



THE GOSPEL

If you want to arrive at your destination, you need to set the right intention. How do we do that? We plan our route, type the location into our GPS, and buy a bunch of Twizzlers for the road. If you just get in a car without a plan, you will end up somewhere but not where you need to be. As we start our Growth Track journey together, we want to help you grow closer to God, His people, and His purpose for you. Your destination is God's purpose for you, but what is God's intention for you? How does God want it to start?

Let's start right at the heart. Let's talk about the very core of our lives as followers of Christ: the gospel. If we want to grow closer to Jesus, we need to understand His heart first. This is found in the gospel message. It's the foundation of our faith. It's the fabric that brings us together. It's the fundamental truth that energizes us on our journey with Jesus.

So, what is the gospel? That's the place we need to start. We can find the gospel beautifully summed up by the Apostle John in the third chapter of his Gospel. If you have grown up in church, this is likely a verse you know by heart. It's John 3:16.

READ: 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.

There it is. That's the gospel summed up in one sentence. God so loved the world that He gave Jesus as a gift to His people so that they could experience eternal life with Him. How mind-blowing is this message? However, sometimes we can lose sight of the glory behind the words. Why? We know them so well. Let me ask you a question. Do you just know the words, or do you believe the truth of these words and let that change your life? That's why we're at Growth Track, after all. Just because this verse is commonly memorized doesn't mean it's any less miraculous.

John 3:16 is displayed on billboards, plastered on bumper stickers, and shared by pro athletes. If the Bible had a verse bracket, this would be the first seed. It makes me sad that the profound meaning of John 3:16 often gets lost in familiarity. So what are we



going to do? We're going to take these familiar words and break them down phrase by phrase.

1. God Loved.

Love led God to save us. Love led Jesus to step out of heaven. Love led the Spirit to fill us. Since God is love embodied (1 John 4:7), love is the driving force behind everything He does—including our salvation. Look at how John 3:16 starts: “For God so loved the world.” How amazing is that? Moved by love, God sent His Son to save His people. Jesus didn't attach salvation to any rules or regulations. It was all an expression of God's love for us.

God's love is larger than you can imagine. God loves you right now, just as you are—even with all your hangups, hardships, and hurts. That's God's love for you. It's not about some edited Instagram version of you. God loves YOU—the good, the bad, and the unfiltered. Furthermore, He also loves you enough to help you become better.

Remember, love isn't just a Valentine's Day emotion or the way you feel when watching a rom-com. Love is action. Love requires sacrifice. God showed us the ultimate act of love—giving of Himself for our salvation. Next time you look in the mirror, remember that you are looking at someone radically loved by God. You are really loved by a real God who wants the best for you. However, something is getting in your way. It's called sin.

2. We Sinned.

The Bible tells us that every person is plagued by a sickness known as sin. It's a deep-seated curse we are born with. Fortunately for us, God reversed the curse. Jesus offered us a cure. There is no long process, regiment, or strings attached, either. We reverse the curse by being reborn.

Since “gospel” literally translates to “good news,” we must grapple with the “bad news” first. What is the bad news? All of us have sinned. Jesus explains it this way: “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born again” (John 3:3). We do not need to merely improve ourselves; we need to be reborn.



We cannot see heaven on our own; we need a rebirth. We need supernatural help. If we try to be perfect on our own, we'll inevitably fall and stumble. Just like medication helps you overcome a disease, the same is true for your sin. You need help outside of yourself. You must trust in Jesus. When you put your trust in Jesus to take away your sins, He makes you completely new.

So what do we do in response? Let's go to our next point and the next part of John 3:16.

3. We Respond.

In John 3, we witness an encounter between Jesus and a man named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin served as the highest religious court for the Jewish people. However, the members of the Sanhedrin held strict legalistic views on salvation, believing that it could only be achieved through good deeds rather than faith. They taught that Jews had to adhere to specific dress codes, dietary restrictions, and frequent temple visits to be saved. Jesus taught a message completely counter to that view.

To avoid backlash, Nicodemus approached Jesus in the middle of the night (John 3:2). The esteemed member of the Sanhedrin asked Jesus to sum up His core message. Jesus offered him John 3:16 in return: God loves us. We have been cursed with sin. We respond with belief (not actions), and God saves us. In that moment, we are welcomed into the family of God.

Salvation is a gift from God. What good is a gift if you never open it? We must respond to God's love to receive the gift of salvation. The Bible teaches that "whoever believes in Him shall have eternal life" (John 3:16). You are part of the "whoever." If you want this amazing gift, you simply believe in Jesus, respond in prayer, and God radically transforms you from the inside out.

That's why I love the Bible so much. It's not just a story we read; it's a story we join. So, every one of us needs to ask the same question as Nicodemus when confronting Jesus: "How can I be born again?"



It all starts with a prayer. There are no specific words or phrases that need to be said, but a prayer of salvation could go something like this:

“Jesus, I confess that I’ve made mistakes. I’ve sinned and need your forgiveness. I believe that You came to earth, died, and rose again so that I could be reunited with God. I affirm You as my Lord and commit my life to You. I give You my past, present, and future. Please use my life to bring you glory. I give it to You. Amen.”



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.

Ice Breaker: Introduce yourself and share this week's highs and lows. What was the best part of your week, and what was the lowest part of your week?

Q1: What inspired you to join Growth Track? What are you hoping to gain from this experience?

Q2: John 3:16 is the most popular verse in the whole Bible. When have you seen this verse outside of church? Why do you think so many people know it?

Q3: Have everyone in the group sum up the message of the gospel in ten words or less. Be creative.

Q4: How does understanding the gospel help you grow in your faith?

Q5: Salvation is a gift. What is our natural response to a gift? How does this apply to our salvation?

Application: How can you better understand or respond to the gospel message in your life?