

# Does God Love Me?



Session 1



**John 3:16;**  
**Romans 8:38–39**

## Session Objective

Participants will explore the sovereign love of God and how God loves us regardless of our imperfections.

### Faith Statement

#### Question 8. How do you understand the love and power of God?

Through Jesus Christ. In his life of compassion, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead, I see how vast is God's love for the world—a love that is ready to suffer for our sakes, yet so strong that nothing will prevail against it.

#### Question 9. What comfort do you receive from this truth?

This powerful and loving God is the one whose promises I may trust in all the circumstances of my life, and to whom I belong in life and in death.

—Study Catechism: Full Version

## Session Overview

 Enter	Option A: Who Loves You? Option B: What Shows Love?	
 Engage	Option A: Mistaken Perspectives Option B: What Separates Us?	
 Explore	Option A: Knowing We Are Not Alone Option B: Making Scripture Our Own	
 Express	Option A: Home Option B: Reconciliation Circle	
 Exit	Option A: God Loves Us Option B: We Are Both	 For instructions to download Web Resources and the coffeehouse version, see page 1.

## Spiritual Reflection for Leaders

Pray:

- Ask for God's blessing.
- Seek to convey what God would want God's children to know and receive.
- Pray for each of the participants.

Reflect:

- Where do you see God's love in your own life?
- How do you know the insistent unending nature of God's love in your own life?
- How can you open yourself even more to the miracle of God's love and grace?
- What comfort is taken in knowing that in life and in death, we belong to God?

Remember:

- God will take what you have, bless it and it will be enough.



## Understanding the Scripture

The Scripture selections for this session show the depth and durability of God's love for us. In John, we are told of God's gift to the world, his son, as a clear indication of the depth of God's love. This gift serves several purposes. First, it clearly demonstrates God's love for humanity. Through Christ, God is providing a way to overcome the limits placed on life by human failure and inadequacy. Following Christ and his teaching spares us from depending on our own human efforts that will never be enough. Instead, we are given the hope and promise of a life not dependent on our own inadequate ability but anchored in God's love. This eternal life stretches through chronological time to eternity and deepens the quality of life into eternity. Now through the gift of God's only son, every moment holds within it the possibility of eternity.

Second, God demonstrates God's love for humanity by coming to us in human form. While Christ is fully God, Christ is fully human. As a human, he knows how humans hurt. He suffers as a human and knows the wounds of human life on earth. He celebrates the goodness of life as a human. He is tempted as all humans are. God shows us that God truly understands what it is like to be human. God then chooses to love us still.

The third purpose found in this passage is in showing us that God takes the initiative. God is coming to be with us. Throughout Christ's life, he went to people rather than demanding they come see him. He called Zacchaeus, who

was in a tree at the time, went to the tomb of Lazarus, went to the Pharisee Simon's home for dinner, and traveled to see the centurion's daughter. After his death, he came back for us. God takes the initiative and, when it comes to loving us, will not be stopped.

These purposes represent the heart of our understanding about the God who loves us. It is little wonder then that they are often called the gospel in miniature.

Paul's passage assures us of the durability of this love God has shown. He reminds us with that nothing can keep us apart from God's determined love for us.



## **Understanding the Faith Statement**

Questions 8 and 9 of the Study Catechism approved by the 210th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) focus on the sovereign nature of God's love. They call us to remember that our lives begin and end in God's love and nothing can defeat or block it. All hope we have comes from God's promise that God will always love us.

God demonstrated his unending and all-understanding love through coming to be with us in Jesus Christ. Christ knew what it meant to be human and to know human suffering. Christ, in his life of compassion with us, his death of sacrifice for us, and his resurrection showing eternity for us, clearly conveys the nature of God's love for us. It is unending, sacrificial, and eternal.

The ninth question tells us of the hope we can have in such a love. Our hope comes from God, who can be trusted because nothing can or will ever stop God's love or separate us from it. We can take comfort knowing that in life and in death we belong to God and live in God's love.



## **Teaching Today's Question**

Finding a foundation on which to build one's life is an essential part of adolescence. In addition to answering the questions of what am I going to do with my life and with whom will I live my life, adolescents seek a foundation on which to build the answers to such questions. They are old enough and mature enough to know that answers provided by the world are not always satisfactory. They learn that earthly love doesn't always last forever, that not everyone can be trusted, that not all things are as they seem, and that others—and even themselves—will disappoint them.

