

**BIBLE TEACHING
AND
WORSHIP GUIDE**



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Responding to God's Love
John 3:1-16

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

- 1. The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.
- 2. The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)
- 3. The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Write the names of the suggested "famous" people and one "infamous" person on slips of paper. Feel free to substitute names of famous people who are more familiar to your group.

Have snacks ready, or ask someone to prepare them if this is appropriate for your church.

Bible Study Leader:

Have a coin available for use in the illustration during the Bible Study.

If possible, have several versions of the Bible on hand to compare how each expresses John 3:16.

Arrange the room to accommodate the group expected. Some may choose to sit on the floor as needed. They may need to be against walls for back support.

Worship Time Leader:

Find John 3:16 in ***The Message*** version of the Bible by Eugene Peterson to use near the beginning of the Worship Time. Have someone prepared to read the verse with feeling and expression.

Music Sources:

“God Is So Good” #23, *Baptist Hymnal*, 1991 ed. (BH)

“Bless His Holy Name” #22, BH

“I Have Decided to Follow Jesus” #305, BH

“Jesus Loves Me” #344, BH

“For God So Loves the Word” #548, BH

“We Have Heard the Joyful Sound” #581, BH

1

Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

Responding to God's Love

Focal Text

John 3:1-16

Main Idea

In love, God offers you eternal life if you will respond to Jesus, His Son, whom God gave so that you might be saved.

Questions to Explore

How does God want you to respond to what He has done for you?

Gathering together:

As people arrive, give each one a slip of paper with the name of a famous person printed on it (e.g. Prime Minister Tony Blair, President George W. Bush, author Barbara Johnson, singer Celine Dion, artist Thomas Kinkade, etc.) Include someone who has earned a bad reputation.

(Note: Include characters children and youth would recognize, and distribute these appropriately.)

An older child or youth may be assigned to distribute the names.

If the group knows simple and well-known Christian songs, begin by singing one or two of the hymns and praise songs listed in the "**Music Sources**" located near the beginning of this session's materials.

You may want to choose among these—or among others that speak of God's Love.

"God Is So Good" #23, *Baptist Hymnal*, 1991 ed. (BH)

"Bless His Holy Name" #22, BH

"For God So Loves the World" #548, BH

"We Have Heard the Joyful Sound" #581, BH

First thoughts:

Leader: Ask the following questions about the assigned names when the group is seated:

- ✓ Where would you go to encounter this person?
- ✓ What would you want to talk about?
- ✓ What would you like to ask the celebrity?

Ask several people to respond with their answers to these questions.

Say: Our Bible lesson today concerns a leader in Israel. He secretly met with a man who had gained a reputation as a troublemaker for speaking the truth about God. Jesus was causing a lot of problems for the social and spiritual leaders in Israel because he taught such radically different ideas about what people needed to do to please God. The leader wanted to ask him some questions. Today we will look at this account in the Bible.

Say: When we have questions, we want to go to someone who is reliable and can give us honest answers and helpful advice. Perhaps you have come to worship today with questions or problems. The best place we can take our concerns is to Jesus, the One who knows all about us. Let's take a few minutes to pray together, to leave our problems with God, and to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit who is willing to meet here with us today.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Have the group bow their heads and pray silently for two minutes, talking to God about their problems and asking Him to help them trust Him to care for them and meet their needs. Close the silent prayer time with a simple "In Jesus' name, Amen".

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry opportunities or activities and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Responding to God’s Love

Focal Text

John 3:1-16

Background Text

John 3:1-21

Main Idea

In love, God offers you eternal life if you will respond to Jesus, His Son, whom God gave so that you might be saved.

Questions to Explore

How does God want you to respond to what He has done for you?

Teaching Aim

To lead participants to respond to God’s love by trusting in Jesus.

Introduction to your personal study:

We don’t always understand the process of coming into a relationship with God. Here is one person’s story.

- Regularly attended Bible study and worship.
- Baptized at age nine.
- Tithed by regularly giving a tenth of what I earned to God’s work as a teenager.
- Abstained from certain sins.
- Was well-thought-of by my pastor.

