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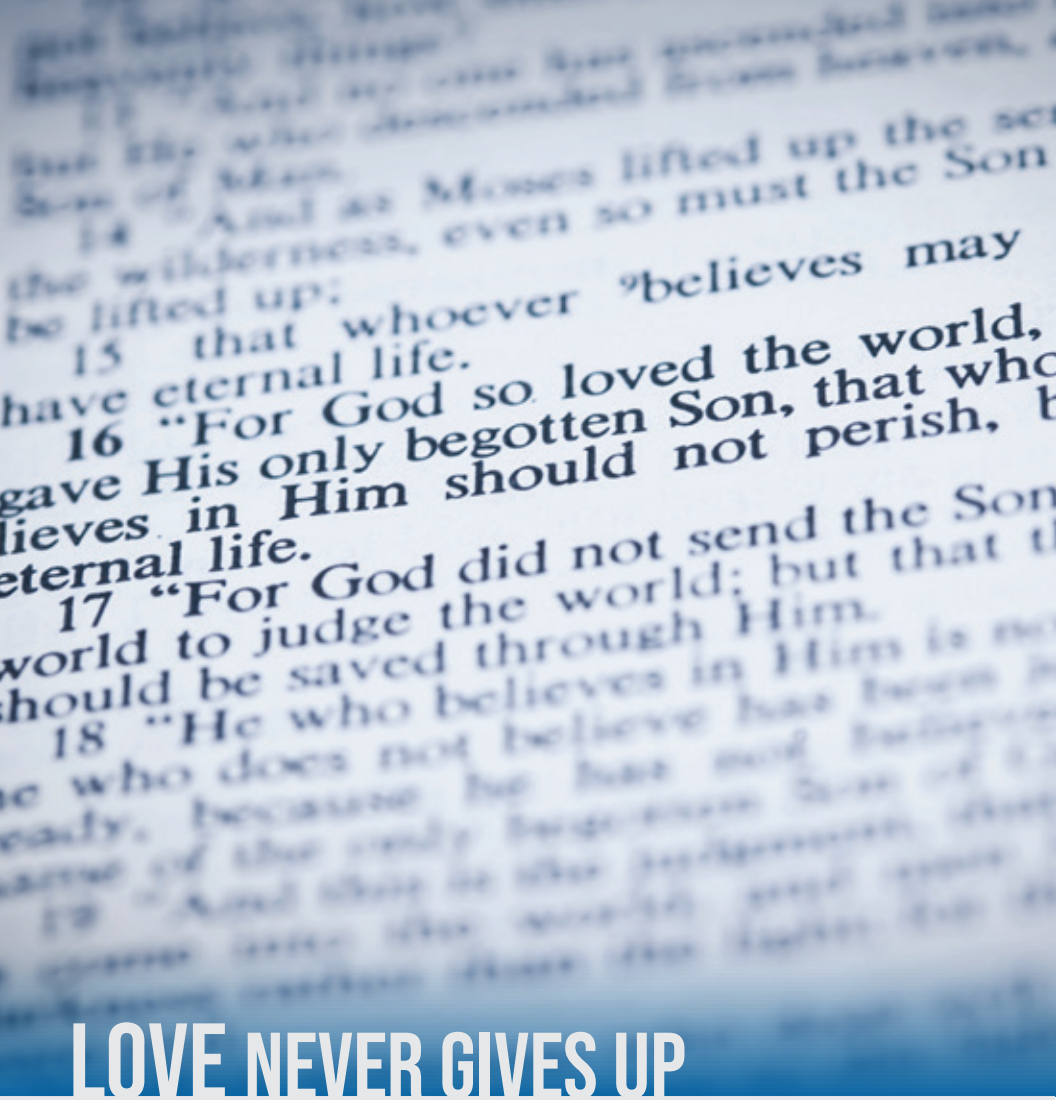
3ABN BIBLE STUDY GUIDES
Looking Higher

LOVE NEVER GIVES UP



LOVE NEVER GIVES UP

John 3:16 is undoubtedly the best-known verse of the entire Bible. If you have watched or attended professional sporting events in the 1970s or onward, you've likely seen someone holding a large sign saying "JOHN 3:16." What is so special about this verse? Why do people print it on their clothes, their cars, on the shopping bags of a major business, and inside the bottom rim of the cups at a well-known restaurant chain? Even if you already know what this verse says, it is worth hearing one more time: "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." People have been trying to escape death for as long as there have been funerals and graves. These words claim it is possible to do just that.

