LOVE'S Priceless GIFT

study number two



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A Study of 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."

Lesson One - Amazing Love

Lesson Two - Priceless Gift

Lesson Three - To Believe or Not to Believe

Lesson Four - Life or Death

Note: Bible references are from the New International Version (NIV), unless otherwise noted.



Amazing Love

"loved the world" ... (John 3:16a).

If you've been a Christian any length of time, you know John 3:16 by heart. It is concise enough to write on a sticky note or commit to memory swiftly, yet powerful enough to cause believers to risk their lives daily to spread its message.

This verse begins with God, ends with life, and urges us to do the same. If you know nothing of the Bible, start here. If you know everything in the Bible, return here. We all need the reminder. The heart of the human problem is the heart of the human. And God's treatment is prescribed in John 3:16.¹

These 26 words comprise the deepest, inexhaustible truth of our faith. When our circumstances threaten to drown us in hopelessness, these life-saving words from God remind us that His love *does* conquer all. His love embraces all. His love never forgets where we live.

This verse is the undeniable address of eternal security and safety. It is the most important verse in all of Scripture. This works when life doesn't. It bears hope for the hopeless, and invites us to be loved like we've *never* been loved before

This one proclamation of the Gospel has been on the lips of missionaries for centuries, has brought multitudes to the feet of Christ, and kindled self-sacrificing love to mankind. Luther called this verse "the Bible in miniature." There is no sweeter verse in the whole Bible because it declares loud and clear that God is love.

This verse is **THE** Hope Diamond. All we need is faith.

Take a moment to write out John 3:16

Now read this amazing verse aloud. This life-changing verse is our memory verse for this study. I encourage you to write it on index cards and place them in various locations where you spend the most time.

In this first week, we are studying John 3:16a, which states, "For God so loved the world". Webster's defines love as "to have profoundly tender, passionate affection for". We often put that in the context of people that we *choose* to love, but God applies it unilaterally across the board. God *chooses* to love all people, not just the "likeable".

The only question is will we love Him back?
What do these passages say about God's love for us?
Deuteronomy 7:6
Romans 5:8
Ephesians 2:4-5
1 John 3:1a
1 John 4:9-10
The word <i>loved</i> in John 3:16a is translated from the Greek word <i>agapeo</i> . <i>Agapeo</i> love is actually a two-fold process. <i>Agapeo</i> love expresses the deep and constant love of God towards His children, which produces and fosters a reverential love in us toward the Giver. ² For love to flourish, it must work both ways. In other words, if we never accept God's love or we choose to ignore it, we will never benefit from that
close, intimate relationship we need in our day-to-day walk. We behold God's love for intimacy toward His children in the very beginning of Scripture. We read in Genesis 3:8 that God walked in the garden in the cool of the day looking for Adam and Eve. He longs for that personal relationship with us to this day.
We see throughout Scripture the preeminence of love. Love is a vital ingredient in our walk with God and our witness to the world about Him. Love changes lives. God's love saves them.
Read and record the following passages:
1 Corinthians 13:13
Ephesians 3:17-19
Ephesians 5:2
Colossians 3:14

In order to more fully comprehend the meaning of this verse, it is crucial that we understand that God's love is **not** based on us – it's based on **His** love. Just like an earthly father to his child, the father's love is not based

God, and God in him. Love is a choice and an action - not a feeling. We choose to love God and we choose to

love our neighbors. Why? Because God first loved us (1 John 4:19).

What does 1 John 4:16 proclaim? God is ______. It goes on to say, Whoever lives in love, lives in

on the child's love. The child can make a mess of the best of circumstances, but that doesn't change the father's love for that child. That child is still precious and loved because that love is based on the father's love - not the child's.

Love is priceless. More powerful than any drug on the market, love cannot be found on the shelves at the corner store.

Take a moment to recall things that you have done in the name of love:

Love can cause those who hate to be reconciled. What does Proverbs 10:12 tell us?	

In our personal relationships with those closest to us, love matures over time by our choices and sacrifices toward each other. The choice to love or not. Forgive or not. To be kind or cruel.