These were the conditions in my life. Yet there was something missing. A Bible study on the life of Jesus—the prophecy of His coming, His birth, the beginning of His ministry, the miracles, teachings, trials, His crucifixion and resurrection—made me

aware of my lack of a relationship to Christ. One night in a darkened room, I said, "God, if I were to die tonight, I would not be with You. Whatever it is that You do to people to make them right with You, I want You to do it to me." No one blew a trumpet, the lightening didn't flash; but something happened to me. That night, God came into my life. In the years since then, I have enjoyed the presence of Christ in my life each day. This is only possible because of my "new birth."

Background:

Focusing on the Meaning:

A Religious Man (John 3:1-8)

John 3:1 Nicodemus was a religious man. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, a religious Pharisee sect that was directly opposed to the spirit of Christianity. The Sanhedrin was the supreme religious court of the Jews. They believed that a person gained salvation by keeping the Jewish law in the strictest way. They had about six hundred laws. They were committed to these laws and attempted to lead the entire nation to obey them. Nicodemus practised legalism personally. He taught legalism with passion, and he enforced legalism strictly. Yet there was something missing from his life. Nicodemus acknowledged Jesus' relationship to God (John 3:2-3).

John 3:2 Nicodemus diplomatically approached Jesus by recognizing Jesus' power in teaching and ministering. This in itself was unusual. Ordinarily the younger men sought the counsel of the older, the poorer men sought out the richer, and the uneducated sought out the educated. In this case, everything was reversed.

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Perhaps he didn't want to be seen. This may have been because of Nicodemus' prominence among the Jewish religious leaders. Whatever the reason for the timing of the visit, the important thing is that he came to Jesus.

John 3:3 Jesus knew Nicodemus' inner thoughts and answered his unspoken question. Jesus explained that people enter a relationship with God by having a spiritual birth. Nicodemus did not understand Jesus' statement about eternal life (John 3:4-8).

John 3:4 Nicodemus inquired how a man could be born again. He certainly could not go back to his mother's womb. Nicodemus was unwilling to acknowledge that a religious and orthodox leader would have to make such a radical change to be in a right relationship to God.

John 3:5 Jesus stated again that no one could enter the kingdom of God without being born of water (natural birth) and of the Spirit (spiritual birth). He insisted that a new birth is necessary and that it must be spiritual and inward.

John 3:6 The human nature with which all people are born is corrupt. The new birth is holy and spiritual and comes from the working of the Spirit. Flesh will grow old and die. Spirit transcends time.

John 3:7 Jesus repeated his imperative that for persons to be in the spiritual kingdom, they must experience a spiritual birth.

John 3:8 Jesus compared the work of the Holy Spirit to the work of the wind. His statement about the wind explains that just as you cannot see where it comes from, so it is with the spiritual life. While it cannot be explained, it is still fact.

Nicodemus Seeks Clarification (John 3:9-15)

John 3:9 Nicodemus sought to understand by further questioning Jesus. He believed that people were in God's kingdom if they were descendants of Abraham. Jesus was teaching something drastically different from Nicodemus' previous understanding and experience.

John 3:10 Christ reproved Nicodemus for not knowing about a right relationship with God and being incapable of understanding it. Jesus told Nicodemus that, as a teacher of Israel, he should have understood that religion did not mean anything without this inner-life experience.

John 3:11 Jesus was speaking of knowledge he had personally, yet Nicodemus and his comrades did not accept it.

John 3:12 Jesus often spoke of spiritual truths in language borrowed from common earthly things such as birds, seeds, flowers, water, wind. Then he asked, "If you can't understand these common examples, how can you understand and believe heavenly things in the language of angels?"

John 3:13 Jesus explained that his knowledge comes not from revelation as the prophets received truth. He had been in heaven before His incarnation and therefore spoke the truths of God. The pre-existent Son of God who was in heaven before He came to earth knew from personal knowledge and experience about the things of God.

