

Q&A with Max Lucado, author of *3:16: The Numbers of Hope*

Q: In this study of John 3:16, you share parts of your life story. Tell us why this verse is so personal, why it engages in your life so much?

A: John 3:16 has meant a lot to me in my life because it's so concise. It's one of those scriptures that summarizes all the core doctrines of the Christian faith. It provides a toolkit, a "Table of Contents," that we can use once we understand it. Taking a deeper look at John 3:16 allows us to fall in love with it and appreciate how brilliantly these 26-words articulate the big ideas of the Bible. I think that's why it has meant so much to me all these years.

Q: Why do you think so many people deeply cherish this verse?

A: I think millions and millions of people have cherished this verse down through the years because they find their story in this Scripture. We all honestly wonder if God could love someone like us. We all wonder if there's some work we need to do or deed we need to do to earn God's love. We all wonder what truly is the outcome of history, and these core questions are answered in John 3:16. Yes, He does love us. What do we need to do? We need to trust. Yes, there is a heaven that awaits us and yes, there is a separation that awaits those who reject God. And so, this scripture gives us just a tidy clarification of these important questions.

Q: If there were one thing that you would want somebody to have as the takeaway after reading 3:16—*The Numbers of Hope*, what would it be?

A: The big takeaway I would want every person to have from John 3:16 is the idea that God loves us. I think that's the big idea of Scripture, the big promise, the big discovery, the big aha, and also the big stumbling block for many people. You know, it's one thing to say, God made the world. It's something else to say, God loves the world, but that's the promise of John 3:16.

Q: In the opening of John 3:16, it says "God so loved the world," but how can God love a world that has so much conflict and seems so anti-God?

A: Indeed, the question surfaces how could God love a world, when the world is such a mess? Or so antagonistic toward him? As parents though, we catch a flavor of that. We love our children when our children are rebellious. When they're stubborn. When they're hardhearted. We may not appreciate what they do, and we certainly want to help them grow out of it, but we still love them. Now, the love that God is not to be equated with the ooey-goey affection feeling that we often think about. God's love is simply a decision, a commitment, to stick with his children and to do what is always in our best interest.

Q: God promises us, in this passage, eternal life. What are your thoughts about the afterlife? And how does that offer you hope?

A: John 3:16 promises eternal life to all who believe in this offer that God gives us. As I get older, I think about that more and more. I realize that my days are passing quickly. There's truly more sand in the bottom half of the hourglass than the top. And so I am genuinely excited about what will happen after I die. I can't say I'm excited about dying. Maybe I should have more faith. That process, that transition, that's kind of unnerving. But once that passage through the valley of the shadow of death happens, it'll take all of eternity to satisfy my curiosity.

Q: What does Heaven's "whoever" policy really mean?

A: Heaven's "whoever" policy is really special to me because I have gone through phases in my life in which my faith was very small, and my disobedience was very large. And the "whoever" policy tells me that even during those seasons, or maybe *especially* during those seasons, God still had His hand on me. The decision I made as a 10-year-old, I did not always honor, especially in my teen years and my young adult years. But during those years as I look back, even though I wasn't following close after God, according to this promise, God was following close after me.

Q&A About Max's Life and Ministry

Q: What was it like growing up in Andrews, the West Texas oil field. It seems like a really different lifestyle than many of us would know.

A: Most people who have spent time living in West Texas make the same comment. The people are great. And those of us who have lived in West Texas know the people are great because the countryside is desolate. If there's any beauty to be found, it's certainly not in looking outside at the prairie. But the real beauty is found because the people are so kind, loyal, friendly. Have a flat tire out in West Texas and you won't be on the side of the road very long before somebody will pull over and help you. So, the countryside is not the greatest, but the people are.

Q: So, Max, why did you pick Brazil as your mission field, and just give us a few things that really stood out that were life changing or very interesting to you while you were there.

A: There was a group of us in college who decided to become missionaries, and we decided to go as a team. The decision to go to Brazil was a group decision. And actually, we knew some missionaries in Brazil who paved the way for us to go. And so, the decision was somewhat easy.

When I think about Brazil, I think about living on Avenida Maracana. Maracana is a famous word in Brazil, in the Portuguese language, because of the large Maracana Stadium. I lived within a short jog of that huge stadium. It was, at the time, the largest stadium in the world. And whenever there was soccer, which seemed to be every night, the sound of the soccer games came all the way to our apartment. And so, we got introduced to the great passion of Brazil, and that is soccer.

And we also got introduced to the great food of Brazil. And boy, I still get hungry just thinking about it. But most of all, the people. The Brazilian people are just the kindest, most hospitable, warmest people you'd ever want to meet. They made us feel like our citizenship was Brazilian. They welcomed us with open arms. And we will always be grateful for those years that we lived in Rio de Janeiro.

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