God's love for us is so much more than you and I can imagine! He could choose *not* to love us. Then where would we be? He could choose to demand that we keep every law to the letter or else. He could choose to be cruel and bring down on each of us the wrath we most assuredly deserve.

Instead, He chooses to love. His love forgives. His grace is sufficient. His mercy endures forever. Let the praises ring!

According to Jeremiah 31:3, God has loved us with an ______ love. I don't believe that we can comprehend the full meaning of that statement from this side of heaven. God's love is *everlasting* to the **whole** world, whether friend, foe, or alien. He doesn't just love "good" people.

We see numerous times throughout Scripture that God's love "endures forever." See 1Chronicles 16:34, 41; 2 Chronicles 5:13, 7:3, 7:6, 20:21; Psalm 100:5, 106:1, 107:1, 118:2-4, 118:29, 136:1-26, and Jeremiah 33:11. WOW!!

Jesus' announcement of God's universal love in John 3:16 was made to a representative (Nicodemus) of the narrowest and strictest sect in ancient Jerusalem, who taught that God's love was the special providence of Israel alone.³ But God was clear. He loved the **world**. The Greek word for world here is *kosmos* meaning the "human race, mankind."²

Read and record these passages which carry the exact same *kosmos* rendering and once again demonstrate God's amazing love for us:

Matthew 5:14
John 13:1b
Timothy 1:15
Let's review our Bible memory verse for this study. Write out John 3:16 once more:

God's love is more than emotion and intention. God's love is demonstrated. The Bible is God's love letter to us - a love backed up with action. John 3:16 is not just a message in words. God demonstrated that love at *great* personal cost. Jesus did not die on a cross to compel God to love people, but because He *already* loved us.³

The cross was the result of God's love, not the cause of it.

I'm amazed. Are you?

Closing Prayer:

PFather, Your love for me is everlasting. I just pause to let that sink in. Everlasting. Never ending. No matter my circumstances, choices or actions. You continue to have profoundly tender, passionate affection for me. I need that so badly, though some days I don't realize how much. Thank You for the cross, Lord. Thank You for the price You paid. Bearing all my sin and shame, in love You came and gave amazing grace. Thank You for Your love, Lord. Thank You for Your nail-pierced hands. Thank You for knowing my address. Teach me to love You with that same single-minded focus as You love me. Oh, let it be so! In Jesus' name, Amen. ♣



Priceless Gift

"That he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16).

My "love language" is gifts. I love to give and receive gifts. In fact, I love it so much that for *at least* the past three Christmases, I have successfully suggested to my friends and family that we exchange our gifts early.

I carefully craft reasons that sound good at the time. Since Christmas time tends to get a tad hectic for everyone that reason always strikes gold. "You know that we're going to get so busy over the next several days. Why don't we just exchange and open gifts now while we have some down time together?" Score!

All good reasons, right? They sound good on the outside, but the real motive is to see what's inside the package. The content is oftentimes irrelevant - it could be a pack of gum. It's the fact that a loved one thought of me in times when our work, home or church schedules separate us - that they thought enough of me to expend the time, energy and resources to get me a gift.

God thought of us while we were separated from Him by sin. He thought enough of us to give us a Gift. The content of His Gift was anything but irrelevant.

This Gift was the most priceless, unique treasure that He had - His one and only Son. The best Christmas Gift of all time. And God's real motive is for us to see and receive what's inside the package.

Take a moment to write out our memory verse for this month, John 3:16:

In this second lesson, we are studying John 3:16b, which states, "that he gave his one and only Son." The Greek word for gave in this verse is didomi, meaning "to bestow a gift; to supply and furnish necessary things." If Jesus is anything, He is necessary to every one of us - necessary to be assured of salvation.

To give means that the Giver is not expecting return payment. God *gave* us His Son. We did not take or destroy - God *gave*.

	Take a moment to look up the following passages affirming this wonderful truth:
John 1:	14, 18
Mark 1	2:6

Romans 5:10 _		
Romans 8:32 _		
James 1:17-18		

That God "gave" shows God's initiative toward us.

