your testimony? Take some time this week to write it out.

2. Is there a spiritual blind spot or person in your life? A situation or person you’ve been avoiding? Ask God to open your eyes and reveal how you can use his healing power to address these issues.

3. How can participation in The Church Has Left the Building break down judgments and skepticisms? Have you selected a mission project?

**Love God** – In your closing prayer, ask God to give your group insight and vision to see the world around us through his eyes.
Week 6: Loving the Grieving
Read John 11:17-44

Love God – Each week there are prayer requests for those battling a disease and mourning the loss of a loved one. Take time to pray for those who are grieving in your groups, among your acquaintances, and in the larger church and community.

Grow in Grace
1. Describe a time when you thought you knew better than the person giving you the instructions – on a mission trip, directions on how to make something, instructions on how to raise your children. How did you react to these “instructions”?

2. There are three different reactions to Jesus in this passage: 1) from Martha and Mary, “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” 2) from the Jews, “See how he loved him!” and 3) from some of the Jews, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?” Which reaction do you align yourself most with and why?

3. In this passage Jesus’ presence is essential to comfort the grieving. Why do you think presence is so important for the grieving? There is no correct or wrong way to grieve. There are also many causes for grief in addition to the loss of a loved one. If able, please share what brought you most comfort when you were grieving.

4. Martha gave “correct” responses to everything Jesus told her: 1) she believed in the resurrection at the last day; 2) believed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God; 3) Lazarus was in the tomb for four days and there is a bad odor. What in your life is hard for you to turn over to Jesus? What do you think is impossible for Jesus to do for you in this life?

5. Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Jesus wept. What is the significance of this? Does this make God seem weaker or stronger? Why?

6. For Jesus, raising Lazarus is not his “quick fix” for the grieving sisters. His presence, aching heart, and troubled spirit were all part of grieving with the sisters. Ultimately, this is Jesus offers us when we grieve: He is always present with us and He is always praying for us to His Father who always hears him. What do you think Jesus’ prayer is for you?

Share with Others
1. When you approach an “impossible” situation such as a terminal disease, a mental illness, an irreconcilable relationship, ask Jesus how he is praying for this impossible situation, or plainly ask Jesus to pray for this situation since you don’t know how.

2. Who is grieving among you? Are you weeping with them? What are some things that would be helpful for those who are grieving? What things are not be helpful for them?

3. The Church Has Left the Building. Share your story of what you did to bless our community. Did you bring comfort to the grieving through your service?

Love God – In your closing prayer time ask God to fill you with His compassion for someone who is grieving or who is facing an impossible situation.
Love God: This study is a story of redemption after an episode of failure and shame. As you pray-silently or aloud-thank Jesus for a time of redemption and healing in your life or ask Jesus to take away a burden of guilt or shame you carry now.

Grow in Grace
1. Answer one of these questions: a) What’s your favorite place for breakfast? b) Do you fish and do you have a story about a fishing trip?

2. John 21:1-3 After witnessing the greatest event in the history of the world – the resurrection – why do you think the disciples returned to their hometown and their old jobs? Were they slipping back into their old ways? Did they forget or abandon the job Jesus gave them?

3. John 21:4-14 How is this event at the end of Jesus’ ministry similar to Luke 5:1-11 at the beginning of His ministry? What is Peter’s reaction in each of these stories? What does Jesus want Peter to do in both stories?

4. John 21:15-17 Why do you think Jesus asks Peter, “Do you love me”? Why doesn’t he ask, “Will you be obey me from now on?” or “Are you sorry?” Why does He ask three times? If you were Peter how would you feel the third time? Each time, Jesus commissions Peter to “feed my sheep.” What does it mean to be a shepherd? Why is it important to remember they are Jesus’ sheep?

5. Jesus does not demand perfection or proficiency. He asks for love. Machiavelli said, “It is better to be feared than loved, if you cannot be both.” Which motivates you more – fear or love? How does fear or love affect the nature of the relationship?

6. This story shows that with God, failure is not fatal or final. Is there something in your life you find hard to forgive? Do you ever doubt your ability or worthiness to feed Jesus’ sheep?

Share with Others
1. If Jesus asked you, “Do you truly love me more than these?” how would you respond?

2. Who are the “sheep” Jesus wants you to care for? Did your mission project for the Church Has Left the Building inspire you to care for more of His sheep?

3. Is there some failure, fault or frustration in your life right now that your group can lift up in prayer today?

Love God – In your closing prayer time ask Jesus to fill you with His love and forgiveness. Ask Him to show you the sheep He wants you to feed and care for.