



# Sermon Growth Guide

**March 31, 2024**

**God So Loved**



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**March 31, 2024 | Happy Easter!**

**All for Love – God So Loved**

**John 3:16-21**

**Key Verse:** John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

**Big Idea:** God SO loves you!

## Foundations

“My prayer for you,” preaches Tim, “is that you not only think about God’s love, hear things about God’s love—my prayer for you is that you feel God’s love today. Will you try? Try to allow it.”

God loves you, so. So big. Big love. Paul writes “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

God creates us in His love and places a mantle of freewill on our shoulders, enabling us to respond, or not respond, to His lavish love for us.

Each week we have been raising a question Gen Z asks. Our question this week is, “What is my worth?” Great question. This is a shared question across the generations. Consider this:

“He himself bore our sins,” Peter writes, “in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness.”

We each of us are worth everything to God. So much so, that He came and suffered and died for us. Friend, you are so loved by the Father, so loved. Open your time together in prayer, giving thanks to God that He loves us, He loves YOU. Amen.

## Understanding God’s Word

Together, read John 3:16-21.

According to verse 17, why did God send His son?

In verse 19, does humanity prefer light or dark? Why?

Spend time discussing this passage at length. What do we learn about the heart of God throughout John 3:16-21?

## Applying God’s Word

God SO loves you!

What steps can you take to even more so receive this love?

What life rhythm might you commit to that will help you to better respond to this eternally joyous reality?

## Witnessing God’s Word

God’s love is meant to be shared. Dwelling in the love of God, how can you then move out and share God’s great love with those around you? Name one person with whom you want to share God’s love. Pray for this person and discern one step you can take in loving them with God’s love this week.

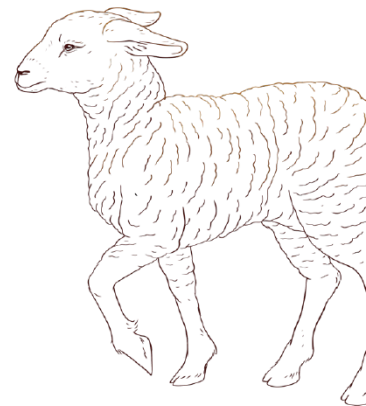


“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) **God So Loved.** It’s a matter of degree. How much did God love the world? He so loved the world. “So” is also a word we use about the manner or way a thing is done. In what way did God love the world? He loved the world like this, just so. And “so” is a word used to sum things up. So, God loved the world in the end. God so loved the world. **All for Love** is our sermon series. My prayer for you is that you not only think about God’s love, hear things about God’s love—my prayer for you is that you feel God’s love today. Will you try? Try to allow it.

“God so loved” is a matter of degree. How much did God love the world? Do you think you can grasp how much God loves you? When our kids were little, we read them this children’s book: “Guess How Much I Love You.” The little rabbit says to his dad, “I love you this much,” and spreads his arms. The dad says, “Well, I love you this much.” His arms stretch twice as wide. “Ooh, that’s a lot. I love you up to my ears,” the bunny says. “I love you up to my ears,” says the Dad. Ooh! On it goes until they are loving each other out to the fence, over the hill, up to the sky. Finally, the bunny says, “I love you to the moon,” and falls asleep. The father whispers in his fuzzy bunny ears, “I love you to the moon... and back!” Parents hope kids know they love them, but things get in the way. It seems hard to remember your parents’ love. It drifts away or fades or something, or it’s tainted by parents’ mistakes and imperfections. We hope our kids remember we love them, but they said they didn’t remember reading that book. We only read it to them about 4,000 times. Oh well. Do you have any idea how much God loves you? Think you could guess? God so loved. It’s a matter of degree. How much did God love? So much. God loved the world so much he gave his one and only Son. That’s a lot.

“God so loved” is a question of manner. How did God love? God loved just so, in this manner, in this way: he gave his Son. How do we understand that? Help me. I’ve never been loved that way. I’ve never had someone say, “I love you. Here’s my son.” God so loved he gave. We need to loop back around to understand this. What is the object of God’s love? The world. God created this world, ‘cosmos’ in the original Greek. We are all, this is all, everything you see is all, the makings of God. We are his creation. We see and feel some love in that. It’s not hard here in Colorado to see the fingerprints of love in the beauty of creation. How lovely, we say. Yes. How lovely; how loving. See how he loves you and me, every sunrise against the mountains. Do you feel how God loves you?

God is an artist. John Burke, in his book *Unshockable Love*, points out how every artist accepts the limitations of the medium in which they work. A painter knows the limitations of the paint, how it spreads, its colors, the limitations of the canvas, the limitations of the brushes. A sculptor knows the limitations of clay or bronze, a musician the limitations of the instruments. The medium presents its own limitations. What does that have to do with God? God has no limitations. Can’t God do whatever he wants? Yes. But think about this. What God decided to create was love. God decided to create love. You are the pinnacle of creation. Did you know that? God smiles when he thinks of you. And God created you to participate in his most important, most beautiful, most heartfelt piece of art: Love. Like every artist, God—yes, even God—accepted the limitations of the medium he himself created. Love must be free. “Love cannot be forced. It must be free. Once God chose to create creatures like us who could love, he limited himself by creating a world that could choose to reject or ignore our Creator and go against his will and spurn his love.” (John Burke) Love had to be free, not preprogrammed in the algorithm. Have you heard of AI Companions? Pretty



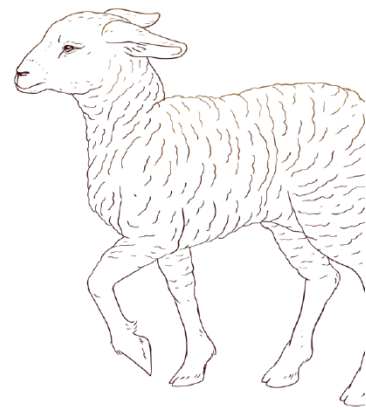
soon we'll all have robots following us around parroting how awesome we are, and how smart everything is we say, and how good we look. It's gonna be great! I can't imagine what could go wrong. God didn't want that. That's not what he was making. He set out to create love, genuine, beautiful and free.

