

Embracing the Blessings of God

John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

- *John 3:16 is one of the most recognizable verses in the Bible and it beautifully summarizes the gospel message.*
- *“For God so loved the world” – God’s deep and unconditional love for mankind compelled God to respond to our desperate need for salvation.*
- *“that he gave his only Son” – God’s response to our totally lost and hopeless state was to send His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place and to take upon Himself all our sins, curses, and sickness.*
- *“that whoever believes in him should not perish” – The only condition for us to be saved is to put our faith in God and all He has done for us, through the suffering, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.*
- *“but have eternal life” – The salvation we receive through Jesus Christ is not only deliverance from the penalty of sin, which is eternity in Hell, but receiving eternal life.*
- *One question that might be asked is, “What exactly is eternal life?”*
- *Some say eternal life is living forever.*
- *While that is true, it is not the whole picture, because we know from Scripture that the ungodly will also experience a physical resurrection and they will spend eternity in Hell, because the soul of every human being is eternal. (Revelation 20:12-15; Daniel 12:2)*
- *Eternal life is more than just continuing to exist forever.*
- *Eternal life is being in Heaven forever.*
- *However, there is another dimension to eternal life that makes Heaven such a glorious place.*

John 17:1–3 (NKJV)

¹Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You,

²as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.

³And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

- “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” – *The Bible defines eternal life as knowing God and knowing His Son, Jesus Christ.*
- *The Greek word used here for “to know” is γινώσκω ginōskō and it means, “to acquire information by whatever means, but often with the implication of personal involvement or experience.”*
- *If eternal life is defined as knowing God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ through a personal relationship, then the opposite of eternal life is not knowing God and not having a personal relationship with Him.*
- *Heaven is where we will have unbroken fellowship with God for all eternity.*
- *However, another wonderful revelation is that eternal life begins the moment we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour and are born again. We have eternal life now and we can grow in our relationship with God while we are still on this earth.*

2 Thessalonians 1:8–9 (NKJV)

⁸in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

- *This Scripture describes a few aspects of Hell and eternal damnation.*
- “In flaming fire taking vengeance” – *Hell is a place of torment where justice is fulfilled.*
- *Either we put our faith in Christ and accept that He took our punishment for us, or we receive eternal punishment for our sins.*

- ***“those who do not know God” – This provides the reason people will find themselves in Hell—those who do not know God—those who have no relationship with God.***
- ***“those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” – This is the reason they do not have a relationship with God. They rejected the gospel message.***
- ***“These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” – Hell is described as a place of eternal destruction clearly showing it is a permanent state.***
- ***“from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” – If Heaven is a place of perfect and unbroken fellowship with God, Hell is a place of absolute separation from God and the glory of His power and presence.***

Romans 1:20 (NKJV)

²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

- ***Every human being, while they are alive on this earth, whether they are believers or unbelievers, experience some dimension of the reality of God.***
- ***Through our experience with creation and life, God reaches out to each person to the reality of Who He is and displays His Divine Nature.***
- ***However, in Hell, God’s presence and goodness is totally absent and while the person may be conscious, they are in a state of death for the One who is life is not present.***

John 10:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

- ***“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy” – All the wars, pain, sickness, hatred, and death describe what selfishness, sin, and the devil have done to this world.***

- **“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” – *In sharp contrast to what mankind’s sinful and selfish decisions have produced, Jesus has come to give us life and life that is overflowing.***
- ***When we put our faith in Christ Jesus and are born again He gives us eternal life.***
- ***However, that is not where our relationship with Him stops, this is where our relationship with God begins. He has come to give us life more abundantly.***
- ***The Greek word for “abundantly” means “rich and satisfying, exceptional, pertaining to a quality more than what one would expect or anticipate.”***
- ***Jesus’ sacrifice was so infinitely wonderful that it resulted not just in eternal life, but a quality of life that is beyond description, one which will continue to overflow and increase for all eternity.***

Ephesians 2:5–7 (NKJV)

⁵even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

⁶and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

⁷that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

- **“that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” – *This is an example of life more abundantly, that in the unbroken ages of eternity God will continue to pour out more and more of the riches of His grace upon us!***
- ***Once we have received Christ, He wants us to begin to experience and grow more and more in this abundant overflowing life.***
- ***The way we grow in the reality of this abundant eternal life is by developing and deepening our personal relationship with Him.***
- ***Many times Christians are disappointed with God, not because they have expected too much from Him, but because they have expected too little.***

- *Many expect that God will give them a comfortable life, but that type of expectation does not lead to a deeper life with God. It leads to a more selfish life focused on one's own needs and desires.*
- *God wants us to experience a deep and rich life through a relationship with Him.*

2 Corinthians 5:14–15 (NKJV)

¹⁴For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;

