

Optional Study Questions

1. Have you ever ignored a caddie's advice or a warning on the golf course and regretted it? What does that experience teach us about the relationship between warnings, trust, and care?
2. Read John 3:18–19. How does Jesus' description of humanity challenge the idea that we are innocent people who simply need God to overlook our mistakes?
3. Romans 3:26 describes God as both "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." How does the cross reveal both God's justice and His love, and how should we respond to His mercy?

Leader's Guide

Questions Redirected: Would a Loving God Send Anyone to Hell?

Primary Scripture: John 3:18–19

Supporting Scripture: John 3:16–17; Romans 3:23–26

Purpose and Main Idea

Help the group understand that God's love does not cancel His holiness or justice. His warnings reveal real danger, and His gift of Jesus reveals the extraordinary mercy He offers guilty people.

The goal is not merely to win an argument about hell. It is to help participants see God more clearly, recognize their need for grace, and consider their response to Jesus.

Preparing to Lead

Read the devotional and John 3:16–21 slowly. Then read Romans 3:21–26. Notice how both passages connect our guilt with God's gracious provision in Christ.

This subject may be deeply personal. Someone may be thinking about a deceased parent, an unbelieving spouse, or a child who has rejected Christianity. Others may be hearing the Bible's teaching about judgment seriously for the first time.

Speak with conviction, but never with satisfaction at the thought of someone's condemnation. Christians discuss judgment as people rescued by mercy, not as morally superior people explaining what others deserve.

You do not need to answer every question. If an issue goes beyond what you can explain faithfully, say, "That deserves more attention than we can give it today. Let's return to it after we look carefully at this passage."

Opening Conversation: Trusting the Caddie

Ask the first study question:

“Have you ever ignored a caddie’s advice or a warning on the golf course and regretted it? What does that experience teach us about the relationship between warnings, trust, and care?”

Allow a few golfers to tell their stories. Keep the opening relaxed but move beyond the amusing result to the decision behind it.

Follow up: “Why do we sometimes trust our own judgment more than someone who knows the course?”

Listen for pride, overconfidence, desire for a shortcut, or the suspicion that the warning is unnecessarily restrictive.

Transition:

“A good caddie’s warning does not create the ravine. It tells us about a danger already there. In a far more serious way, God’s warnings tell us the truth about our condition. But unlike the caddie, God does more than give advice—He provides a Savior.”

Leader’s caution: A lost golf ball and eternal judgment are not comparable in their seriousness. Use the illustration to explain the purpose of a warning, not to explain every aspect of salvation.

Read the Scripture

Read John 3:16–19 aloud. Reading the verses before the devotional’s opening text helps the group hear God’s love and God’s judgment together.

Ask: “What do these verses say about God’s purpose in sending His Son? What do they say about our condition apart from Him?”

Let participants identify the words and ideas in the passage before you explain them.

Leader’s explanation: God gives His Son because He loves the world. Yet verse 18 does not describe humanity as morally neutral, waiting to see whether God will become angry. It describes unbelievers as already under condemnation. Verse 19 exposes the underlying problem: people love darkness rather than light because their works are evil.

This is not simply a lack of information. It is a problem of the heart.

First: God’s Love Does Not Make His Justice Unnecessary

Discussion question: “Why do we expect a human judge to take evil seriously, yet sometimes think a loving God should overlook it?”

Suggested explanation: We rightly object when a judge dismisses wrongdoing without regard for the victim or the truth. Love for those who have been harmed does not make justice less important.

God is not merely a larger version of a human judge. His knowledge is complete, His character is holy, and His judgments are never mistaken. Still, the illustration exposes a weakness in our thinking: overlooking evil is not automatically loving.

God's holiness means that He is completely pure and opposed to evil. His justice means that He always judges rightly. His love does not compete with these qualities. Everything He does is consistent with His perfect character.

Follow-up questions:

"Whose wrongdoing do we most want God to judge? Whose wrongdoing do we most want Him to excuse?"

"What changes when we stop thinking only about the evil done to us and begin considering the evil in us?"

Leader's caution: Do not imply that every sin has identical consequences or severity. The point is that none of us can claim innocence before God.

Transition:

"The question becomes more personal when we recognize that we are not simply spectators watching God judge other people."

Second: Our Problem Is Deeper Than Making Mistakes

Ask the second study question:

"Read John 3:18–19. How does Jesus' description of humanity challenge the idea that we are innocent people who simply need God to overlook our mistakes?"

Suggested explanation: A mistake can result from misunderstanding or lack of skill. Sin includes something deeper: resisting the rightful authority of our Creator.

Jesus says people love darkness rather than light. That does not mean every person is as outwardly wicked as possible. It means sin affects our desires as well as our actions. We often resist the truth because we do not want it to expose or govern us.

Romans 1:18–21 also teaches that people suppress the truth about God revealed in creation. Our need is therefore greater than better advice or stronger willpower. We need forgiveness and a heart renewed by God's grace.

Follow-up questions: “What are some respectable-looking ways people avoid God’s authority?”

“Can religion itself become a way of avoiding honest repentance?”

Possible responses include comparing ourselves with worse people, relying on good deeds, hiding behind church attendance, or treating God as useful only when life becomes difficult.

For a mixed-faith group:

“If you are still exploring Christianity, you do not have to pretend you agree. Consider the diagnosis Jesus offers: Is our trouble only that we do not know what is right, or do we sometimes resist what we already know?”

Leader’s caution: Honest questions are not automatically evidence of deliberate dishonesty. Listen patiently. Apply the passage to the whole group, including yourself, rather than using it to accuse one participant.

