

FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRU the BIBLE

GOD SO

Loved

DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

GOD SO LOVED

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. –John 3:16

The words of John 3:16—arguably the most well-known verse in the Bible—are simple. In fact, most of the words you read in the Gospel of John are so simple a child can read them, but they are also so profound that I wonder if any one of us really knows what they mean.

In the original language, John 3:16 reads, “loved God the world.” Greek sentence structure places the important part of the sentence first. So *God* is not the important word and *world* is not the important word; the emphasis is on the *love* of God.

I feel inadequate before this truth, unable to communicate to you the intensity of the love of God, the overwhelming goodness. So I pray the Spirit of God will make it real to you; I am dependent on Him.

LOVE GOES TO THE CROSS

John, chapter three records part of an interview between Nicodemus and the Lord Jesus one night. Our verse sums up what they covered in the conversation, but the two verses that come before it are very important to understanding. Let's go back and read them:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. –John 3:14, 15

Jesus calls Nicodemus' attention to something with which he is very familiar—the event in the Old Testament of the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness (Numbers 21:9). Jesus then said, “Even so *must* the Son of Man be lifted up.” The “must” corresponds to the “must” our Lord said earlier to Nicodemus—“You must be born again.” Since Nicodemus *must* be born again, then the Son of Man *must* be lifted up. The necessity of being born again makes imperative the lifting up of Christ on the cross. It is a divine compulsion.

With this picture, our Lord threw open the doors of heaven for Nicodemus (and for us), and we see the King of Glory—not enthroned and crowned, but on a cross. It is amazing Jesus Christ revealed His death on the cross to Nicodemus on His first trip to Jerusalem, at the very beginning of His ministry. He didn't reveal this to His own disciples until three years later, six months before He hung on the cross.

By the way, this is the answer to those who say the Lord Jesus died as a helpless victim, caught between Roman power and religious greed. This obviously is not true, since three years before His death on the cross He told Nicodemus about it. If He had wanted to escape His crucifixion, He could have disappeared into the East—which teemed with millions in that day—so Rome and the religious rulers could never have touched Him. But He says here the plan all along is that He will be lifted up because *God loved the world*.



GOD SAYS
HE LOVES ALL THE
HUMAN FAMILY.
NO ONE IS EXCLUDED.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Hardly is there a more interesting word than, “love.” In the Greek language, love can be understood in three different English words. One is *eros*, from which we get our word *erotic*—that is, sensual love. The New Testament doesn’t use this word. Then *phileo*, used in the New Testament to mean “friendship.” It means, “I like you,” and no more. Obviously, this is not the word used here, because you cannot say God so *liked* the world! The third word for love is *agapao*—love in the highest degree. *Agapao* is an attribute of God; it is divine love, not human. It is love lifted to a high, noble, supernatural plane. God *loved!* This is the word used here in John 3:16.

The “world” means the world of mankind in which we live. It means all people—not limited to the elect, to the good, or to any particular race. This “world” encompasses the totality of humanity, from Adam right down to the people alive today. Those who say God loves only certain people (the elect) are not giving us the language of the Bible. God says He loves all the human family. No one is excluded.

Another great statement in this verse is “He gave.” His love was revealed in the fact that He gave it. It was completely a gift. It does not say God gave His Son to die, although this is included; it means more than that. It means Christ’s coming into the world—beginning with His virgin birth and ending with His death, His resurrection, His ascension into heaven, even His present ministry today and His coming again in the future—all of it is God’s gift.

A great deal has been made of the words “only begotten Son.” In the original language, it does not say God gave *His* only begotten Son—He did not beget Him. Rather, it is “the Son, the only begotten one,” which is His title.

If we go back to the beginning of this Gospel from John, we see Jesus Christ as the eternal Word:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. –John 1:1-3

In the beginning *was* the Word, not *is* the Word. It was not in the beginning that the Word started out or was begotten. “Was” means continued action, that the Word *was* in the beginning. You see, ours is the God of eternity. At the time of creation “all things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” (See John 1:3, Colossians 1:16.) No matter how far back you want to go, billions of years *before* creation, the Son comes out of eternity to meet you. He was already there when the beginning was. The eternal Son, the Creator of all things, took upon Himself human flesh.

“The only begotten” is unique; it means the Lord Jesus is unlike any other.

- He is the only one who is virgin born.
- He is the only one who has lived a perfect life. The Father can only say of Jesus Christ, “This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” He can never say that of me or you, but He did say it of Christ.
- He is the only one who could die for the sins of the world.
- He is the only one who is back from the dead in a glorified body.
- He is today the only hope of the world, the only begotten Son.

PUTTING THE YARDSTICK ON "SO"

God so loved. How much is that? How much did God love the world?

A different translation can widen out that word: "God loved to such an astounding and astonishing degree" Now we are faced with a problem. Is there some way to bring this word "so" out of heaven and reduce it to the terminology of earth?