1 Most people, at some point, ask the questions, "Why am I here? What is the purpose of my life?"

John 17:3 "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."
Jeremiah 9:23–24 "Thus says the Lord: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me….'"

> Thankfully, God has not left us without an answer to this question. The purpose of our life is to know God. Not just knowing *about* God the way we know about a famous person from a distance, but having a close friendship with Him. To have all the benefits of life, we need to be as close to God as a branch is to the main vine, completely connected (John 15:5).

Ephesians 2:10 "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

> In a close friendship with God, He will "instruct you and teach you in the way you should go" (Psalm 32:8). Since He made us, He knows the best path we should follow. We fulfill our life's purpose when we willingly obey God's instructions.

2 God designed us to have a close friendship with Him. What does sin do to our relationship with God?

Isaiah 59:2 "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you …."

> Sin separates us from God and "the soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). Nothing we do can fix our broken relationship with God. Even our good deeds are compared to "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). We cannot trust our own thoughts to lead us back to God: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). Since God is the only One who "has life in Himself" (John 5:26), the direct result of separation from Him is death. We can't escape this result any more than we can escape the law of gravity. Our only hope is in what God does to make a way for restoring our relationship with Him.

3 How does God treat sinners?

1 Timothy 1:15 "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."
Luke 15:2 "And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

> We learn a lot about someone by who they eat with. God desires to spend time and enter into friendship with sinners. We can also learn a lot about someone by how they treat their enemies. See how God treated the first murderer in this world's history. His name was Cain. God preserved his life and protected him, "lest anyone finding him should kill him" (Genesis 4:15). Why would God do that when Cain deserved to die? It is because God is patient with us, "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

4 How did God respond to Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden?

Genesis 3:19 "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

> As soon as Adam and Eve sinned, God permitted them to receive the natural consequences that have been passed on to us: pain, trouble in life, and ultimately death. But God mercifully withheld the consequence of death from Adam for a while (Genesis 5:5) so He could reveal the solution for sin and the choice to accept it.

Genesis 3:21 "Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them."

> The next thing God did was to cover the sinful couple with the skin of a lamb whose life was given to cover the shame that came from separation from God. We know it was a lamb from the next chapter, where a lamb is the sacrifice God required (Genesis 4:2–4). God directed lambs to be used as a way to show the painful effects of sin and how He would provide a remedy (Exodus 29:38–39).

5 What does the lamb represent?

John 1:29 "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"

"The lamb represents Jesus Christ and what He would do for sinners ..."

1 Peter 1:18–19 "… you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

> The lamb represents Jesus Christ and what He would do for sinners, who deserve death. By God's instruction, the white, lovable, and innocent lambs took the place of sinners and gave their lives as a visible, hands-on illustration of both the deadly consequences of sin and how Jesus would step into the place of each guilty sinner.

6 Where did Jesus come from?

John 17:5 "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was."
John 1:14 "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

> Jesus is not a created being. He was in Heaven before this world began, and has shared God's glory for all eternity because He is God. Jesus declared, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). He came to this Earth and showed us a flesh-and-blood picture of what the Father is like, because He is "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).

Matthew 1:23 "'Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,' which is translated, 'God with us.'"
Luke 1:35 "And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.'"

> Jesus left Heaven to become one of us, born as a human by God's power alone. Immanuel (God with us) is Jesus, a name that means "God saves," which illustrated that He would "save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

7 If Jesus came from Heaven, how could He take my place?

Hebrews 2:17 "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren … ."
Romans 1:3 "… His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh …."

> When Jesus was born as a human, His physical body and mental ability shared the damaging results of sin that every person experiences. He understands our weaknesses and temptations since He experienced them, too.
>
> Jesus had to do the same thing you and I must do—stay close to God the

"... Jesus was born as a human ..."

> Father. "Then Jesus answered and said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner'" (John 5:19).

8 If Jesus was a person just like me, who experienced the weakness of what sin has done to humanity, then how can He help me?

1 John 3:5 "And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin."

> Jesus can "sympathize with our weaknesses" because He was "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Where we failed, He succeeded. He can stand in the place of sinners because He has no sin of His own.