Michelangelo's famous "Creation" painting provides an excellent illustration. This painting depicts Adam lounging back with his arm resting on his crooked knee. It depicts God hovering above Adam with His right arm outstretched toward Adam, every muscle tense and active, straining to touch Adam. All Adam needs to do is literally raise his index finger to touch God's outstretched hand. Adam lazily declines to expend the effort.

You know the painting well. But do you know the love of God that well? God's every muscle is tense and active as He strains toward us in love. Through the power (working) of the Holy Spirit, we are given the strength needed to touch the cross.

God gave us His "one and *only* Son." Not one of many - His only. The only thing that God had in limited supply. God's *most* valuable item. God has plenty of everything since He created all things. To give us His Son was the only sacrifice He could make.⁴

For 33 years, God went without that fellowship in heaven until Jesus' crucifixion and return. God didn't give us an inanimate object, but His living, breathing, **only** Son.

This Son was the Messiah prophesied throughout the Old Testament and confirmed in the Gospels. Read and record:

Deuteronomy 18:15 _		
John 6:14		

John 3:16 elevates Christ into the singular, regal title of "One and Only Son." The Greek word for "one and only" is *monogenes*, a compound adjective meaning *only offspring, kind*.² The word in Greek was used of an only child (Luke 7:12, 9:38) or daughter (Luke 8:42). It was also used of something unique or the only one of its kind.

It easily depicts a description of Isaac (Hebrews 11:17) who was not only Abraham's "only" son, but was one of a kind because he was the child of the promise. In the New Testament, "One and Only" is reserved specifically for Jesus in five places. In these occurrences, the apostle John highlights the unparalleled relationship between Jesus and God. We are studying one of these five verses. Take a moment to look up and write down the other four:

John 1:14
John 1:18
John 3:18
1 John 4:9
We see in these passages that <i>monogenes</i> highlights the particular relationship between Jesus and God. Though God is the father of all humanity, Jesus alone is the <i>monogenetic</i> Son of God, because only Christ has God's genes or genetic makeup. ¹ Basically, holy DNA.
We get our earthly DNA from our parents. Our genetic traits are passed down to us through our parents. Jesus gets His DNA from God and God alone. Every quality we attribute to God, we can attribute to Jesus. There is none like Him.
Let's take this a step further. Take a moment to think and write down the traits that your parents passed down to you. Not physical traits, but inherent traits such as kindness:
Now, let's look up these passages to see the <i>monogenes</i> that we can attribute to Jesus from His Father:
Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14)
Divine Teacher (John 3:2)
Image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4)
Source of Truth (John 6:68)
Liberator (Galatians 5:1)
Redeemer (Titus 2:14)
Bread of Life (John 6:48)

The list of God's attributes in Jesus is long. Jesus is also our Comforter (John 14:1), Wonder Worker (Mark 6:2), and Friend to sinners (Luke 19:10, 18:10-14, 19:2-10). I don't know about you, but I find great comfort, confidence and power knowing that Jesus loves us so much and provides for our every need. I pray that we walk in that confidence and power as we share His love and light with a dark world.

Let's re	view our Bible memory	verse for this study.	Write out John 3:16 once more:	

God is love. Jesus is love. We are His and have full access to that love because He gave it to us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

He gave us that priceless Gift. When we open the Gift in faith, we can live life in that abundant love demonstrated to us through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. We close today with the lyrics from the old hymn "Here is Love": "On the mount of crucifixion, fountains opened deep and wide; through the floodgates of God's mercy flowed a vast and gracious tide. Grace and love, like mighty rivers, poured incessant from above, and heaven's peace and perfect justice kissed a guilty world in love."

Closing Prayer:

PFather, You have given me a Gift that is priceless beyond measure. The Gift that literally keeps on giving - giving me love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. These could only come from your DNA, Father. I am so blessed to be Your child. Thank You for continuing to strain toward me through the love of Your One and Only Son. In Jesus' name, Amen. ₱



To Believe or Not to Believe

"That whoever believes in Him" (John 3:16c).

"I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," the accused prisoner calmly states, as he stands handcuffed. The prosecution fires question after question at the prisoner. The prisoner honestly and completely answers all of the prosecution's questions.