John 3:14 Jesus referred to the incident in Numbers 21:6-9 where the children of Israel who were bitten by the snakes in the wilderness were healed only by looking at a brass serpent on a pole. Jesus' giving himself on the cross parallels Moses' elevating the image on the pole. It cannot be explained how a sick man looking at a brass serpent on a pole could be healed, but this happened. In the same manner, though it is inexplicable, people receive God's forgiveness of their sin and they begin a right relationship with God by looking in faith to Jesus Christ.

John 3:15 “Eternal life” as used here describes the believer in close communion with God, sharing a rich, deep relationship. It is not something merely hoped for in the future but something already experienced in this present life. Eternal life is more than endless existence; it is enjoying the life of God in Christ now. God freely offers this eternal life through faith (John 3:16).

John 3:16 This verse, sometimes called the “little Gospel,” is a wonderful description of the mission and sacrifice of Jesus. The Greek word used here for love portrays the self-sacrificing love of God. God loves the “cosmos,” the entire world. His love is for all people regardless of heritage, family, and race. It includes people of all times. Jesus as God’s only Son was offered as the sacrifice for the sins of everyone. This goes far beyond the Old Testament pact with the Jews as the chosen people. The verse states that anyone, not just the Jews, but anyone who trusts in Christ will be saved. All those who believe will receive everlasting mercy. The sacrifice of his own Son is God’s supreme effort to bring people back into fellowship and relationship to Him. John 3:16 is essentially a recapitulation of all that Jesus wanted to communicate to Nicodemus. It represents the answer to all his questions.

Teaching the Passage:

Verses in the larger lesson (John 3:17-21) explain some implications of God’s ultimate gift. Based on a person’s choices in this present life, he or she will face either salvation or condemnation. New birth and eternal life come as a result of believing in Christ as Saviour. A lack of belief in him leads to eternal condemnation and judgement. Jesus came to save people. He did not come to condemn them. A person’s belief in Christ cancels all condemnation, but a lack of belief means that judgement is already pronounced. These verses also portray the pitiful condition of people who persist in unbelief and wilful ignorance. Notice the contrasts drawn between light and darkness, belief and rejection.

For Personal Reflection:

- 1. What have I learned from this study?**
- 2. What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**
- 3. What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Responding to God's Love

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to – or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc. Children who stay with their parents in the Youth/Adult study should have the material on worship as suggested in **The Children's Corner** at the beginning of this **Unit** of studies. (Ask your leader who downloads the studies for those suggestions).

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

John 3:1-16

Background Text

John 3:1-21

Main Idea

In love, God offers eternal life to those who will respond to Jesus, God's Son, given so that all might be saved.

Questions to Explore

How does God want you to respond to what He has done for you?

Teaching Aim

To lead participants to respond to God's love by trusting in Jesus.

Connect with Life:

Leader: Have participants (including children and youth) read John 3:16 from various versions of the Bible. Make sure beforehand that you know that each person asked to read feels comfortable reading in public. Suggest to parents that they help their children memorize John 3:16 as a family activity during the coming week.

Leader: If you wish, read the testimony given in the “Introduction” to the Teacher Preparation section.

Guide the Study:

1. Say: The question was asked, “What do you think is necessary for a person to have a personal relationship with God?” One lady answered, “You know, believe in the flag and be a good citizen.” There are many other answers given to that question: support and love your family, be baptised, live a moral life, attend worship services at a church, give offerings to religious causes, care for neighbours, do good deeds, perform certain religious rites, know the Ten Commandments, or have other family members who attend church. Others might say, “I don’t believe a loving God would send anyone to hell.”

Perhaps you can think of other replies that people may give when asked how to have a personal relationship with God. In today’s study, a religious man seeks answers to that very question. Let’s examine Scripture to discover the answer that Jesus gives to that man, Nicodemus.

2. Lead the group to read John 3:1-2 to discover some things about the man who came to Jesus to learn about God. After reading the verses, ask: “What do we know about this man?” Be sure to cover the following:

His name was Nicodemus.

He was a Pharisee.

He was a member of the ruling religious council.

He had some knowledge of Jesus’ teaching and ministry.

