

Title: **For God So Loved the World: A Christmas Reflection on a Familiar Verse**
Text: **John 3:16**

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Big Idea

The first gift of Christmas wasn't what Santa gave that little boy up at the North Pole in *The Polar Express*. Neither was it what the Magi brought to lay at the young Jesus' feet. It's what God gave to us there in Bethlehem: his only Son!

John 3:16. There's a reason why this is likely the most well-known and well-regarded verse in all the Bible. And that's because, it seems to me, this is the most potent and yet simple summary of the gospel that we're given in Scripture. It's just one little sentence. But within the humble boundaries of its vocabulary and grammar, Jesus has stuffed in some of the most magnificent realities imaginable!

1. The Subject: God

God is the main actor here. As he was in creation, so he is in redemption—the start of it, the initiator, the first cause. Let it not be said by us that we somehow got this thing started and made our way back to God—by our good deeds, by our moral compass, by our sound intellect, by our faith even. Oh no! It doesn't begin with us. It couldn't begin with us. There would be no getting back to God if he didn't first get back to us. We fled from him in our sin. He fled after us in his grace. That's the story.

2. The Object: World

We are not allowed to think that God so loves the world because the world is so lovely. God loves the world because, as John puts it elsewhere, "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). He can do no different. It is his very nature. It is who he is. The accent here, therefore, is not put on our beauty but on God's. We are not meant to see in this verse just how lovely we are, but just how loving (and gracious and merciful) he is! And that's why I say we see here not just the surprising *breadth* of God's love—that he loves everyone everywhere; but also the surpris-

ing *depth* of his love—that he loves sinners . . . even sinners like me and like you.

3. The Gift: Son

He gives his highest treasure for his lowest creature. If you try to measure the distance between those two points—between where you and I fell as sinful rebels and where Jesus sat in heaven with Father as his one and only one-of-a-kind Son—you could pull that tape out for all eternity and you still wouldn't reach the extremities of it. It's immeasurable!

4. The Aim: Life

God cast his own Son into that fiery lake so he could bring us up into his loving arms. God put his only Son through hell so he could bring you and I, sinners though we be, into heaven.

5. The Call: Believe!

We are all utterly sick, helpless, dying, snake-bit in our sin, suffering under the curse—"by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). And from the gloom, from our place in the dirt, we see the Son lifted up on that cross—the very emblem of the curse. And we hear the voice of God to us: "Look and live!" You look to the cursed thing lifted up in the air—Jesus dying on the cross for my sin in my place—and find that the cursed effect is lifted up off of you. Jesus becomes a curse to remove the curse. He takes it on himself to take it off of us (cf. Gal. 3:13).



Reflection Questions

- Which of the five points discussed today seems most relevant to you personally and why?
- How might you take John 3:16 with you into your Christmas celebrations this week? What might change in light of what you learned today?

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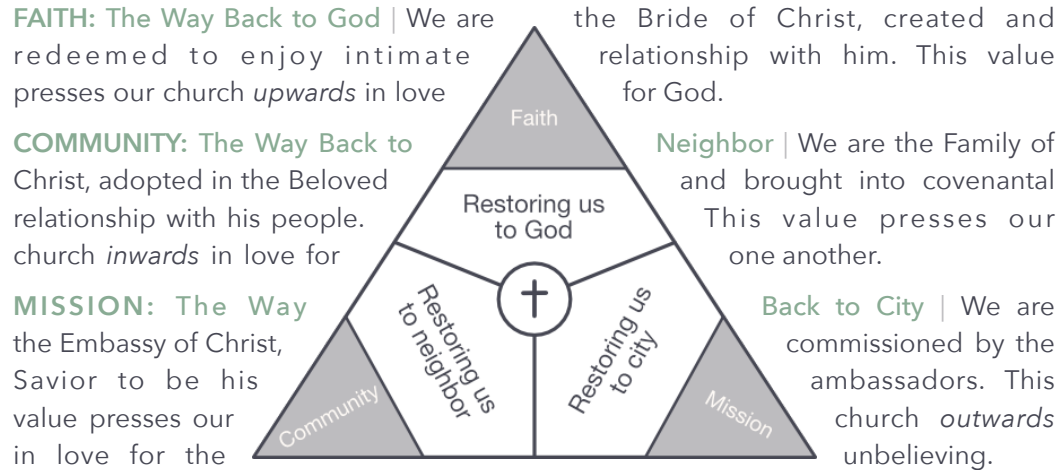


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