¹⁵and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

- *“The love of Christ compels us” – The love of Christ is to seize and take hold of our hearts, that our greatest desire would be to live a life surrendered to Him, because He gave His life for us.*
- *Our desires are no longer focused on ourselves, but on God and those around us.*
- *When I was a young Christian I was happy that Jesus saved me, but as I grew in my relationship with Him my heart became burdened for those who did not know Him.*
- *Many times when a person first receives Christ, life seems so wonderful, easy and joyful. But after a few weeks or a few months, difficulties begin to creep in.*
- *Why does God allow difficult or painful things to happen to us?*
- *Because He wants us to deepen our relationship with Him, so it is not based simply on feelings, but a deep love and faith in Him regardless of our feelings or circumstances.*

John 15:13–14 (NKJV)

¹³Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

¹⁴You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

- *“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends” – Jesus defines what true intimate friendship looks like—a willingness to give one's life for one's friend.*

- *Jesus laid His life down for us on the cross so we could be saved.*
- *Jesus is our friend, but now our challenge is this: Are we willing to be His friend?*
- *A true friend is willing to walk side by side through good times and difficult times.*
- *Christ has many people who placed their faith in Him, but fewer who are really His friends and are willing to obey to Him.*
- *How do we know if we really love Jesus? Do we obey Him?*
- *John, Chapter 21, describes a touching encounter between Jesus Christ and Peter that helps us grasp what it really means to be God's friend on a deep and intimate level.*

John 21:3–23 (NKJV)

³Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.

- *"Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." - Peter had very recently witnessed the two most powerful events in the history of mankind—the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but his response was to go fishing with the other disciples.*
- *Peter and the other disciples, who spent 3 ½ years with Jesus, whom Jesus prepared and discipled to spread the gospel message to a lost and dying world, forgot all about what Jesus had taught them. Instead, they returned to their fishing business.*
- *Jesus Christ had no plan "B." He invested His whole life and ministry in this handful of men. Either they would carry forward the gospel message or all He did would have been to no avail.*
- *"that night they caught nothing" – The combined efforts of the disciples produced nothing—except perhaps a sleepless night.*

⁴But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

- *It is interesting to note that the disciples who had walked with Jesus for 3 ½ years failed to recognize Him as He stood on the shore talking with them.*
- *Sometimes we can become so spiritually dull we fail to recognize God in our every situation.*

⁵Then Jesus said to them, “Children, have you any food?” They answered Him, “No.”

⁶And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

- *“Then Jesus said to them, “Children, have you any food?” – Jesus’ words to them are so tender and caring, “Little children, how are things going?”*
- *“Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” – Jesus nonchalantly asked, “Why don’t you try fishing from the right side of the boat?”*
- *“So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish” – Jesus’ response to the disciples was not to rebuke them, but bless their fishing expedition.*
- *I would have thought that Jesus would cause them to fail, so they would return to the original mandate He gave them, the great commission, but instead He supernaturally provided a superabundant catch of fish.*

⁷Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea.

- *Their eyes were opened by the miracle and they immediately recognized Jesus, the Lord. Peter was so stirred he couldn’t wait for the boat to make it to shore, so he plunged in and swam to shore.*

⁸But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish.

⁹Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread.

- *Jesus was on the shore, sitting nonchalantly by a fire and cooking breakfast for them—a very touching picture of Jesus as their friend wanting to enjoy a meal with them.*

¹⁰Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.”

- *Jesus asked them to share some of what they had caught to complete the meal.*
- *He was illustrating that they had something to bring to Jesus that would make their meal complete, and something He had imparted to them that would make His ministry complete.*
- *There are gifts and abilities the Lord gives to each of us that He wants us to bring to Him so He can use us.*

¹¹Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken.

¹²Jesus said to them, “Come and eat breakfast.” Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, “Who are You?”—knowing that it was the Lord.

¹³Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish.

¹⁴This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.

- *After a wonderful meal, He turned to Peter and asked him some very important and telling questions.*

¹⁵So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.”

- *“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” – This question may seem a little strange if we understand it as if Jesus was asking, “Do you love Me more than the rest of My disciples?”*
- *However in Greek the word “these” could refer not to the other people around them, but to the great catch of fish they had just pulled in.*

- *They had just caught a lot of fish, worth a lot of money, a very large and exceptional catch.*
- *Instead of Jesus saying, “If you don’t follow Me, then your life is going to be worthless,” He actually blessed Peter’s fishing business. Then He asked him, “What do love more, Me or the success and riches of this life?”*

¹⁶He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.”

¹⁷He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep.

