



Sermon Growth Guide

December 14, 2025

Exposure, John 3:16-21

Key Verse: John 3:21 “But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.”

Big Idea: We don’t want to be exposed. We don’t want a decent exposure! Something in us prefers the dark where we can stay hidden. What do we do when our deeds are exposed? Everything hidden will one day be revealed. There is forgiveness in Jesus.

Foundations

Our Advent and Christmas series for 2025 focuses on the theme of Everlasting Light. Lights are everywhere during this special and sacred season! Stores are decorated. Homes are decorated. Streets are decorated. And First Pres is decorated. Thousands of lights illuminate these places as a testimony that light and salvation has come to the world in the person of Jesus Christ. We are reminded what the Prophet Isaiah said of this, more than 700 years before the birth of Jesus, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned. But how people and things react to light is interesting. Sometimes, light is welcomed and embraced with joy. We see things more clearly. We feel safer because things that are hidden in darkness become exposed. And there’s the warm glow of a rising sun, signaling that a new day has begun. But other times, light is unwelcome because it exposes the things that are hidden, dangerous and unholy. There’s a reason why criminals typically commit their crimes at night when darkness covers their deeds. Today’s sermon from John 3:16-21 is entitled Exposed. John offers a powerful contrast between light and darkness and leans into the tension of our reluctance to come out of the darkness and into the light of Christ. But God’s design for humanity is for us to be children of light. Ephesians 5:8 says, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)... The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus, as the Light of the World, has come and lovingly exposed us to the truth and power of a life made new. Hallelujah!

Understanding God’s Word

Read John 3:16-21. Since one of the important principles of biblical interpretation is for scripture to interpret scripture, take a few minutes to also read and reflect on these scripture passages: Isaiah 9:1-7, Isaiah 60:1-3, Matthew 5:14-16, John 8:12, and Ephesians 5:8-14. Having looked at these passages, what patterns and themes do you find?

Applying God’s Word

Since the clear and compelling message of the Gospel is the call to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and allow his light to transform us and pull us out of darkness, in what ways in your own life have you found this to be true? Can you identify areas in your life where you’d rather remain in darkness? What prevents you from abandoning these areas and fully step into the light of Christ? In the areas of your life where you have stepped into the light of Christ, what differences have you noticed? What differences have other people noticed?

Witnessing God’s Word

As the light of Christ transforms us, our worldview changes, our attitudes change, and our behaviors change. Some of this is a natural progression of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. But there is also a conscious decision to act as children of light and consciously seek to bring the light of Christ to the world. In what ways can you give witness to the light of Christ in you, and the call upon your life to be Christ’s light of the world?

Exposure. Wow, there's a word. In Colorado, we think of exposure to the elements. If your skin is exposed this time of year, you will feel the wind chill. Get some gloves. Put on a hat. Or you might think of indecent exposure—nobody wants that. But I was actually thinking of something else with this title. Exposure is photography lingo. How long is the film exposed to the light? Now it's a digital sensor. How long? Long enough to capture the image. In high school, I took black and white photography and wound up being one of the photographers for the yearbook. I loved it so much I took some photography in college. That all meant a lot of time in the darkroom, where you hid the film and photo paper from overexposure, from any exposure, to the light. If it got hit by the light, it would be ruined. Exposure can ruin everything, or it can make the image the image. Jesus is the Light of the Word, the Everlasting Light. Are we ready to be in that light? Are we ready for Exposure? We need enough light to take on the image, to bear the image of Christ.

Having studied how the Prophet Isaiah talked about a coming light from God, some 700 years prior to the coming of Jesus, we now pivot to one of Jesus' close followers, John the Apostle, a disciple of Jesus who was so close to Jesus he remembers laying his head on Jesus' chest, being called "beloved," walking with Jesus like buds, camping, eating, joking. John says this Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth, this man, this person—this is the light Isaiah was talking about. The baby born in Bethlehem. This is the Light of the World. You can hardly turn a page of the Bible where there is not some reference to the metaphor of light and darkness.

Darkness stands in for the damage done by our disobedience to God. Darkness is sin; it is evil. But it is also ignorance, lack of knowledge, lack of awareness of right and wrong, good and bad—an ignorance that itself causes more error. Light is knowledge. If someone is enlightened, it means they are full of knowledge and, also, full of wisdom,

the ability to apply knowledge properly to a life situation. Light is knowledge. Light is cleansing. It is healing. It brings peace. Darkness promotes anxiety. It's where mildew grows. It's not healthy. God said at the beginning of creation, "Let there be light." He meant it as a gift. But something in us prefers the darkness. Even Nicodemus who Jesus is talking to in this passage, a religious leader, a devout and devoted man, something in Nicodemus preferred the darkness. We don't want to be exposed. We don't want exposure! Decent or otherwise. Something in us prefers the dark where we can stay hidden. But we are not hidden, are we? Everything we do, we do in the sight of God. "If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you." (Psalms 139:11-12) So, what now? Our deeds are out in the open before God. We are exposed. Everything hidden will one day be revealed. What do we do when our deeds are exposed? There is forgiveness in Jesus.

John 3:16 is the most famous line in all Scripture. And for good reason. This one sentence is a complete rendering, a summation of the entire story of salvation in God's care. It's such a powerful and clear proclamation, people used to hold up "John 3:16" posters at football games. Well, I said "used to" but I was watching the Big Ten Championship, Ohio State against Indiana (who won), and there it was! I'm not sure it's the most effective way to share Jesus with others. You'd be better off inviting a friend to attend Alpha with you. But you could do worse. To look it up and read it is to hear a direct invitation from God, an offer: "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) He gave. God loved. God gave. We believe. We live. You are exposed. I am exposed. Will the exposure send us away from God's light, or will it burn the image of Jesus on us? Will it actually make us who we were meant to be? Individual, different, unique images of the glory of Jesus.