3. Ask: What was Jesus’ response to Nicodemus’ statement in v. 3? After answers are given, point out that Jesus did not comment about his miracles but immediately launched into what a person had to do to see the kingdom of God.

Read v. 4. Point out that Nicodemus asked a question. Discuss the question and his comments about being born again.

4. Ask: What was Jesus’ answer to Nicodemus’ question? Read the answer in vv.5-8. Discuss Jesus’ comments about water and spirit, flesh and spirit.

5. Raise this question: What was Nicodemus’s response in v.9? (He asks another question).

6. Say: Let’s read Jesus’ answer by reading v.10-15. Read the passage and point out that Nicodemus, even though he was a teacher, did not understand these spiritual things.

Ask: In v.13, who does the Bible say has seen heaven? (The Son of man who came from heaven).

Review vv.14-15 to show the parallel between Moses lifting up the brass serpent in the wilderness and Jesus being raised up on the cross.

7. Explain that v.16 shares how an individual receives eternal life and forgiveness of sin. Read the verse.

Ask: What does a person have to do to have eternal life? (Believe in Christ). Help them understand that this is not just an intellectual belief—rather it is a commitment to let Christ control their lives.

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to go away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

8. Place a coin in your open hand. Stretch out your hand to a person and ask them to take the coin (Do not hand it to them. Let them pick it up with their own hand). After the person takes the coin ask: Why does this person have the coin? (You gave it, and the person took it). Elaborate. The coin was offered. It was a free gift, but no one was forced to take it. The person took it by choice.

9. Ask: What would have happened if the person had not taken the coin? (He would not have the coin). Explain that God offers everyone a right relationship with Him, but He does not compel anyone to take it. A person makes a personal choice to respond to God's offer.

10. Ask: Won't you accept the gift of eternal life from God right now? Ask those in attendance to bow their heads.

Say: You only need to invite Christ into your life as your Saviour and Lord once for all time. Then He is there forever. If you have not done that, I would like to invite you to receive salvation today by repeating this prayer silently as I lead it:

“God, I come to you today as a sinner. I have done wrong. I want you to forgive me of my sins. I accept Jesus as my Saviour and Lord of my life.”

11. Say: If you made that commitment to Jesus, you will want to let us know so we can share your joy and help you begin to grow spiritually in Christ as He works in your life.

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship times. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! TakeTen

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

Responding to God's Love **John 3:1-16**

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Danger! – Help!

Can you describe a time when you were in danger and someone rescued you?

Did you realize that you were at risk?

How did the rescuer know you needed help? (*shouting for help, chance observation, concern for your welfare*)

Who responded to you?

Identify the problem that prompted Nicodemus to seek help? (*He wanted to understand who Jesus was. He was worried about his ignorance of spiritual truth*).

How did Jesus respond to Nicodemus' questions? (*He identified the danger Nicodemus was facing—missing out on eternal life*).

In what way did Jesus rescue Nicodemus? (*He explained to him how to have confidence about his relationship to God, not just for the present but for eternity. Jesus essentially offered Himself as Nicodemus' rescuer or saviour.*)

Nicodemus had to make a decision. What was it? (*It was to believe and follow Jesus or to ignore the truth Jesus offered.*)

You may be like Nicodemus before he met with Jesus. Maybe you don't really understand who Jesus is or what it means to be "born again." Perhaps you think living

for today is all that matters. Jesus warned Nicodemus, and in this passage from the Bible, He warns you and me that all of us must face eternity. We each need to be rescued from our sin and accept a relationship with God through faith in His Son. Jesus came to save the world. He still offers to rescue people through faith in Him. When we make the choice to trust Him, He'll rescue us from danger; and we'll experience a spiritual birth and a new life.

Do you know what will become of you when you die? Remember that no one will rescue you after you die. You need to prepare for eternity in this life; not when you face God's judgement. You must make the same decision as Nicodemus—to follow Jesus or to reject Him.

Think about Nicodemus' questions (v.2,4,9). How would you have answered him? Can you tell someone else how to start a new life with Jesus as rescuer or saviour?

