

## Back 2 Church Sunday Sermon (John 3:16)

The way we see our lives will shape our lives.

So how do you see your life?

What image best suits your view of your life?

What would be your Life metaphor?

Is it:

- **A Party?** – is life all about having fun?
- **A Contest?** – is winning what life is about?
- **A Trek?** - is life something to be endured and survived.
- **A Test?** – is life about constantly having to prove yourself?
- **A Sprint?** – are you always in a hurry, do you value speed?
- **A Marathon?** – is endurance and overcoming important to you.
- **A Sacrifice?** – Does everyone else come first?
- **A Trial?** – are you repeatedly giving evidence to validate your life and value?
- **A Journey?** – Something to be completed in order to get to the real destination?

Today I want to suggest that there is life metaphor provided to us by our creator that is worthy of consideration.

We are an object of Love!

*“For God So Loved the World”*

These are the first six words of one of the most well-known and often quoted sentences in the bible.

It is a remarkable passage, John 3:16 has 26 words in total which can lead us to the answers of some of the most important questions of life:

- Who am I?
- What am I doing here?
- Is there a plan or purpose for my existence?
- Am I just an accidental bag of chemicals and energies, pointless, purposeless, and insignificant?

John 3:16 answers all these questions with an emphatic...

**NO!**

Today is the anniversary of those horrendous events a decade ago in America that are collectively referred to as the 9/11 attacks.

Whatever you think personally about those events and the myriad of responses that followed, our world is different...

Our world is more suspicious, less hospitable, less open, more self-centred, less tolerant, and more reactionary.

Our world and all of us in it are diminished as a result of the events of that day.

As a result the online media especially the youth forums are filled with questions which at the core deal with: Identity, purpose, value, and relationships. Questions like:

- Where do I fit in?
- Do I matter?
- Why do I hurt?
- Is this all there is?
- What comes next?

And really... what could be more important? These are certainly not new question and neither are the answers.

It is not hard to see why John 3:16 is one of the most famous, most often memorized, most cherished verses in the Bible.

It is packed with some of the greatest questions and realities that exist.

- *God.*
- *Love.*
- *Creation.*
- *Faith.*
- *Eternity.*
- *You and Me*

My wife and I are currently blessed to have 2 grand-daughters; one is 6 weeks old the other 6 years old.

One, for now, has no questions; she is content in just being cared for. Her world just the here and the now. She doesn't know what it means yet but she is an object of love... and she is very pleased about it.

My other granddaughter while still firmly attached to the here and now, is full of questions, even more so during her mother's pregnancy!

- Will the baby like me?
- What colour hair?
- How did it get in there?
- How will it get out?
- What will we call her?
- ?

And it's understandable because underneath all those questions is the real question:

*“What will this mean for me?”*

Broadly speaking there are two ways to seek out the answers to life's big questions?

- We can speculate.

Every one of uses this method. We observe, measure, interact with the world around us and based on those interactions we try to theorise about the rest.

Unfortunately for many it leads to a life which is unfulfilled, unfocused, constantly searching, somewhat like a blank canvas waiting for a picture of purpose to be painted on it.

It was once said that all of us are born with a missing piece, and we look in lots of places to fill the gap:

- Friends, fashion, sex, drugs, music, possessions, achievements, fame, power, reputation, good deeds, hospitality, courage.

But none of them fit – not by themselves anyway. Sure they keep the wind away for a while but very quickly they tear or warp or dissolve and we are aware of that hole once more.

It's often feels a bit like:

- Trying to put together a jig was puzzle without the picture?
- Especially if it's one that has a curved border and no obvious orientation?, and
- Do we have all the pieces anyway?

Well that's what it was like for me trying to make sense of my life, the world and my place in it before I asked God.

Which brings me neatly to the alternative to speculation which is?

- Revelation

The easiest way to know how to use something is to read the instructions.

If something needs repair its wisest to read the repair manual and perhaps even consult the technical specifications.

We turn to the manufacturer and ask him/her to tell us the answer.

John 3:16 is the result of just such an enquiry.

At the beginning of chapter 3 is the story of Nicodemus.

As a scholar of the scriptures, Nicodemus had been watching Jesus and the deeds He had performed, and they had given him food for thought.

He had sensed that there was something deeply significant to all of this and so he came to see Jesus.

Nicodemus had come to the conclusion that Jesus must have come down from heaven otherwise I doubt he would have left his comfortable and respected position in Jewish society and religion to sneak out at night to ask his question.

