



"For God so loved the world,
that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him
should not perish but have eternal life." –John 3:16



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John 3:16

The Bible's most famous verse

If you were to sum up the entire Bible in one verse, you might consider John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

In less than 30 words, this verse tells us about God's heart and desire for all mankind. It describes the person and work of Jesus Christ, and explains how we can partake of His boundless grace. Have you ever wondered why it is so often quoted? It contains the entire gospel in one sentence.

We have used John 3:16 in all sorts of contexts—to explain the gospel to a seeker, to comfort a new believer who doubts his salvation, to encourage a follower facing trials, or to challenge a backslider. It is a verse that simultaneously teaches, comforts, encourages, challenges, and reaches out to every one of us—believers and non-believers alike.

In this booklet, let us examine this famous verse, picking it apart and looking at it word by word, phrase by phrase, to uncover the deep truths and the practical applications that it contains. Together, let's take time to meditate and reflect on this amazing verse, allowing the beauty and wonder of God's Word to sink into our hearts.

Dear friends, we hope that after you've rediscovered the wonderful truths contained in the Bible's most well-known verse, you will be inspired and encouraged to share them with others. Pass this booklet to a loved one, a friend, or anyone seeking to know more about Christ. Our prayer is that they too will be touched by God's love for all, and come to a saving knowledge of His Son.

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Reflection 1: For God ...

Different people view God differently. For example, some think He is an impersonal force, while others say He is someone so distant He is impossible to know. Culture and traditions can also colour our perception, often turning God into some local deity particular to an ethnic group or geographical region. Then there are those who don't even believe He exists. In the midst of all these conflicting views, who is God to us?

John 3:16 opens with the words, "For God". These are very important words, asserting clearly from the start that God exists. Not only does He exist, He is also our Creator (Gen. 1:1). And the fact that we are personal beings means that He

Himself cannot be an impersonal force, because we were created in His image (Gen. 1:27).

A personal God means He can relate to us and we can know Him. That's exactly God's desire. We see that in 1 Peter 5:7 and 2 Corinthians 5:20: He cares for us and yearns for our return to His side. How wonderful!

God took it even further by reaching out to us even though we had rebelled against Him (Rom. 5:8). Yes, we are no longer under sin's curse, utterly lost without hope, because He took the initiative to save us.

Such is our God. What a privilege to share Him with others!

Reflection 2: So Loved ...

Some kids find going marketing with Mother very frustrating. They wonder why she takes forever to choose mangoes when all of them look equally good. Actually, Mom takes so long because she has a list of “conditions” in mind that must be met. Psychologists say that when it comes to falling in love, we too make a list, subconsciously. The Bible declares that God is love (1 John 4:16). But does He love in our way?

Earlier we reflected on the opening words of John 3:16: “For God”. The next two read: “so loved”. In Greek, they mean *in this way*, indicating the way God chooses to love us. So, what is His way? John 3:16 says He gave us His only begotten Son, the one who is one with the

Father, shares His very essence, and who is therefore God (Col. 1:15-20).

Are you surprised that God would give us His Son in order to save us? Well, you shouldn't. This is exactly what a God of love would do. There is no hesitation in giving us His all and very best, even Himself. Romans 8:32 states He withholds nothing from us. This simply shows His self-giving nature, for as far as He is concerned, there is no “list”. Isn't it wonderful that He loves us in this way?

How can we not respond to Him?

What do you think is the object of God's love? The next phrase in John 3:16 gives us the answer—"the world".

That's shocking news for Jewish readers of John's gospel. They considered themselves God's chosen people, and expected His special love towards them (Deut. 7:6-8). But the Gentiles? The Jews wouldn't have touched them with a ten-foot pole! Yet God has always loved the world and desired to save all of mankind (Gen. 12:3; Isaiah 65:2). John often uses the word *world* to refer to sinful human society (John 1:10, 7:7, 14:17, 15:18-19). In essence, John wants his original readers—and us today—to understand that God's love goes beyond

the Jews to Gentiles of "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9), and even to sinners.