Can we measure the love of God? Let's try.

Paul tells the Ephesian Christians that he prays this for them:

[That you] ***may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*** –Ephesians 3:18, 19

If we lay the yardstick on that little word "so," we can determine the breadth and length and depth and height of it. At this point, we're quite inadequate to that task. How can mere man measure the love of God?

A wooden cross stands in a field of tall, golden-brown grass. The background is a soft, hazy sky with a warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The cross is slightly out of focus, and the grass in the foreground is blurred, creating a sense of depth and tranquility.

WHY DID OUR LORD ENTER
AND PASS THROUGH THIS WORLD?

BECAUSE YOU WERE HERE,
AND HE WANTED

To save you.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

WIDE AS "WHOEVER"

First, how wide is God's love? His arms encompass the entire world so that all are included. When the Bible says He loves all, it means He loves each one—He loves *you*. Frankly, John 3:16 is the most personal verse in the Bible; it is personal to you, and it is personal to me. It is more personal than if it said, "God so loved Vernon McGee." I'll tell you why.

Several years ago, I conducted meetings in a church in Seattle. One morning at the hotel where I was staying, I received a telephone call from a woman who began speaking as if she knew me very well, "Pastor McGee, how are you?"

"Fine."

"How is Annie?"

"Annie?" I repeated, "I don't know Annie."

"Oh, yes, your wife."

"No," I countered, "you are wrong. I do not have a wife named Annie."

Suspiciously she probed, "Aren't you Vernon McGee?"

"Yes."

"Aren't you a preacher?"

"Yes."

"Were you not," she asked distrustfully, "pastor of a certain Methodist church back in Iowa?"

I said, "No ma'am. I have never even been off the train while traveling through Iowa."

Puzzled, she continued, "Well, I knew a Vernon McGee who was my pastor back in Iowa."

"I'm sorry," I said. "I didn't know there was another one loose."

Now you know the reason I am glad John 3:16 does not read, “God so loved Vernon McGee,” because it might mean some other fellow and not me at all. But when it says, “God so loved the world,” that means me and it means you, too.

God loves the meanest, lowest person you can think of just as much as He loves you. If you somehow think you are one of God’s little pets and He has placed His love on you and your kind and no one else, you are wrong.

God loves the world. We have heard this so much it is commonplace. But let me ask you: How could He love this reeking world today, with all its sin, rebellion, cruelty, ugliness, and sordidness? God made a level place at the Cross of Christ, which is the only place where you have real integration. None is righteous there; all have sinned (see Romans 3:10). God declares all to be sinners that He might have grace upon all.

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. –1 John 2:2

God has His arms outstretched to a denying, lost, rebellious world. They spat in His face when He was here, and they are still spitting in His face today. Yet He says, “I love them.”

A young country fellow being interviewed for church membership was asked how he became saved. He answered, “I did my part, and God did His part.” They thought they had found a flaw in his theology and probed, “What was your part, and what was God’s part?” He answered, “My part was the sinnin’ and His part was the savin.’ I ran from Him as fast as these sinful legs and this sinful, rebellious heart could carry me, and He done took out after me ’til He done run me down.” My friend, that is the only way any of us is saved. God pursues us because He loves us.

God loves everybody. There is no exception. Oh, the breadth of the love of God!

LENGTH BY DEMONSTRATION

What about the length of God's love? After all, the test of love is to what length it will go. Love is not love which will not die or make sacrifices often more bitter and cruel than death.

God so loved that He *gave*.

May I say to you, we *demonstrate* our love. And God has demonstrated His love by the extent to which He has gone—He gave His Son. Do you want to know how much God loves you? Do you want to know the length to which He has gone?

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. —Romans 5:6-8

What a staggering demonstration of His love!

God is on the giving end. He doesn't ask one thing from us. I am afraid we preachers give the wrong impression that God is asking this world for something. He asks nothing from this world! He said, "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness" (Psalm 50:12). If He wanted gold, would He ask us for the puny amount we have at Fort Knox today? Why, the gold and the silver are His. God says in effect, "I do not want anything from you, but I would like to *give* you something: Eternal life in Christ Jesus." God so loved the world that He gave, and what He gave is His only begotten Son. He gave Him not only at Bethlehem, not only in a perfect life, not only to teach, not only to reveal God, but He gave Him to die upon the cross for the sins of the world. My friend, what else can you ask Him to do for you? Can you think of anything more God could do for you, a sinner, than to give His Son to die for you that He might save you?

*Love ever gives, forgives, outlives,
And ever stands with open hands.
And while it lives, it gives.
For this is love's prerogative:
To give and give and give.*

-John Oxenham

An interesting article appeared in a metropolitan newspaper some time ago. There was a picture of a mother and son with the caption "Father Gives Life for Son:"

Sidney Lawrence underwent a cross transfusion for his son, Robert ... in which blood of father and son mingled. The father's kidney worked for both, allowing the son's diseased kidney to recuperate. But the father was sensitive to proteins in his son's blood, causing his death.