John 14:10 "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works."

> Jesus remained intimately connected to God—like a branch connected to the vine, just like we are meant to be. Through His moment-by-moment connection to the Father, He did what God required perfectly.

Mark 2:5 "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven you.'"

> The help Jesus gives meets our greatest need. He forgives our sins that separate us from God.

9 How is Jesus able to forgive my sins?

Isaiah 53:6 "… we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."
John 19:17–18 "And He, bearing His cross, went out to a place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha, where they crucified Him, and two others with Him, one on either side, and Jesus in the center."
1 Peter 3:18 "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God …."
Titus 2:13–14 "… our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."

> This is the most powerful message ever shared. Jesus, the only person to live a sinless life, accepted the complete penalty for every sinful person. He suffered, was tortured, and was put to death on a cross in our place. An animal sacrifice could not take away sin; it was just a symbol: "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12). Only Jesus' sinless life, given freely, could pay the penalty that Adam deserved for his sin, and it pays the penalty of death we deserve. He did this willingly because He loves us (John 10:18). The payment was complete; when Jesus died, He said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30).
>
> Jesus' death on the Cross shows how horrible sin is. God's Law, and the results of breaking it, could not be set aside. The cost must be paid, even though it required the priceless life of God Himself.
>
> The Bible tells this story clearly four times so no one will miss it. You can find it in Matthew 26–27, Mark 14–15, Luke 22–23, and John 18–19.

10 Did God confirm for us that Jesus' sinless death gives Him the power to forgive sins?

Matthew 28:2–6 "And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust ..." 1 Peter 3:18

as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.'"
1 Corinthians 15:17 "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!"

> Just as He promised in advance (Matthew 16:21), Jesus could not be held in the grave by the power of death (Acts 2:24). The resurrection of Jesus from the grave is evidence that His death was a full payment of the penalty for our sins, and that He has the authority to forgive us. Jesus says, "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death" (Revelation 1:18; *Hades* is the Greek word for "the grave"). Satan has power to *cause* death, but Jesus has power *over* death.

11 Is there anything that confirms these claims about Jesus?

Luke 24:27 "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

> The Word of God in the Old Testament described what Jesus would do many years in advance. Many of these statements were recognized to be prophetic before Jesus was born, and many of them dealt with things outside a person's control, such as how and where He would be born, or die. Here are just a few to think about:

Micah 5:2 - born in Bethlehem - Luke 2:4–6
Isaiah 7:14 - born of a virgin - Luke 1:34
Genesis 3:15 - without a human father - Luke 3:23
Isaiah 11:1 - a descendant of David, the son of Jesse - Matthew 1:6
Hosea 11:1 - lived in Egypt as a child - Matthew 2:13–15
Isaiah 53:5 - was whipped before He was killed - Mark 15:15
Psalm 22:16 - his hands and feet were pierced - John 20:24–29
Psalm 22:18 - people gambled for His clothes - Matthew 27:35
Psalm 69:20-21 - was offered vinegar to drink while He died - Matt. 27:34
Psalm 34:20 - none of His bones would be broken - John 19:33
Isaiah 53:9 - buried in a rich man's tomb - Matthew 27:38, 57–60
Psalm 118:17-18 - death couldn't keep Him in the grave - 1 Cor. 15:3–8

> Sin did not catch God by surprise. Before Creation, Jesus chose to be "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). God had a plan to rescue us from sin before we were born, and He desires us to know all about it.

"And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!"
1 Corinthians 15:17

12 In what other ways is Jesus unique?

John 1:1–3 "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."

> "The Word" refers to Jesus, who created all things, speaking life into existence "by the word of God" (Hebrews 11:3). It is no wonder He loves you and me and gave His life for us.

John 14:9 "… He who has seen Me has seen the Father …."

> Jesus showed us exactly what God is like: He meets sin head-on while showing us mercy and love.

Matthew 4:24 "… they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them."

> Through the power of God, Jesus relieved the suffering that resulted from sin when He cast out evil angels and completely healed the sick of their diseases.

13 Is it possible for me, a weak and sinful person, to relate to Jesus, who never sinned?

John 15:13–14 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you."
Matthew 11:28 "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."
John 6:37 "… the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."