God so loved the world. This needs to be emphasized. We live in a time when culture assumes Christianity is a negative, judgmental force out to cast judgment on people who don't agree with our dominant, Christian, traditional ideals. Wait, God loved. God so loved the world. Even though the world is disobedient, rebellious, hostile to God, angry and antagonistic toward the very God that made it, that made us...even when we made ourselves enemies of God, God so loved. He so loved that he gave, the greatest gift ever given. All our Christmas gifts are dim reflections of this great gift. God so loved God gave. Gave what? He gave his Son. Jesus. This is approaching the mystery of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus is so different from the Father that he can say "the Father is greater than I," but Jesus so united with the Father, so united in divinity, that Jesus can say "the Father and I are one; if you have seen me, you have seen the Father." Jesus is God come in the flesh. God so loved, God gave. When did he give? Certainly, on Christmas morning, the incarnation, the birth of the baby, Jesus. But the real gift, the sacrificial gift, was on the cross of Calvary. Jesus took upon himself, in himself, in his flesh the sins of all mankind in all history, and by his death he killed them on the cross. Isaiah saw it coming, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

This was an act of love, not judgment. Not condemnation. "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:17) Now, God could condemn the world and be justified. Every King has the right and responsibility to put down rebellion. But God's heart was to save, even through the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus his Son. Did you think Jesus came to condemn? Does the name Jesus sound like condemnation? That is only because his followers have failed to carry the same grace and love he carried. We Christians have made Christianity

judgmental and harsh, self-righteous and condemnatory. Jesus came to save. And what Jesus declares is that this salvation is necessary. He is the judge. Jesus is the only one with authority to make a judgment, to pass a verdict. He's the only one who led a perfect and sinless life. He will judge. But that's not what is happening here. Here Jesus explains, the rescue is necessary. "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 3:18) The condition is clear. The poison is in. We can all feel it rolling around in our common bloodstream. Death is at work. The question is, will you accept the cure? Believe in him. Whoever believes in him. "Jesus replied, 'This is the work of God—that you believe in the one he has sent.'" (John 6:29) Whoever believes in him will not be lost. Take Jesus at his word and trust in him, and be saved, be rescued.

The status quo is rebellion. So, the status quo is condemnation. We know our deeds, and we prefer not to step out into the light. We prefer the darkness and shadows. That is why Jesus, the Judge of all the Earth, renders this verdict. "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) This is the verdict. This is the truth. Why do people turn away from Jesus? Why? A friend said to me the other day, "Can you imagine going through December and not coming to church, not knowing this is all about Jesus, not knowing Jesus?" I can't. What a horror story. But people do turn away from the light. Why? Jesus knows why. We want to hide our evil deeds. We want to manage our appearances. We want to be seen as good—or at least better than most. The darkness is a shroud we accept if it keeps us from exposure. Don't let me suffer exposure. A man here in the church shared with me that his adult son, married with kids, was

arrested for a DUI. I said, as I'm sure you would, "Oh, I'm sorry." "I'm not," he said. "I'm not. Oh, this is a gift. He can't keep hiding it now. He can't pretend everything is okay. He can't keep up the shiny appearances, the outside appearance, that everything is fine and his addiction is not hurting his wife, his kids, his career. It's over now. It's all come to light. This will be hard, but it's better." The light is better than the darkness. So, we prayed that this would be the moment, as it often is, that Jesus would enter his son's life in a manifest way. The light shines in the darkness. When the darkness is deep, that's when the light breaks in.

This is the verdict. People prefer the dark. "But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God." (John 3:21) This is the verdict; people love the dark. But. But! There is another way. Christ has made another way. "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:12) People prefer to turn away from Jesus. You and I, we still run the other way sometimes. But! We don't have to walk in darkness. "If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin." (1 John 1:6-7) "If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us." (1 John 1:10) But! "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9) More on that next week.

John 3:16 is the proclamation of the Gospel, the good news. You are more in need of God's help than you ever dared imagine, but you are the object of more love and forgiveness, grace, help and salvation, than you ever dared dream. John 3:16 is an invitation. We are lost in our sins. We are committed to our rebellion. We are drawn to darkness. But! "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) Stop running for the shadows. Drop the rebellion. It was a silly rebellion anyway. There is nowhere we can hide. Turn to Jesus, the Light of the World, and believe. This is the way; we turn toward the light. We walk out of the darkroom, the darkness where we fought to keep every bit of light away. "I don't want exposure! Exposure is harm. Exposure is pain. Exposure is damaging. No! I want darkness." Turn from that. Don't lock yourself in the darkroom.

Jesus, like a skilled photographer, Jesus is able to put his light on you in just such a way that the exposure, it brings life. Yes, some things need to be burned away, but in the light of Jesus your life can take a new form, a new picture emerges. You are exposed to the light of Christ, and now, like film, like silver print paper, like a photograph, now you bear the image of Jesus. Are you willing to turn from the shadow and feel the light? You can pray with me if you'd like: "Lord, I have spent too much time chasing darkness. I don't want to live in fear. Turn my heart now. Open me up to your light. Thank you for giving your life for me; now I give you mine. In Jesus' name. Amen."