God's love is universal. There is no favouritism involved here; it extends to all people. We may, therefore, say to every human being, "God loves you" and invite them to experience God's love by believing in Jesus and turning away from their wickedness.

God longs to express His great heart of love for others through us. Will we allow Him to do so? We can start where He has placed us—in our school, workplace, and neighbourhood.

Reflection 3: The World ...

Reflection 4: That He Gave ...

A girl once asked a boy, "Do you love me?" The smitten boy replied, "Yes, dear, I love you." The girl then asked, "Would you die for me?" The boy declared, "No . . . mine is an undying love." This humorous story illustrates two poignant points: Lip-service love is not true love, and the greatest expression of love is self-sacrifice. Thankfully God's love went beyond words; His love moved Him to take action—"He gave".

John 3:17 helps us understand the significance of this phrase even better, using the word *send*. "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." God did not

only give us His very best—His beloved Son—but He also sent His Son into the world on a mission. Jesus Christ came to die, so that we may live. Oh how deep the Father's love for us, that He should give His only Son to die in our place!

*How then shall we
respond to such love?*

As redeemed people, let us, in gratitude, recommit ourselves to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10).

How can I know that God really, truly loves me? John tells us directly: "This is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son" (NLT). In Greek it reads, "his Son, the only-begotten, he gave", emphasising the magnitude of the gift. "Only-begotten", used and described in John 1:14 and 1:18, means "unique, one of a kind and no one is his equal". But who exactly is God's "only-begotten Son"? What's so unique about Him?

From the start, John proclaims that Jesus is God Himself (John 1:1-4), who became human like us, to live with us (John 1:14; Matt. 1:23), in order to save us (Matt. 1:21; John 3:17; 1 John 4:14). Removing all doubts that He Himself is God, Jesus said, "I and the Father are one . . . Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 10:30, 14:9).

To offer one's self is the greatest gift anyone can give. And God did exactly that. He gave the greatest gift—Himself, His very best, His very life—to show how much He loves us (John 15:13; Rom. 5:6-8; 1 John 4:9-10). Jesus reveals the depth and intensity of God's unfathomable love.

The best gift of all is Jesus Christ. "Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!" (2 Cor. 9:15, NLT).

Reflection 5: His Only Son ...

Isn't it wonderful to see everyone celebrating Christmas, whether they are Christians or not?

At the very first Christmas on earth, many people didn't believe in God. Yet it was an eventful day that was worthy of celebration by all, because God was offering His Son and eternal life to every single person in the world.

In promising that "whoever believes" shall not perish but have eternal life, Jesus was emphasising that *anyone* can receive this gift, if he or she believes in Him.

No one is excluded from God's salvation plan. It doesn't matter who we are, where we come from, or what we have

done in the past. In fact, it was sinners for whom Jesus came. He said: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32).

What a wonderful and challenging truth!

It means no one is beyond God's redemption, because

Christ has made it clear that salvation is available to anyone who is willing to open his heart to God. It also means we are to share this truth with others, so that they too can receive this priceless gift. Will you share the message of Christmas with "whoever" you meet?

Reflection 6: That Whoever ...

Reflection 7: Believes in Him ...

Most of us have been raised to believe that acceptance, rewards, and praise must be earned. At home, we behave well to please our parents. In school, we study hard for good grades. At work, we are expected to perform well to earn promotions. When we fail to meet the standard, we may feel guilty or inadequate.

Do we treat our relationship with God likewise, and think that we must be "good" Christians in order to enter heaven? Do we try not to be late for church, do our best to help others, and behave in a godly manner? And when we fail, do we feel like we cannot face God?

Such concerns are not wrong in themselves. But they will not earn us sal-

vation. Jesus did not say whoever "does good works" or "is a good person" will not perish; He said "whoever believes" will have eternal life.

God accepts us into His kingdom solely on the basis of faith, not on works or character. How comforting it is to be freed from the guilt of the past and our fear of failure! All we need to do is trust in His saving grace and the work of Jesus on the cross.