But the prosecutor doesn't like his answers, so he has the bailiff backhand the prisoner. "If I said something wrong, tell me what it was. But if I was telling the truth, why did you hit me?" asks the prisoner. "What is truth?" the judge asks. The prisoner remains silent. Angered, the judge orders the prisoner abused and beaten.

Afterward, the judge has the prisoner brought back before him. "Do you refuse to answer any more questions? Are you taking the 5th? Don't you realize that I have the power to either free you or hand down the death penalty?" The prisoner answers, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. My kingdom is not of this world ... my kingdom is from another place."

In today's litigation-prone society, that's how the scene would have played out between Jesus and Pontius Pilate and before the Sanhedrin as recorded in John 18:19-19:11. Pilate, the High Priest, and the Sanhedrin had a choice -- to believe Jesus or not.

That same question is put to you and me today. Do we believe that Jesus is God's Son? Do we believe that He came to seek and save the lost? Do we believe that He came to prepare a place for us in heaven?

Do we *really* believe?

Take a moment to write out our memory verse for this study, John 3:16

In this third lesson, we are studying John 3:16c, which states, "that whoever believes in Him." "Whoever" sounds careless and random in its indistinctness. Webster's defines whoever as "no matter who". Sounds vague, doesn't it? But God intends it very specifically to us.

Whoever here in the original Greek refers to *all, every, whole.*² God is very determined to include everyone - all of us - the whole enchilada. He specifically casts the net around all of humankind. Yes, *all* of humankind. Murderers, thieves, prostitutes. You name them, they're included.

Let's look at some of these "whoevers" in Scripture:

1) Murderers

King David, known as the "man after God's own heart." Read 2 Samuel 11:1-17.

2) Thieves

Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, who gained wealth from overtaxing people.

Read Luke 19:1-10.

3) Prostitutes

The sinful woman who crashed Simon's party to meet Jesus. Read Luke 7:36-50.

The story of the "sinful woman" in Luke 7:36-50 has often intrigued me. She believed so deeply that Jesus could make all the difference in her life that she displayed an extravagant, risky love. Simon (the Pharisee who hosted the party) had a "love" that was calibrated and stingy.

Simon had invited Jesus there to entrap Him and treated Jesus like an unwanted step-uncle. No customary courtesies, kiss of greeting, washing His feet, or oil for His head. Simon did nothing to make Jesus feel welcome.

The woman, however, did everything that Simon didn't. Each gesture was extravagant. She put her cheek to His feet, still dusty from the path, washed them with her tears, and dried them with her hair. She anointed His feet with costly perfume and massaged it into His skin.⁶

She believed. She knew she had to. Her life had been messy. And although we may not be in her same position, our lives have been messy, too. Messy with broken relationships, financial debt, poor choices, hasty actions, questionable motives, a harsh tongue, and shallow love. But God loves us – the "whoevers" of humanity. And He *can* make all the difference in our lives.

Look up and record these passages, in the NIV translation, that reveal to us the identity of "whoever":

ohn 4:14
Revelation 22:17
Matthew 10:32
ohn 3:36
ohn 6:37
ohn 11:26
Matthew 10:39
Mark 16:16

God's saving love is available to all, not just a select few or certain church. There's nothing we can do. It's all about God. We need only believe. Believe may be an easy word to say, but not so easy to put into action sometimes.

Our human tendencies towards mistrust and skepticism hinder our belief a great deal. But believing is essential to fully taking hold of God's incredible promise in John 3:16. In the original Greek, *believe* in this verse refers to "putting one's faith in; trust". Believe is such an important word that it appears over 230 times in the New Testament alone. But we are not called to believe randomly. God is very specific in what we are to believe.

What do the following passages teach us?

Matthew 21:22	
John 20:31	
Romans 10:9	
Thessalonians 4:14	
Hebrews 11:6	
icolews 11.0	

What does it take to believe? Faith. Not just any ordinary faith, but faith in Christ, not faith in faith.

How does faith work? By love, <u>not</u> works.

Faith in what? Faith that Jesus' death on the cross is the only fire escape for us. We cannot just believe ABOUT Him. We must believe IN Him. Yahweh. Creator of heaven and earth. Believe in Him in our hearts by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We cannot simply believe that He exists. Scripture tells us that even the demons know He *exists* (James 2:19). We are called to believe that He is who He says He is and is able to do all that He says He can do. And He invites *whoever* to have this faith. The *whoevers* of every tribe, every tongue, and every language.