But before he can get to his question Jesus stuns him by saying:

*“Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”*

Jesus was saying to Nicodemus

“God created you, God sustains your life, your birth was at his command... but not for this... not the way you live your life.

Deep down you know that your life, however successful it appears, is not the way it's meant to be, that's why you're here isn't it?

Nicodemus you already know that you don't need more religious activity, more knowledge or more facts about your life, the universe and everything else in it.

You need to start again, from the very beginning, go back to first principles.

You see all of Nicodemus' religion, all of his amazing Pharisaic study and discipline and law-keeping, cannot replace the need to be “born again”.

The word translated as “Again” is the Greek word “Anothen” which does mean again like repeat but excludes the idea of:

- Imitation,
- Replication, or
- Reverse engineering
- IT MUST BE DONE AGAIN BY THE ONE WHO DID IT ORIGINALLY!

We cannot just renew or reengineer our own lives any more than a baby can choose to be born, or for a piece of granite decide to be a lump of Gold.

This is not some self-improvement program to refresh the old you, like an episode from a reality TV makeover show like “THE BLOCK” or “RENOVATORS”.

Jesus was talking about the re-creation of the real you, based entirely on the original design specifications, by the engineer who built and designed you in the first place.

Have you ever considered what drives your life? What are your individual priorities, preferences, purposes are in your life?

- Anger
- Approval
- Fear
- Grief
- Guilt
- Honour
- Knowledge
- Materialism
- Resentment
- Reward
- Risk

- Self-preservation
- Truth

All of our lives are driven by something!

The words in John 3:16 ask us to be purposed or driven by the love God has for us.

I'll say that again...

THE LOVE GOD HAS FOR US.

Not our love for him or each other, not our abilities, accomplishments or accumulations, our goodness, our religion, or our standing.

Why is this so important?

Because as we will see later there is a singular method of being born again and because the love of God is a very wonderful thing, especially when we see it set against the divided and troubled world we inhabit.

What is there in our world that God should love it?

Where did god's love come from?

He loves because it is his nature to do so. God's love springs from God himself.

This love of God for us comes to us in the following ways.

1. First God's love is a **GIFT**:

*"... **he gave** ..."*

Two things need to be said about this giving. One is that it is a giving from heaven. And the other is that it is a complete unreserved giving

2. Secondly, God's love has **NO LIMITS**:

*"...**whoever**..."*

It includes everyone. It goes out to all people of every ethnic group and every age and every socio-economic category and, best of all, to every degree of sinner—from the bad to the worst and gives us all equal hope and joy.

3. Thirdly, God's love **RESCUES**

*"...**not perish**..."*

What's most clear and most important is to see that *perish* is the alternative to *life*,

*"...not perish **but** have eternal life."*

So if you perish, you don't get eternal life.

#### 4. Finally, God's love **BRINGS LIFE**:

*"not perish, but **have eternal life.**"*

This does not simply mean you exist forever. We all exist forever. You knew that didn't you? We all live forever but not everybody has "**eternal life**".

Eternal life is *life to God*—life that can see and savor God and all his creation the way he meant it to be enjoyed in the beginning, before it became necessary for us to be "born again".

God wants our life purpose to be the acceptance of the reality of His love in our lives. That's it.

Remember the list of great questions and realities I started with?

- *God.*
- *Love.*
- *Creation.*
- *Eternity.*
- *You and Me*
- *Faith.*

Well there is only one to go.

God's free gift of love to us (all of us – *whoever*) is intended to bring us eternal life according to the original design.

To receive eternal life and not perish we must believe in the gift God gave to us; his son Jesus.

That belief is demonstrated by the simple act of trusting in Jesus.

Notice that it doesn't say:

- whoever lives a holy life; none of us could do that, or
- whoever learns the holy words; some might be able to recite them all but none of us would ever fully comprehend them.

Because, if either of these things were true god's gift would not be available to us all.

But God did say is that

*"...whoever **believes in him...**"*

The word believe means to embrace something as true; and when it's a person, like Jesus, it means to trust them, to rely on them, depend on them to

- be what they say they are,
- to do what they say they will do.

No matter the measure of faith or assurance; that we might have as individuals, Jesus will see even the smallest amount of it and reward it.

It's a certainty.

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

*John 3:16*

You are an object of God’s love and believing in Him will change your life.

- Believing in God’s love for you will give your life meaning.
- Believing in God’s love for you will simplify your life.
- Believing in God’s love for you will focus your life.
- Believing in God’s love for you will motivate you in living your life.
- Believing in God’s love for you will prepare you for eternal life.