- *Jesus asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” Peter answers three times, “You know that I love you.”*
- *However, for us to really appreciate what was happening, we need to understand in Greek the different words for love used here.*
- *The first type of love is ἀγαπάω agape and it speaks about an unconditional love based solely on seeing how precious someone is. This type of love describes God’s love for mankind. This love does not denote necessarily a relationship, but simply unconditional love.*
- *The other word that is translated as love in these verses is φιλέω phileō and it denotes the idea of friendship or to “like” someone. It is a love based on relationship and can speak about how the person makes you feel.*
- *Agape love is a more noble aspect of love and is defined in 1 Corinthians 13 as a love that is self-sacrificing and not seeking any reciprocation, while phileo love denotes enjoying someone’s company and friendship.*
- *In verse 15 when Jesus asked, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter responded, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”*
- *Jesus asked, “Do you love (agape) Me.” In other words, “Do you love Me because you see how precious I am?”*

- *Peter's response was, "Yes, Lord; You know I love (phileo) You." In other words, "You know I love you because of how you make me feel because You are my friend."*
- *Jesus' response to Peter's answer was, "Feed My lambs."*
- *In other words, "If you really love me, then take care of My people and love them the same way I love them."*
- *The second time Jesus asked the same question, He again used the word agape and Peter again responded using the word phileo.*
- *Jesus asked, "Do you love Me because You see how precious I am?" and Peter responded, "You know I love You because of the way You make me feel."*
- *Again Jesus told Peter, "Tend My sheep." This illustrates the great concern that the Lord has for His people and His Church.*

¹⁷He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep.

- *The third time Jesus asked the question something very interesting happened, because He changed the question.*
- *Jesus asked, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (phileo) Me?" Jesus asked, "Do you love Me because of the way I make you feel?" In other words, the depth of Peter's love for the Lord was limited.*
- *"Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" - When Peter answered Jesus the third time it was almost like he was hanging his head, saying, "Yes, you know that I love You because of the way you make me feel." Jesus saw through Peter's words to his heart.*
- *Peter's love for Jesus at this point in his life was still limited to phileo love. He had not yet arrived at agape love.*
- *But Jesus did not rebuke Peter, but simply shared His heart's desire, "Feed My sheep."*

- *Peter must still have been reeling from the two huge failures.*
- *First, he denied Jesus three times because of his fear of people. When Jesus needed Him most as He was arrested and sentenced, Peter denied Him.*
- *The second failure was after Christ's resurrection and His two appearances to the disciples; Peter had neglected the apostolic calling on his life and intended to return to his occupation as a fisherman.*
- *Jesus spent 3 ½ years focusing on Peter and the other disciples and now the very ones He had entrusted with the gospel message were neglecting their calling.*
- *Jesus did not seek to shame Peter, only to gently and lovingly restore him.*
- *Jesus' words were all about motivating Peter from the point of view of love.*
- *For Peter to get past this spiritual roadblock he would have to learn to love Jesus Christ with the unconditional love of God.*

¹⁸Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.”

¹⁹This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”

- *Jesus shared with Peter how he would eventually be martyred for his faith in Him.*
- *“when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished” – When we are spiritually young we are led by our desires of what we like and what we don't like. We are very much self-centered and not so much interested in God's will, but our own will.*
- *“but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” – When we are more mature we are willing to allow God to lead us through difficult circumstances, because we love Him and trust Him more fully.*

²⁰Then Peter, turning around, saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following, who also had leaned on His breast at the supper, and said, “Lord, who is the one who betrays You?”

²¹Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this man?”

- “But Lord, what about this man?” – *When we are immature we have a sense of entitlement, and we are always comparing ourselves with others. God’s word to us is simply, “Follow Me,” and don’t worry about what I choose to do in other people’s lives.*

²²Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.”

²³Then this saying went out among the brethren that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?”

- “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me.” – *Jesus is really pushing Peter’s buttons. Jesus is saying, “If I want him to never die that is My business, not yours. You are just to follow Me and I will lead you to fulfill the will of God for your life.”*

2 Peter 1:13–15 (NKJV)

¹³Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you,

¹⁴knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me.

¹⁵Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.

- “knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me” - *We see Peter had arrived at full spiritual maturity and was willing to die for his faith in Jesus Christ without regrets, or fretting, or comparing himself with others. Now he had peace and joy.*
- “Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you” –*More than just being willing to die as a martyr, Peter was faithful to feed the sheep to the last moments of his life. His concern was for the sheep and not for his own life.*

- **“Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease” –Peter left a spiritual legacy through the writing of his epistles that we still benefit from today.**

Philippians 1:21 (NKJV)

²¹For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

- *To hold on to this life tightly leads to a vain and frustrated existence, but to surrender to the will of God results in life filled with His purposes now and for eternity.*
- *We are all going to die, how much better to die doing the will of God than to die and not to have done the will of God.*