But faith also doesn't mean simply acknowledging the gospel truth; it also means committing and entrusting our lives to Jesus, such that we depend on Him alone. Will you recommit your life to Jesus today?

Reflection 8: Should Not Perish ...

What is death? What happens afterwards? Death is an intrinsic part of the human condition. Like it or not, all of us have to die one day, no matter how rich, successful, famous, or knowledgeable we become. Some people think that death is an end, a fading away into oblivion. They work hard to build up a legacy, so that they will be remembered. Others try to push the spectre of death from their minds by experiencing as many exciting new things as possible.

The Bible, however, makes it clear that after death comes judgment (Heb. 9:27). "Shall not perish . . ." reminds us of what our fate would have been without Jesus.

Perish means to be *ruined* utterly. This is not a cessation of consciousness or existence, but a loss of all significance, value, and meaning. It is to be separated from God for eternity, and thus to be deprived of all that is good.

All of us have sinned and deserve to die, but Jesus' death on the cross dealt with the problem of sin completely. He paid the penalty of sin in our place, so that when we place our faith in Him, we are spared this terrible fate, and shall not perish.

What great comfort to know that Jesus has saved us, and that we need no longer fear death.

We are all familiar with stories of dramatic turnarounds in people's lives. An impoverished student is offered a scholarship. A dying patient is saved by a surprise organ donation. A condemned prisoner gets a last-minute pardon. Although their situation looked hopeless and their fate seemed assured, they were given a fresh start in life, something that they neither expected nor deserved.

From the time of Adam and Eve, all of humanity has been lost to sin. We were consumed by our ignorance and depravity, unable to break the hold that sin had over our lives. We had fallen far short of God's standard. We deserved to be put to death for our wickedness, to be separated from God forever (Rom. 3:23, 6:23).

But God reached out to us, and Jesus' sacrifice, unexpected and undeserved, changed everything forever. Instead of

death, we can now look forward to eternal life in heaven.

John 3:16 says that we were destined to perish, "but" will instead receive eternal life. The word "but" is adversative, signalling a contrast between two things. In this case, it indicates a dramatic transformation of our situation, a 180-degree change in direction—where once we were heading towards death, we now move towards life.

God will give us the very opposite of what we deserve, if we accept what Jesus has done for us. Have you done so?

Reflection 9: But ...

Reflection 10: Have Eternal Life ...

Humanity has long desired to live forever. But despite all our efforts, immortality has remained elusive. Yet, Christians today already possess what the world has craved for so long.

God intended man to live forever. Adam and Eve were permitted to eat from any tree in Eden, including the tree of eternal life (Gen. 2:15). But they wilfully ate from that one tree not permitted them (Gen. 2:17, 3:1-7). As a result, they were banished from their eternal home (Gen. 3:23), and death entered the world (1 Cor. 15:21).

But God still desires that mankind live with Him, forever. Because we "who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13-

14), we can now make our home with God forever (John 14:2-3, 23; Rev. 21:3). Have you ever wondered what it's like to be with God forever?

Eternal life is not simply endless existence. It is about quality, more than quantity. It is the adventure of "[knowing] the only true God, and Jesus Christ" (John 17:3). In Hebrew, *knowing* implies a close, intimate relationship (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:33-34). This is something we can begin today, because eternal life is not just a future inheritance (Job 19:26; John 5:28-29; Rev. 22:14), but also a present possession (John 5:39, 6:47-51).

What a privilege and responsibility —

we can experience a life of loving and obeying God, now and forever!

Respond to God's love . . .

Share the gift of Jesus with others!

For God so loved the world . . . that

He wants everyone in it to accept the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. John 3:16

contains a simple yet powerful message.

Will you share it with others, so that they will not perish but have eternal life?

How can you do this?

- Pray that God will open doors and grant you the boldness to share the gospel.
- Reach out to loved ones, friends, and those who are in need of God today.
- Share the gospel, that they may know Jesus, the gift of God.
- Be gentle and respectful as you share your faith.
- Share your testimony, because nothing touches people more than your own story.
- Pray for them, that God will open their eyes, ears, and hearts to the gospel.