Third: At the Cross, God Upholds Justice and Shows Mercy

Read Romans 3:23–26. Then ask the third study question:

“Romans 3:26 describes God as both ‘just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.’ How does the cross reveal both God’s justice and His love, and how should we respond to His mercy?”

Suggested explanation: “All have sinned” includes every person at the table. No one earns acceptance with God through moral achievement, religious experience, or service to others.

To justify someone is to declare that person righteous before God. The remarkable news is that God justifies sinners without pretending their sin does not matter.

Jesus, the sinless Son of God, willingly stood in the place of sinners. At the cross, He bore the judgment His people deserved. His resurrection confirms His victory over sin and death. Those who trust Him are received based on His saving work, not their spiritual scorecard.

The Father is not reluctant to love while Jesus persuades Him to be merciful. The Father gives the Son in love, and the Son willingly gives Himself. Salvation is God’s gracious work from beginning to end.

Follow-up questions:

“What would we misunderstand about sin if forgiveness required nothing more than God ignoring it?”

“What would we misunderstand about God if we spoke about judgment but never spoke about the cross?”

Golf connection: “Golf rewards performance, and the scorecard records what you actually shot. We naturally bring that performance mindset into our relationship with God. But the gospel is not an invitation to submit a better spiritual score. It is an invitation to trust the Savior who accomplished what we could never accomplish.”

Leader’s caution: Grace does not make obedience unimportant. It changes its place. We obey because God has graciously received us in Christ, not to purchase His acceptance.

Fourth: God’s Mercy Calls for a Personal Response

Discussion question:

“What is the difference between admiring the message of Jesus and actually trusting Him?”

Suggested explanation:

Biblical faith is more than agreeing that Christianity contains good ideas. It means relying on Jesus Christ rather than ourselves for reconciliation with God.

Repentance means turning from sin toward God. Repentance and faith belong together: we turn from self-rule and place our trust in Christ. Neither is a payment we offer to earn salvation. Both belong to our response to God’s gracious work.

Return to the devotional’s closing question:

“What will you do with His extraordinary offer of mercy?”

Allow a short silence. Do not pressure participants to make public declarations.

Follow-up questions:

“For someone exploring Christianity, what question or resistance needs to be brought honestly before God?”

“For someone who already trusts Christ, how should remembering undeserved mercy change the way you speak with unbelieving friends?”

Leader’s emphasis: The proper fruit of this discussion is humility, gratitude, prayer, and loving witness—not superiority or panic.

Questions and Objections That May Arise

“So does God actually send people to hell?”

The Bible presents final condemnation as God's judicial act, not merely an unfortunate consequence that happens apart from Him. Jesus speaks of final judgment and eternal punishment in Matthew 25:31–46.

Human rebellion is real, and God's judgment is real. We should not soften either truth. Yet God never judges unjustly, and the gospel announces genuine rescue through Christ.

“Why can't God simply forgive?”

God does forgive, but forgiveness is not indifference to evil. Romans 3:25–26 connects forgiveness with Christ's sacrifice and the demonstration of God's righteousness.

At the cross, God does not choose between justice and mercy. He judges sin and graciously receives those who trust His Son.

“Isn't eternal punishment excessive?”

Acknowledge that this is a serious and difficult question. Scripture treats sin as rebellion against the holy God, not merely as a collection of isolated mistakes. Jesus Himself speaks of eternal punishment in Matthew 25:46.

Do not pretend that one analogy resolves every difficulty. Affirm what Scripture teaches while remembering that God's judgment is perfectly informed and just, unlike ours.

“What about people who have never heard of Jesus?”

Romans 1:18–21 teaches that humanity is accountable for the knowledge of God revealed in creation. Romans 10:13–17 stresses the necessity of proclaiming Christ so people may hear and believe.

These passages do not answer every question about every individual. They do rule out treating people as innocent merely because they have not heard the gospel. We entrust judgment to God and take seriously our responsibility to share Christ.

“What about someone I love who has died?”

Respond first with compassion: “That makes this question deeply personal, and I do not want to answer carelessly.”

We do not possess complete knowledge of another person's heart or final moments. We should neither promise salvation apart from Christ nor claim knowledge God has not given us. We can be certain that God never judges wrongly.

If grief is fresh, offer to continue the conversation privately rather than turning someone's loss into a group debate.

Closing Summary

You might say: “We began by asking whether a loving God would judge anyone. Scripture shows us that God’s love does not erase His holiness, and His justice does not make Him unmerciful. Our sin is real, His judgment is righteous, and His provision in Jesus is extraordinary.

“The cross tells us both how serious our sin is and how great God’s love is. The invitation is not to prove that we deserve mercy. It is to turn to Christ and receive the mercy we could never earn.”

Personal Application for the Week

Invite each participant to identify one response: a sin to confess, a question to examine honestly, a promise in Christ to trust, or a friend for whom to pray.

Encourage believers to pray for one golfing friend and look for a natural opportunity to speak about Jesus with humility and care. The purpose is not to win a debate, but to love someone faithfully.

Optional Preparation Passages

John 3:16–21 — God’s love, human unbelief, and the coming of the light.

Romans 1:18–25 — God’s revelation and humanity’s suppression of the truth.

Romans 3:21–26 — Justification by grace and God’s righteousness displayed at the cross.

Ezekiel 33:11 — God’s call to turn from wickedness and live.

Matthew 25:31–46 — Jesus’ teaching about final judgment.

Ephesians 2:1–10 — Salvation by grace, resulting in a life of good works.