Then where does one turn? Today's session seeks to answer this crucial question by holding up the hope found in a relationship with an insistent, all-loving God who cares so much for us that this very God comes to be with us. Further, we are promised that nothing will ever be strong enough to separate us from such a love, not even our own very human ways. There can be no more important truth or aspect of faith for young people (and old!) to know. While such love may be more easily shown than taught, teaching about it may enable us to see and live in it.



## Enter

### Option A: Who Loves You?

Newsprint, tape, markers

Before participants arrive, place a sheet or several sheets of newsprint and markers on tables. At the top of each sheet of newsprint, write: "Who loves you?" and "How do you know?"

As participants arrive, ask them to think about the questions and then write their answers on the newsprint. When everyone has arrived, discuss the answers given. Use the following questions to prompt discussion:

- Are there answers that are alike? (e.g., mom, friends)
- Are there more family or non-family members?
- Are there any common actions that show love?

### Option B: What Shows Love?

Index cards, marker

Before participants arrive, write each of the following phrases (each phrase an example of showing love) on an index card. Two or more sets may need to be made depending on the size of the group. Place cards on a table.

Listens to me	Does things for me
Is there for me	Tells me they love me
Helps me with my problems	Offers words of encouragement
Spends time with me	Gives advice to me
Understands me	Teaches me
Gives me a gift	Believes in me

As participants arrive, ask them to make a line with the cards, putting them in order from least important expression of love to most important. Each person's personal order may be different, but encourage groups to come to a consensus. Ask the group or groups to share why they placed certain cards where they did and which decisions were easy and which were difficult. The importance is not in the correctness of order but in the participants' reasoning and discussions to create the order.



## Engage

### Option A: Mistaken Perspectives

- Copy of "The Mistaken Perspective Story" (Web Resource 1a) for each participant, newsprint, marker

Have participants read the story on Web Resource 1a and discuss the following questions:



- What mistake did the driver in the blue car make?
- Do we ever make the same mistake?
- Does God ever make incorrect assumptions about us? How does God avoid making this mistake? *God is sovereign and knows everything there is to know about us, loves us completely, and is always with us.*

Write down responses and keep them to use in the upcoming Explore activity related to John 3:16.

Pray the opening prayer.

### Opening Prayer

*Loving God, thank you for your presence with us here today. Help us open our minds and hearts to learn more about and experience more deeply your constant, abundant, perfect, and amazing love for us. Amen.*

### Option B: What Separates Us?

- Newsprint, marker

Have participants discuss the following questions:



- What separates us from who we are and what we would like to be?
- What separates us from understanding and being connected to each other?
- Do we ever feel separated from God, and if so, what keeps us apart?
- How can we overcome such separations?

Note any similarities in responses, such as lack of belief, anger, mistaken understandings, feeling unlovable, or bias.

Write down all responses on newsprint. Keep them for use with the Romans 8 passage in the next Explore activity.

Pray the opening prayer.



## Explore

### Option A: Knowing We Are Not Alone

- Bibles, pencils or pens, paper

Have participants form pairs, read John 3:16, and then write a newspaper article telling what happened as if the event happened yesterday. Explain to participants that all good newspaper articles answer five questions—who, what, where, when, and why—and that these questions should be answered. Encourage them to be creative. When their work is complete, have participants read their articles.

Use the following for discussion:

- Which of the 5 W's was hardest to answer and why?
- What were the reasons reported as to why God did this?
- Is one of the following reasons more important than the others?
  - To show us God's love.
  - To show us God knows what it is like to be human.
  - To show us what God is like.
  - To show us what to believe.
  - To give us eternal life.
- Reread the mistaken perspective story.
- How does God not make the same mistake as the driver in the blue car? (*God is sovereign and knows everything there is to know about us, loves us completely, and is always with us.*)

### Option B: Making Scripture Our Own

- Bibles, pencils or pens, paper

Have participants read Romans 8:38–39. Explain that Paul, the writer of the book of Romans, tries to show how great and persistent God's love is by listing things that can't keep God's love from us. Ask participants to rewrite the passage in their own words, substituting things from their own lives that can't keep God's love from them. For example, a participant might write, "I am sure that neither shame, or good times, nor parents, or bullies, or hurtful words, nor being dumped, or mean people, or winning scholarships, or thinking nothing can be done, nor anything in my whole life or even not believing, will be able to separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." If option B in the Engage section was used, answers given there may be used as a starting place.

Have participants share their paraphrases with each other after they have finished.



## Express

### Option A: Home

Bibles, recording of the song "Home" from the CD "The World from the Other Side of the Moon" performed by Phillip Phillips, media player

Introduce the song by saying, "Imagine this song as God's message to you."  
Play song.