I love the different languages of our world today, and John 3:16 is beautiful in all of them. Read John 3:16 in these beautiful languages:

Spanish: "Porque de tal manera amo Dios al mundo, que ha dado a su Hijo unigenito, para que todo aquel que en el cree, no se pierda, mas tenga vida eterna."

German: "Denn also hat Gott die Welt geliebt, da er seinen eingebornen Sohn gab, auf da alle, die an ihn glauben, night verloren werden, sondern das ewige Leben haben."

French: "Car Dieu a tant aime le monde quÕil a donne son Fils unique, afin que quiconque croit en lui ne perisse point, mais quÕil ait la vie eternelle."

Italian: "Poiche Iddio ha tanto amato il mondo, che ha dato il suo unigenito Figliuolo, affinche chiunque crede in lui non perisca, ma abbia vita eterna."

Let's review our Bible memory verse for this study. Write out John 3:16 once more:

To believe or not to believe – that IS the question. Everything is at stake, my fellow whoever - *everything*.

Do you believe?

Closing Prayer:

♣ Father, You are who You say You are. Thank You for that unshakeable truth and rock solid reality. I can only imagine what I will see when Your face is before me in heaven, but I can hardly wait, Father. Thank you for loving this "whoever" with an everlasting love. Thank You. Gracias. Danke. Merci. Grazie. In Jesus' name, Amen. ♣



Life or Death

"Shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16d).

Over the past three lessons, we have taken quite a journey through John 3:16. For this final lesson we bring the caravan to its final destination.

Kind of like life on this earth, isn't it? We travel through the days, weeks, months, and years of our journey through earthly life until we reach our final destination - eternity. We arrive tired, weary, scarred, and dusty. We may have gotten lost along the way and needed our GPS systems to kick in.

As Christians, our GPS is God's Plan of Salvation. God's Plan of Salvation (GPS) represents the rescue disk when we need to reboot and start over after making wrong choices. How is our GPS activated? It is received by faith. God's plan is clearly laid out in the 26 words of John 3:16.

This incredible verse is loaded with transparent simplicity, yet overwhelming majesty. So, as we behold our destination on the horizon, let's wipe the dust from our feet and continue onward.

Take a moment to write out this month's memory verse, John 3:16:

In this fourth and final lesson, we wrap up this study with John 3:16d, which states, "shall not perish but have eternal life."

Perish. That word has such a final ring to it. This verse escorts us to the most somber of Christian realities - hell. No topic stirs greater resistance. Who wants to think about eternal punishment? Some prefer to sanitize the subject. Easy to understand why. Hell is a hideous topic.

A glimpse into the pit won't brighten your day, but it will enlighten your understanding of Jesus. God created man as eternal beings. Man will either exist eternally separated from God by unbelief (hell) or in union with God eternally through faith, forgiveness and salvation (heaven). Hell, like heaven, is an actual, physical place of eternal existence

Read and record the following Scripture passages:

Revelation 20:15		
Matthew 11:23		
Luke 16:23		
Revelation 1:18		

Hell is a place of emotional anguish where its inhabitants are subject to everlasting torment. John 3:16 is our fire escape.

Throughout our whole earthly lives, God puts the cross in our path. Will we choose to believe? Will we trust? What will we choose - close proximity (life) or distant observation (death)?

For those who spend their entire lives pushing God away or basically telling God to leave them alone, God will grant their request in the end.⁷ Hell is the complete and total absence of God and all that He is - love, light, goodness, kindness, gentleness. Hell is described as the "blackest darkness" because the light of God is completely absent (2 Peter 2:17). Solitary confinement away from God for all eternity (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

But while we're still on terra firma, there is hope. More specifically, two words of hope immediately before we arrive at *perish* - Shall not. Those words are God's definitive promise to those who believe in faith through the power of the Holy Spirit in the saving work of Jesus. They *shall not* perish. They *shall not* spend eternity separated from God in blackest darkness. They *shall not* know the torture and torment of hell.

