

REFLECTION GUIDE

JOHN 3:16-21 | THE CRUX OF ALL THINGS

KEY TERMS

World - From the Greek word *cosmos*, John uses this word 78 times in his Gospel, while the synoptics only use it 14 times combined. For John, the word can mean the created world/universe (John 1:10), humanity as a whole (John 3:16), or systems opposed to God (John 15:18).

Believes - From the Greek word *pistueo*, which can be translated "believe," "trust," or "entrust." Here in John 3:16, the phrase literally reads *believes into Jesus* and has the sense of directing one's trust into Jesus and resting in him.

Eternal life - In a 1st-century Jewish understanding, *eternal* referred to the age to come beyond the present when all things would be made right. As the previous verses (vv. 1-15) show, Jesus is announcing that the age to come is starting now. Thus *eternal life* ("life according to the age to come") refers not only to the duration, but the quality, and is available in Jesus.

SYNOPSIS

During Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, we find the most well-known verse in the entire Bible: *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life* (v. 16). This verse highlights God's love, speaking to a love so great that it encompasses the whole *world* and that it motivates him to send his *only Son* to the *world*. Jesus (or John; see Did You Know? section) says that God sent his Son into the world to save, not judge, the world (vv. 17-18). Later John's Gospel will portray Jesus as bringing *judgment* (John 9:39), which sets up salvation and judgment as two sides of the same coin. One's relationship to Jesus (*whoever believes*) is the sole determining factor for receiving salvation or judgment. The Gospel then returns to this theme of Jesus as *light*, saying, *the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil* (v. 19). Here, as well as back in chapter one, John portrays Jesus as a fulfillment of Isaiah 49:6 which says, *I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth*. This scene with Nicodemus shows Jesus as the One who has come to bring the kingdom of God/eternal life for all—not just Israel—who will believe and entrust themselves to him. The warning, however, is that many will not *come to the light*, preferring to continue living in their old way of darkness (vv. 20-21).

GOING DEEPER

Read 1 John 1:5-10. How does John's statement that *God is light* help us understand Jesus' teaching about those who *love darkness* versus those who *come to the light*? Why is *walking in the light* a proper response to trusting Jesus? In your own journey of faith, what are some examples of ways you've learned to do this and what challenges have you faced in doing so?

DID YOU KNOW?

There are no parentheses in Greek and sometimes it's unclear where speech begins and ends. John 3:16 is a good example of this. While the ESV and NASB consider this verse Jesus' own words, the NIV considers them the words of John the Gospel writer.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read John 3:16-21. What stands out to you? What surprises you?
2. Consider the context of what was said previously in John 3:1-15. How does John 3:16 build upon or explain verses 1-15 (especially verses 14-15)?
3. In verses 17-18, we see something of God's activity in salvation and something about humanity's activity. In what way do we see God's sovereignty at work? Where do we see man's responsibility?
4. Read verses 19-21. Why do you think John uses the words "loved" and "hates" in these verses? Does this language seem strong to you? Why or why not?
5. Note the number of times that these verses focus on Jesus (how many references do you see?) and belief in him. How does the inclusion of the word "already" (v. 18) add even more emphasis on the importance of faith in Christ to our salvation?

LIVING THE WORD

6. Throughout John 3, we've been exploring salvation through faith in Jesus Christ—what it means to be born again (v. 3), to have eternal life (vv. 15, 16), to be saved (vv. 16, 17). How has this deepened your understanding of salvation?
7. Do you remember a time when you first looked to Christ alone for salvation and were "born again"? If so, share the 2-3 minute version of your redemption story with your group or with a friend. If you have haven't put your faith in Christ, share what is difficult for you about making this decision.
8. Close in prayer thanking God our Father for giving his only Son so that you might have eternal life.