Ask participants to share using these questions:

- What line or lines in the lyrics spoke to you and why?
- If you had to express God's message as expressed in the song in one sentence, what would that sentence be?
- What are the "demons" that may fill us with fear?
- What would help us know we are not alone?

### Option B: Reconciliation Circle

Briefly, explain to participants that while God's love seeks us out and is always with us, our feelings and actions can make it feel far away.

Have participants stand in a circle with their arms over one another's shoulders. Tell participants that while we know God's love is with us, in our humanness we sometimes forget and feel separated. Move into the following exercise.

Sometimes we get lost or move away from God's love.	I would like for everyone who has ever felt apart from God to drop your hands from around each other's shoulders.
Silence	
Sometimes we disappoint ourselves and we make bad choices. We feel that no one could love us.	I would like for everyone who has ever felt even a little unlovable to take a step backward.
Silence	
Sometimes we lose hope. We think that nothing can change.	I would like for everyone who has lost hope, and thought that nothing could be done, to take another step backward.
Silence	
Sometimes we know what we are supposed to do but can't do it. We turn away from what God has told us to do.	I would like for everyone who has ever done something other than what God wanted them to do to turn around.
Silence	

Sometimes we are blinded by the world. We are so caught up in what we are doing that we forget what God is doing.	I would like for everyone who has ever paid more attention to the world than to God to close their eyes.
Silence	
Still there is hope. While we may have turned away, God came to be with us and never turns away.	I would like for everyone who has known God's presence to turn around.
Silence	
While we lose sight of God, God never loses sight of us. Nothing can separate us from God's love. Nothing. Nothing.	I would like for everyone who has seen God's love in their lives to open their eyes.
Silence	
God comes to us, to you and me. God wants to love us and bless us.	I would like for everyone who has known a blessing from God to take a step forward.
Silence	
God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.	I would like for everyone who has believed in God to take another step forward.
Silence	
God loves us. It is that simple and that amazing. God loves us, even you, even me.	I would like for everyone who has known God's love to put their arms around one another.



### Option A: God Loves Us

Gather participants in a circle. Have the participants say in unison to each person using their name, "God loves \_\_\_\_\_. God sent Jesus to be with \_\_\_\_\_. For example, "God loves Emily. God sent Jesus to be with Emily." Then it would be the next person's turn.

Ask each participant to consider making this kind of declaration, only silently, for a few hours this week for whomever they encounter during those few hours: "God loves \_\_\_\_\_. God sent Jesus to be with \_\_\_\_\_. For example, when they met their friend Fernando, they would say or think, "God loves Fernando. God sent Jesus to be with Fernando." The commitment would apply to strangers they see as well. "God loves that homeless person. God sent Jesus to be with him."

Pray the closing prayer.

### Option B: We Are Both

Read the following and have participants repeat each sentence after you.

We are neither good nor bad, we are both.  
And because God loves us, let us love ourselves.

We are neither guilty nor innocent, we are both.  
And because God forgives us, let us forgive ourselves.

We are neither pure nor impure, we are both.  
And because God accepts us, let us accept ourselves.

We are free. Free to live knowing we will always be loved.

Pray the closing prayer.

#### Closing Prayer

O God, we thank you that you loved us enough to come to be with us. In Jesus, you show us that you understand what it is like to be human, to know our pains and joys, our sufferings and our successes. We thank you that you came back to be with us to remind us that nothing, not even death, can keep us away from your love. Remind us every day that you are with us and that nothing can ever separate us from your love. Amen.



## Enhancements

Other Ways to Connect with the Session

### Family Connections

"Family Connections" (Web Resource) has a set of discussion questions for families to discuss, for each of the four sessions in this course. Provide each family with a copy of this resource.

### Film Connections

Nooma is a series of short films that explore our world through the teachings of Jesus. Purchase a DVD or a download of the film *Lump* at [nooma.com](http://nooma.com). Watch the film together and discuss the following questions:

- Are there any acts that can make God stop loving us?
- What does the term "grace" mean to you and is it shown in the film?
- How and when are we aware of God's unending love and grace?

### Community Connection

Take a risk and commit to showing God's love to one person every day. How it is done is up to the participant. Meet the following week and discuss the experience.

### Congregation Connection

Ask three people in your congregation about how they experience God's unending love in their day-to-day lives.

### Web and Mission Connection

Visit [presbyterianmission.org](http://presbyterianmission.org) and click on "Mission and Ministry." A menu will drop down. Click on "Compassion, Peace and Justice." Look at several of the options and see where you can find examples of people showing God's unending love. Report to the group on one of these the following week.