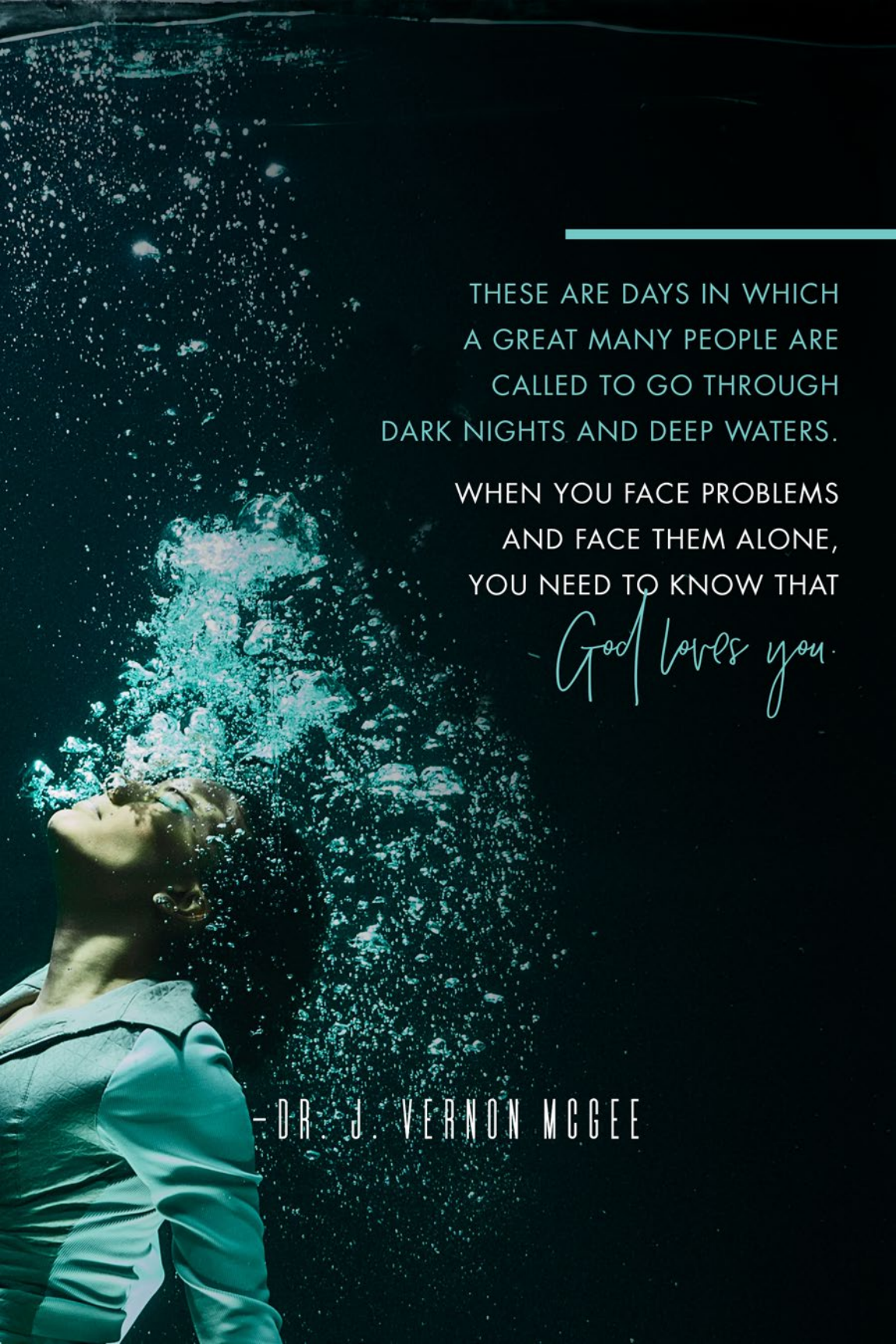
That man did not have to stand up and say, "I love my son." He proved it when he gave his life for his boy. There is many a father who would do that. But, my friend, God has gone far beyond that. He has given His *Son* to die for *you*. Do you want to ask Him to do something else? He has gone the very length of love.

DEEP AS HELL

Now let us attempt to ascertain the depth of God's love: "That whoever believes in Him should not perish."

I don't want to be unloving and unkind to you, but someone needs to speak plainly: We are hell-doomed and hell-deserving sinners, every one of us. A great many folk think mankind is on trial, that God wants to see if we will do better or not. This is not so. Notice the verses that follow:

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. –John 3:17, 18

A woman is shown from the chest up, submerged in water. She is looking upwards with her mouth slightly open. A large plume of bubbles rises from her head, filling the right side of the frame. The lighting is dramatic, with a strong blue and purple hue. The background is dark, making the bubbles and the woman's face stand out.