Well, in that freedom, we did reject God. We did ignore. We did spurn his love, and we do it still. The passage says we are condemned. That's strong language, isn't it? "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." (John 3:17-18) Condemned already. Just for not believing? That's harsh. If you are new to this, you need to know you are jumping in on a long story at this point. God made this world in love. This world, all of us, we turned away from God and chose our own disobedient activities. Now we all know there's something wrong in this world and it needs fixed. There's something wrong inside. When I do this, I feel bad, I feel sick, I know there is something else, something more, somebody else I am meant to be. These are all the indications. But how do you jump to condemned? Your back to the light means your eyes are on the shadows; you are walking into darkness. Our rebellions against God—our little rebellions or our grand, raging rebellions—separate us from him. Separation from the Author of Life means a steady walk into death; like a condemned man on death row. God still loves that man. God still so loves the world. Believing in Jesus is his offer, his way of salvation.

So, again, how did God love? God loved just so, in this manner, in this way: he gave his son. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

"Oh. The world. You mean the cosmos, the universe, the creation. That's what God loves and wants to save? His art?" Yes, it does mean that. God does want to redeem his artwork, his creation. But "world" also means people. It's people he came to save. Like in John 1, we read at Christmas how Jesus came into the world he made, "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:10-12) The world was the people who rejected him. Even while they were rejecting him, God so loved, God so loved the world. And some of them stopped rejecting him; some of them turned and opened their hearts to that love; some received him and believed him and became children of God.

God so loved the world, he gave his one and only Son. He gave him. Jesus is God's gift. Jesus is God's sacrifice. Jesus came; Jesus lived; Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our rebellion. He paid in our place. He died for us, out of love for us, he gave his life. Why? There was no one on earth that could pay the cost for our rebellion. I can't pay the debt for my sins. You can't make up for yours. Sin costs a life. The cross is the culmination of Jesus' mission of love. The only way that God could be both just and the justifier of sinners, both righteous and the forgiver of rebels, is to send his own Son to pay the price for our rebellion. God so loved the world, so loved the fallen, rebellious, spiteful world, that he gave his Son, his only Son, Jesus who died for us on the cross. But, also, Jesus is God. That phrase, "one and only," sometimes we say "only-begotten," in Greek *monogenous*, uniquely-begotten, that's a hint to a great mystery. Jesus is not only God's Son but is God himself. God himself paid the cost. God would not do that unless he loved us. Do you believe



God loves you? Do you think you can grasp it? Can you feel God's love?

Each week we have been raising a question you folks in Gen Z ask as you make sense of this world you are growing into as young adults. Gen Z asks, "What is my worth?" We all ask that one. It matters where you are asking. Where are you basing your worth? If your worth is in your job, you think, I'm not very far along yet but I'm not sure if I'll be the best there ever was. If it's in your body, you're young, things are probably pretty good compared to older... never mind. Even so, you know beauty is fleeting and impermanent, and you never quite feel as beautiful or handsome as the faces you see. Where are you asking, what is my worth? God sets your worth at this price, at this value. It's not what you say it is, the price is what the market will bear. God sets your value here in the end: your worth is proven in the death and resurrection of Jesus. God sees you worth the life of his own Son.

God so loved. It's a matter of degree. How much did God love? It's about the way. How did God love the world? He loved the world just so, in this way. He gave his Son. It's also a way to sum it all up. "So," we say, "that's what happened." At the end of the day, God, so, loved. God loved the world in the end. He gave his Son. That Son died. That Son's body was laid in a tomb outside Jerusalem. That tomb was found empty, and that Son, Jesus, was seen again alive after he was dead. He is risen! Now we know the truth of the second half of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16). Whoever means whoever. Whoever believes in him.

You might want to run away instead. We all want to. We want to run to the dark. "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil

hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed." (John 3:19-20) We think we can hide. Like children playing hide and seek, we think we can hide by closing our own eyes. Just don't tell anybody, if nobody sees me do it, if I don't tell anyone, if it's on a private browser, if I can cover my tracks, nobody needs to know. God knows. Did you imagine God couldn't see you there in the dark? And the problem isn't just that we do these things, and hide our shame, and cover over our wounds to the point they grow putrid and can't heal; the problem is that the dark things in our dark lives seep out into the world. Where do you think racism comes from? Where do you think war comes from? And lust and anger and greed and envy and all the rest? From dark hearts in dark places allowing dark things to grow—seeking darkness. It can stop. There can be light. Do you have any idea how much God loves you?

The father sits on the edge of the bed and says, "Guess how much I love you." He shows his finger and thumb, "This much?" "No, more!" He holds his hands apart, "This much?" "No, daddy, more!" He spreads his arms out wide, fingers stretched, "This much?" No limit, no end, no boundary. Open wide. Stretching out like east and west. Stretching out to grasp the whole world, the whole cosmos, everything in it. This much? Do you see Jesus on the cross, arms outstretched? Can you possibly grasp how much God loves you? I want to give you a chance to respond in prayer. If you wish, but I ask all believers to join with me, but if you are trying to open your heart to Jesus' love for the first time, you too, follow along with me in prayer. Repeat after me, *"I pray to you O God; You who made Heaven and Earth; You who made me; if I have refused your love, I am sorry; forgive me through Jesus; come into my life and let me feel your love; today, tomorrow and forevermore. In Jesus name, amen."*

