

THE GREATEST WORDS

God's Greatest Gift

John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 9:15

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

If someone were to ask you to put in your own words the message of the gospel, what would you say? How would you respond? You could tell a story about what God has done for you—in effect, offering your personal testimony. Or you could explain the message of salvation using an image or illustration—like when you explain something complex to a curious child. God ultimately chose to reveal the fullness of the Gospel in the person of His Son, Jesus. That's what the Christmas season centers on. Yet God's greatest gift is described in a very few words in John 3:16: "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (NLT).

Let's look closely at this brief expression that carries such long-standing significance to all of us—especially during the holiday season.



Getting Started: God's Greatest Gift

Take a few minutes to read some introductory material from a Bible commentary on John's gospel or from the introduction to the book in your study Bible. Make a few notes that you think may help you in your study of John 3.

The gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, were primarily theologians, not historians. Though they compiled historical events, they each emphasized major theological themes centered on the person, life, and ministry of Jesus.

What would you say is the main theme of the gospel of John? Explain how you found your answer.

Quotable

*It's not so much
a romantic or
affectionate love
that compelled
God. God made up
His mind to love
the world in Christ.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Now read through John 3 in its entirety. As you do, circle any repeated words or more significant theological ideas, as well as any individuals that appear in the chapter. What are the primary stories in John 3? In what ways are the two stories related?

Using a Bible dictionary or theological dictionary of the New Testament, read the entry for the term *gospel*. Make some notes below about what you discover.

Your Turn in the Scriptures

Often when studying a very familiar passage such as John 3:16, it helps to consider it from a different angle. Using your Bible, take some time to map out how the translation reads. Pay close attention to individual words—specifically action verbs and their objects—the purpose they serve in the phrases, and how these words connect ideas and themes. Study the following example:



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THE GREATEST WORDS

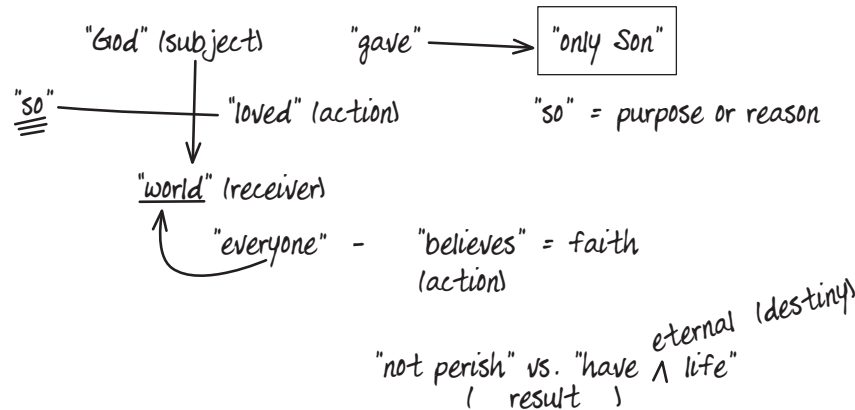
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For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NLT)



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Look closely at this list of phrases:

- God loved
- He gave
- Everyone who believes
- Will not perish
- Will have eternal life

What are some things you could conclude about God's gift to us, based on these phrases? List as many as you can. (HINT: These can become the bases for applications you might include in a Bible-study lesson, sermon, or teaching outline.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



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Now read John 3:10–14. Remember: Jesus was speaking to a Jewish expert in the Hebrew Scriptures. It might be helpful for you to look up the name *Nicodemus* in your Bible dictionary for a brief introduction to him and his standing in the religious community of that day.

How did Jesus refer to Nicodemus? What concern did He express about Nicodemus?

How did Jesus respond when Nicodemus questioned His teaching?

In John 3:14, Jesus made reference to a story from the life of Moses. Using the cross references in the margin of your Bible or by consulting your Bible commentary, what Old Testament story did Jesus refer to? Where in the Old Testament is that story located?

Go to that story in the Old Testament and read it carefully. Describe briefly the context.

Carefully consider why Jesus used this particular story to answer Nicodemus' question. Hint: There may be several reasons.



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In what way do you feel Jesus compared Moses' lifting up the serpent in the wilderness to Him being lifted up? What might He have had in mind in saying, "The Son of Man must be lifted up"?

In what ways do you now see the connection between Nicodemus' question to Jesus, Jesus' reflecting on the story of Moses lifting up the serpent, and the very familiar words in John 3:16 about God's greatest gift?

Finding Yourself in the Story

Placing yourself in the story of Scripture helps you to apply truth to your own life.

In what ways can you relate to Nicodemus and his doubts about Jesus?

Has there been a time in your life when your questions for God have led you to a deeper knowledge of Him? If so, describe that experience.



A FINAL PRAYER

Lord, how thankful I am today for Your wonderful gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. At this time of year, help me to be a thoughtful and engaged listener to the questions of people who have not yet received You. Open their hearts to Your love and to the gift of Your Son, Jesus, whom I love and adore. Amen.



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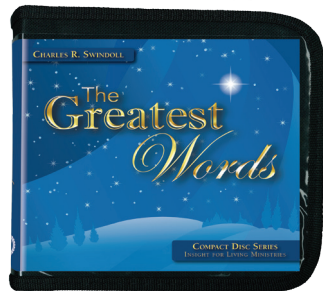
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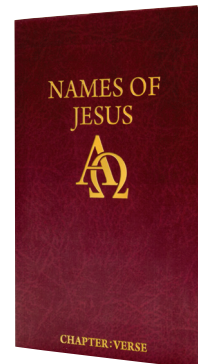
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2016 broadcast, this Searching the Scriptures study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Charles R. Swindoll based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts.



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