THESE ARE DAYS IN WHICH
A GREAT MANY PEOPLE ARE
CALLED TO GO THROUGH
DARK NIGHTS AND DEEP WATERS.

WHEN YOU FACE PROBLEMS
AND FACE THEM ALONE,
YOU NEED TO KNOW THAT

God loves you.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

“He who believes in Him is not condemned.” Well, suppose he does not believe in Christ? That one is already condemned. Why? Because mankind today is not a prisoner at the bar awaiting trial to see whether he is guilty or not. Mankind today is a prisoner to sin and is asked if he will accept a pardon.

Everyone—from the nice and sweet Mrs. So-and-so to the heathen who has never heard of Christ—is a sinner in rebellion against God. We are *all* born lost, with no capacity for God. You and I are members of a doomed race, and we would wreck heaven if we were permitted in without a new nature. What Christ did was come into our prison and say, “Do you want a pardon? I’ll pay your penalty. I’ll stay here and go through this hell for you.”

He has done this because He loves you. God asks, “Why will you die?” The Lord Jesus says, “You are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:40).

A lovely thing is said of the Lord Jesus Christ in Luke’s Gospel: He “entered and passed through Jericho” (Luke 19:1). Why? Because in Jericho lived Zacchaeus, the chief of the publicans—a sinner, a crook—and our Lord went there to save him. He entered and passed through; He did not even spend the night. He was there only long enough to win Zacchaeus.

Let’s widen that out. John’s Gospel gives the tremendous movement—Jesus said, “I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father” (John 16:28).

Why did our Lord enter and pass through this world? Because you were here, and He wanted to save you. He died for *you*. He did this so that you might not perish.

HIGHER THAN HEAVEN

What about the height of the love of God? “They shall have everlasting life!” The height is *infinite*.

GOD LOVES YOU

May I get personal? I am going to heaven someday. You may think, “Well, you must be very good.” On the contrary, I am not very good. I am going to heaven someday because Christ died for me, and I trust Him.

We have not adequately scaled the heights, plumbed the depths, or grasped the width of the love of God. Paul was accurate when he said, “To know the love of Christ that passes knowledge.” We are not able to measure the vastness or the intensity or the overwhelming goodness of God. If you could, it would break your heart, just as it would mine. I can only say that God loves you.

These are days in which a great many people are called to go through dark nights and deep waters. When you face problems and face them alone, you need to know that God loves you. Whoever you are, wherever you are, God loves you, and His love is revealed in Christ on the cross. And, my friend, you will find it only there. It is not on the mountaintops or on the surging sea; it is not in babbling brooks or majestic redwood trees—you will not find it anywhere in nature. The Bible makes this crystal

clear. “God so loved the world that He gave redwood trees and babbling brooks”? No! “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Will you believe?

DO YOU KNOW HIM?

Discover how in His love, God has provided a way for you to be with Him for eternity.

First, we've spent a lot of time talking about God's love here. But right now, this minute, take this to your heart—God loves you. He loves you so much He gave His Son to you. Because no matter how much God loves you, He is holy and He can't stand your sin.

So because He loves you, He's made a way for you to have a relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ, who lived a perfect life and died on your behalf to pay the punishment for your sin. Somebody has to pay—will you let Him pay for you? Can you believe that Jesus did this for you and offers you pardon right now? What an outrageous gift!

Without God's gift and Jesus' sacrifice for you, you can't ever know God. Your sin separates you from Him and you can't do anything to bridge that gap. You can't be good enough. You can't give Him anything or do anything to make yourself worthy enough to save yourself from sin. Your sin condemns you and you can't do anything to help yourself.

But God has made a way for you through Jesus Christ.

His death pardons you from being condemned. His sacrifice can give you life—and not just a better life here and now, but a life in God that goes on forever. But you must decide you want this relationship and ask God to save you. He wants to—but you must come to Him. Don't worry—He's never turned anyone away who comes to Him for mercy and grace.

This is a decision you must make on your own.

There's only one thing to do: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Trust Him to forgive your sin and believe what you can't see.



God loves you.

He loves you so much

He gave His Son for you.

To know Jesus Christ as your Savior is what life is meant to be. The peace and joy you can experience now is just a taste of what's ahead, after you breathe your last breath here.

That's when real life begins.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

What an amazing gift God wants to give you. *Will you take it?*


Tell Him you want everything He wants for you.

God loves you and invites you to real life with Him.

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and greenery.

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THE MOST
IMPORTANT
MESSAGE OF
YOUR LIFE.**

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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a list of booklets with titles and descriptions. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a wooden table.

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QUESTIONS ABOUT THE
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