So who do you need to talk to? Someone who can tell you how to have eternal life? Or someone who needs to know that Jesus wants to be their Saviour, too?

3

Copy this section for the Worship Time leader.

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)

Responding to God's Love John 3:1-16

Beginning the Service:

Worship Leader: Say: The theme of our session today is "Responding to God's Love". Knowing that God loved us so much that he sent his only Son to die for us calls for a response of gratitude, humility and joy. We call this response 'worship' and it is usually accompanied by praise. Worshipping God and praising him in the company of other believers is pleasing to our Lord. Let's enter into this experience of worship with thankful, joyful hearts now.

Say: When we come together in prayer and worship we want to express our gratitude to God for his presence among us. We are going to sing some songs that express our feelings about what Jesus has done for us.

Have the group sing *"I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"* and/or *"Jesus Loves Me"* (You may have children who would like to sing this chorus or another by themselves).

Ask an adult member to read with feeling and expression the verse, John 3:16 from the Bible version called *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson. This new version of the Bible is available at most Christian bookstores as well as many secular ones.

Offering:

Ask a teen to gather the offering for the day.

Ministry Moment:

Have the group reflect on ways in which the offering will be used to help others.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to help the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the theme and Scriptures for the day and bring the worship experience to a conclusion. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he/she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

Truths about God's Love

Text: John 3:16

Introduction:

How many times have you said, "I love you" and wished you had not said it? How many times have you failed to say, "I love you" and wished you had? We say, "I love you, Mother," or "I love the weather," or "I love that song," or even "I love your hair!" Each time we mean something different. God's love for us in the Bible is always consistent. He loves us with the highest form of love. John 3:16 reveals God's love clearly. John writes, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..." He loved and he gave. The Bible is clear. God loved each one of us so much that he gave his only Son in order that we can believe in him and have everlasting life. Let's note some truths about God's love as seen in this wonderful verse:

1. God's love is real.

He loves us. No matter what, he loves us. The fact that "God loves the world" means that no one is excluded from his love. Scripture says, "The Lord is...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9)." God not only loves you, but he also loves everyone you know as well as everyone you do not know. His love is real.

2. God's love is also personal.

The "whoever" not only means that God loves everybody, but it also means that he loves each one individually. It means me. It means you. God's love is personal. He has given each of us a choice to accept his offer of eternal life. We do not deserve it. Paul tells us that we were God's enemies (Romans 5:10). We cannot earn it. Paul says eternal life is a gift, not a payment for good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). We can each choose to believe in Jesus Christ and have everlasting life.

3. God's love is also very clear.

The text reads, "that he gave." God gave Jesus to die on the cross. It is not hard to believe in God's love when everything is going well. When bad things happen, though, it is easy to blame God and think he must not love us. When trying times come, we should close our eyes and see Jesus crucified. It is Christ's sacrifice that reminds us how much God cares for us. His love was made very clear on the Cross.

Call to Commitment:

4. God's love is also a choice.

John writes, "Whoever believes in Him..." We are confronted with a clear choice. If we believe in Jesus, we "shall not perish, but have everlasting life." If we choose not to believe then we shall perish. What does it mean to believe? It means to place one's faith or trust in Jesus. Suppose you saw a high wire stretched between two buildings several stories above the ground. A man says he can push a wheelbarrow across the wire. You might say you believe he could do it. However, if you really "trust" (place your faith in) him, you will be willing to actually get into the wheelbarrow! Do you really believe Jesus was given for you because God loves you personally? Once you do, you will want to trust him with your life and receive the gift of everlasting life. If you have not believed in Jesus yet, won't you place your faith in him right now? John 3:36 says, "Whoever puts his faith in the Son has eternal life...."

Concluding the Service:

Finish the service by singing together the chorus "**For God So Loved the World**". Another option would be the chorus "Alleluia" with some or all of the following verses: Alleluia; Lord, you love me; Lord, I trust you; You're my Saviour; Lord, I thank you; Alleluia.

Have someone lead in a prayer asking God's help with the needs of the coming week and that we would share the good news of John 3:16.