> Jesus is not a distant ruler. He sincerely desires our close friendship. He does not force anyone to accept Him; His invitation must be willingly accepted.

14 What example did Jesus set for me?

1 Peter 2:21 "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps."
John 6:38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."

> Jesus is our example of following the will of our Heavenly Father. He demonstrated that complete obedience to God's commands is possible for humans with weaknesses inherited from sin when we allow Him to work in us "both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). Our obedience to God is a response of love "because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Choosing a close, daily friendship with our Heavenly Father, as Jesus did, allows Him to influence our thoughts and strengthen our will to follow Him.

15 How can I receive God's gift of forgiveness for my sins?

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

> We come to God exactly as we are, confessing our sins honestly, and sincerely believing that Jesus has taken our place (Romans 10:9). Remember, He is loving, and we can do this without fear.

Romans 2:4 "… the goodness of God leads you to repentance …."
Luke 15:10 "Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

> We respond to His merciful forgiveness by choosing to turn from sin. This is repentance. God helps us do this "through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

16 What happens when I confess my sins and repent?

Jeremiah 33:8 "I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities …."
Micah 7:19 "… You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."

> Our sins are completely pardoned—as if they never happened! We still have consequences from our choices in life and we have freedom to return to sin in the future, but we can be confident that Jesus has paid our penalty when we confess.

17 Do I need to come to God through another person?

1 Timothy 2:5 "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."

> The only way to come to God and be saved from sin and certain death is through Jesus, not through any other person who is as guilty of sin as we are (John 14:6).

18 I've never seen Jesus. Where is He now, and what is He doing?

John 14:2–3 "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

> Jesus is in Heaven and He will return soon, as He promised, to rescue those who know Him as a Friend. He wants us to enjoy the purpose for the life we were meant for all along—a close friendship that lasts forever. His invitation is more vital now than ever before: "Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other" (Isaiah 45:22).

"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." 1 Timothy 2:5

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR MY LIFE TODAY?

1. What sins from your past do you need to confess to God and ask for His forgiveness? When our sin affects others, there may also need to be restitution to make it right (Leviticus 6:2–5).

2. God wants to free you from the power of sin in your life. That freedom is experienced when God is "working in you what is well pleasing in His sight" (Hebrews 13:21). Will you invite God to influence your thoughts and actions so you can love Him from the heart and obey Him in every decision?

3. Now is the time to have a friendship with God. He doesn't force; He only invites: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). Just knowing about food is not enough; we have to eat it. The same is true with Jesus: knowing about Him is not enough, you must be His friend. Will you choose to say yes to Jesus' offer of close friendship today?

4. You can know Jesus better by reading the story of His life on Earth in the Bible books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These are the Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament. Will you ask God to help you understand and love Jesus as you read about His life?

5. Who do you know that needs to hear what you have learned? "I have proclaimed the good news of righteousness …" (Psalm 40:9).

Additional Notes:

WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS FOR ME IN THE STORY OF JESUS?

1. The Greek word for gospel means "good news." The best good news of all is "the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (Revelation 14:6)—"the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1).

2. God knows you inside and out, and knows the trouble sin has caused for you: "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:13–14).

3. God does not give up on you: "See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands …" (Isaiah 49:16).

4. The assurance of God's love and forgiveness comes right now, not sometime in the future, if you have been good enough: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

5. Put your own name in the blanks of this promise that shows the real value God places on you. You are worth the life of Jesus: For God so loved _____ that He gave His only begotten Son, that if _____ believes in Him, _____ should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

6. Salvation from sin is a gift we accept by faith: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

7. The story of Jesus is not over. Jesus is coming again soon to rescue His people. "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

LESSON SUMMARY

1. You are designed to be in a close friendship with God, who gives you life.

2. Sin separates you from God and results in eternal death.

3. God the Father loves you and does not want you to suffer sin's consequence. No cost to Himself is too high to pay for your rescue.

4. Jesus, who shows us what God is like, came from Heaven to live a sinless life on your behalf and die the death you deserve.

5. Jesus' resurrection shows that He has conquered sin and death for those who have faith in Him.

6. We express our faith in Jesus' gift of forgiveness by confessing our sins to Him.

7. Jesus' example shows that by the grace God gives, we can resist temptation and turn away from sin.

Additional Notes:

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