What do the following passages reveal to us about hell?

Matthew 10:28	
Matthew 18:9 _	
Mark 9:43	

That's pretty sobering, isn't it? Hell is a one way street. There is no leaving hell once the choice is made. Luke 16:19-31 confirms this stark reality. Take a moment to read those verses. What stands out to you?

But to quote Paul Harvey, "and now the rest of the story." Those who believe that Jesus came to save the lost by offering His life as the atoning sacrifice on a cross to redeem them from their sins *shall not perish*. After working through the previous couple of paragraphs, these three words together sound so sweet and refreshing to my soul. *Shall not perish*. Cool water on a parched tongue.

For the believer, God promises everlasting life. Everlasting means eternal, forever, without end. We will live eternally with God because God wants us with Him. God does not want to condemn us - the choice is up to us.

God promises that we *shall have* eternal life. *Have* carries the hopeful promise. It will be ours to hold through the eyes of faith lifted up to Christ the crucified. In Christ, God reconciled the world to Himself.

Read and record the following passages:
Romans 5:10
2 Corinthians 5:18
Ephesians 2:16
Colossians 1:20, 22
God has provided the means for us to be reconciled with Him. We place our trust in His promises. I low the New Century Version of John 3:16, which reads: "Whoever puts his trust in God's Son will not be lost, but with have life that lasts forever." Trust and faith go hand in hand. When we trust God and take Him at His Word, we come to Him in faith to receive His reconciliation and abundant life.
The two chief promises of God in Scripture are: (1) Eternal life will be given to all who believe; and (2) they will have an abundant life. God's grace is given to us abundantly.
Write the following passages that confirm this wonderful truth: Romans 5:17
1 Timothy 1:14
God's grace allows us to extend His grace and love to others. John 3:16 is God's love letter to us, whice allows us to love others. God's love never condemns.
As believers, our job on earth is not to police God's laws. We are called to <i>love</i> . We see in the Great Commandment that love is most important. Loving others first establishes a trusting relationship that opens doors for instruction and teaching about God from His Word.
Take a moment to write the following passages:
Mark 12:31
Matthew 22:39

One final time, let's review our Bible memory verse for this study. I fervently pray that it is embedded in our hearts. Write out John 3:16

Love is so important in God's Plan of Salvation. Activating our GPS requires faith and trust. The result? Everlasting love.

God continues to pour love into us because our hearts leak. He pours into us what we desperately need to give others. Only by God continually pouring His love into us can our "love tanks" be topped off to overflowing.

Out of that overflow comes our ability to love others as God intended. Only out of that overflow are we able to even begin to love others as God loves us. Left alone, we will become drained and grow fatigued, but God's love will never run dry.⁴

How has God specifically shown His priceless love for you through this study of John 3:16?

This particular journey through these 26 life changing words has come to an end. But the pilgrimage does not end here. We have simply reached a rest stop to take in what God has shown us, take a drink of living water, refuel our "love tanks," and head out toward our final destination.

Come, fellow pilgrim. Let's get this caravan moving. The best is yet to come.

Closing Prayer:

Father, You are light, love and LIFE to me. You love me enough to put the cross in my path. You love me to overflowing, so that I may love others in Your Name. Let that fuel my JOY as I worship You. Let Your joy and love demonstrated on the cross be the Light in me that draws others to You. In Jesus' name, Amen. ♣



Prayers

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An engaging speaker, author, Bible teacher and worship leader, Donna has a passion for studying and teaching God's Word. She has authored 18 Bible studies, several Bible studies published in the *Lutheran Women's Quarterly*, numerous devotions, and magazine articles. Donna's DVD-based Bible study series, *Your Strong Suit*, launched nationwide through LWML in November 2011. Her new full-length, small-group based Bible study, *The God of All Comfort*, is available from Concordia Publishing House. Her next DVD-based Bible study series for the LWML, *Overflowing Abundance*, is scheduled for release at the Pittsburgh LWML Convention.

Donna attends Salem Lutheran Church in Tomball, Texas, where she loves serving in the worship ministry. She is passionate about partnering with the Lutheran Women's Missionary League in mission work and providing new avenues for women to get into God's hydrating Word.



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