

JESUS: THE INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

Jesus: The Gift of God's Love

Twelve Daily Studies for Christmas

John 3:1–17; 7:45–52; 19:38–40; Romans 5:8

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

DAY 9

In the final days before Christmas, most people are busy buying last-minute gifts, finishing decorating, and preparing for guests. At the center of the holiday hubbub amidst the flurry of activity is the tiny figure of the baby Jesus in the nativity set. Although often overlooked next to the lights of the Christmas tree and the colorful spread of wrapped gifts, the figure in the manger represents the essence of Christmas. Everything else is dispensable, mere wrapping to be torn away to reveal the true gift: the love of God in human form—Jesus.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,” begins the most beloved verse in the Bible (John 3:16 NASB). No greater expression of love has been recorded in all the annals of time because no greater gift has been given. As commentator B. Milne explains:

If the depth of love is measured by the value of its gift, then God's love could not be greater, for his love-gift is his most precious possession—his only, eternally beloved Son. He could not love more.¹

Such amazing love! Let's pause from our busy pace for a moment of quiet reflection to prepare our hearts to receive God's love.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

For the next few minutes, set aside your mental to-do list, close your eyes, pace your breathing, and allow yourself to slow down. You may play calming worship music or find a warm spot by a sunny window. Read slowly the following words from John 3:16.

- *For God so loved . . .* Emphasize the word *so*. This is the unfathomable depth of God's love. He loved *so much*.
- *. . . the world . . .* Emphasize *world*. This is the wideness of God's love, which extends beyond those who are worthy or lovable even to those who don't love Him in return.

Quotable

*Every Christmas,
God announces
to every one of us,
the three words
that are most
important to hear.
He says to us,
“I love you.”.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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- . . . *that He gave* . . . Emphasize *gave*. This is the initiative of God's love, which acted not to condemn us but to save us.
- . . . *His only begotten Son* . . . Emphasize *begotten*, which means "one and only." This is the unique manifestation of the love of God, who gave a gift that no one else could give.

Use the space below to ask the Lord to help you receive the full extent of His love as you reflect on the gift of Jesus in this study.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The context of John 3:16–17 is Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. Whether the apostle John wrote these words to summarize Jesus' meaning or Jesus spoke these words to Nicodemus, Nicodemus got the message. After reading the passage, we'll examine the impact the message had on Nicodemus and apply it to our lives as well. Read the verses from the New Living Translation.

For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16–17)



Observation: God's Gift of Love

Observing a passage is the first step of the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study. Sometimes we miss details in a familiar passage, so let's read John 3:16–17 again, this time noting the what, why, and how of the passage.

What did God do? Write down the words that describe God's actions.



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Why did God take these actions? Note words or phrases such as *so*, *so that*, or *to*.

How did God send His Son? Jesus made a similar statement in John 3:13, “the Son of Man has come down from heaven.” How did the apostle Paul explain Jesus’ coming down from heaven in *Galatians 4:4–5* and *Philippians 2:7–8*?

Now let’s look closer at how believing in Jesus gains us eternal life.



Interpretation and Correlation: Salvation through Jesus Christ

Paul’s epistle to the Romans, which explains the saving power of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, fleshes out the theology embedded in John’s gospel. Reflect on the connection between John 3:16–17 and Romans 5:8–9.

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation.

What similarities do you see between John 3:16–17 and Romans 5:8–9?



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What additional information did Paul offer about the role of Christ's death in our salvation?

Combine these passages in a summary statement of God's plan of salvation for the world.



Application: Taking the Step of Faith

To discover how Nicodemus responded to Jesus' invitation to believe in Him, we page forward in John's gospel to John 7:50–51. In the context, the Pharisees were pronouncing judgment on Jesus and spewing curses on those who followed Him when Nicodemus spoke up.

Then Nicodemus, the leader who had met with Jesus earlier, spoke up. "Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?" he asked. (John 7:50–51)

Nicodemus appeared open to Jesus' claims even though the others had already slammed the door shut. After Jesus' crucifixion, Nicodemus emerged from the shadows as a follower of Jesus when he joined Joseph of Arimathea to remove Jesus' body from the cross. Together, "they wrapped Jesus' body with the spices in long sheets of linen cloth" and laid His body in the tomb (19:40).

Just as Mary had lovingly wrapped baby Jesus in swaddling cloth and laid Him in a manger, these two courageous men lovingly wrapped Jesus' body in burial cloth and laid Him in a tomb. They had received God's gift of love and responded by saying in their actions, "I love you, Lord Jesus."



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How about you? Right now, join Nicodemus in returning love to the One who loved you enough to come from heaven and die in your place. Write a prayer expressing your belief in Jesus and your love for Him.

Take your prayer with you through the coming busy days of Christmas and read it often.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for loving me so much to send Your Son to die for my sins. As the hymnist writes, “Amazing love! How can it be That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?” Thank You for the gift of grace in Jesus, the gift of truth in Jesus, and most of all the gift of love in Jesus. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here Is Your King!* The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 77.



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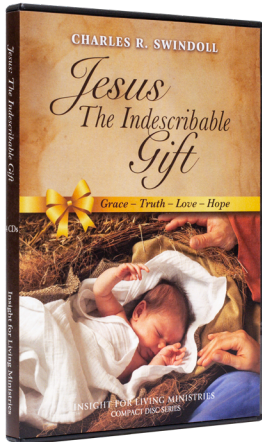
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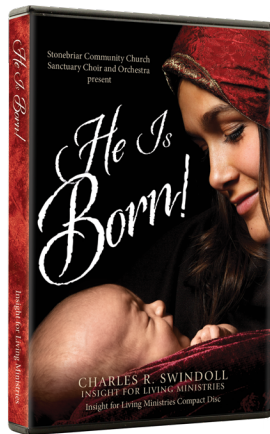
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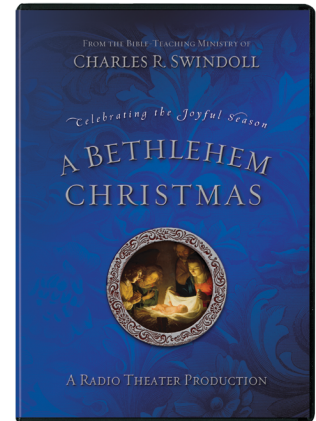
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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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