

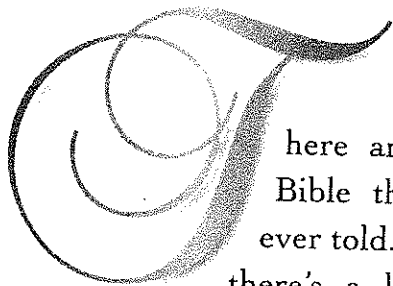
CHAPTER 2



GOD SO LOVED

“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE
GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOEVER
BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH
BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.”

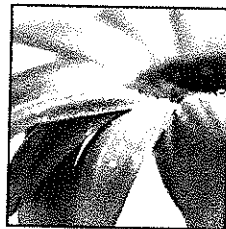
John 3:16 NKJV



here are those who call the Bible the greatest love story ever told. Whenever I hear that, there's a little part of me that always responds by saying, "Huh?" I mean, come on. Genesis through Revelation hardly qualifies as a chick flick. We know what a love story is *supposed* to look like. There should be a beautiful woman, a handsome man, and some obstacle to their love. These are the inhabitants of cheap novels—elegantly coiffed ladies who swoon in the arms of muscle-bound men. These are the Prince Charmings and the damsels in distress. These are the makings of fairy tales, in which true love always triumphs. Love stories should feature romance, passion, fluttering hearts

CLEARING + THE + COBWEBS

What's your favorite
genre of literature—



biography,
historical
romance,
fantasy,
mystery,
cookbook, or what?

*It is right that we should
desire to live in a world
full of love. Our longings
for happy endings are
good. All of these hungers
remind us that our hearts
are homesick for a better
world—a world that runs
the way it's supposed to, a
world not ruined by sin.*

Nicole Johnson

and flowery speeches. How can we possibly describe the Scriptures as such a tale?

But let's take another look at that Bible, gals. There may not be flowery speeches and fluttering hearts, but there is undying devotion, faithfulness, and sacrifice. You don't have to look very far to find the damsel in distress. The heroine of the story has been deceived, carried away and made a slave. She's sometimes called the Beloved or the Bride. What's more, she's cherished by the Hero, who's determined to free her from her captivity. His quest leads Him down a difficult path, but He's willing to go to any length, even to die for the one He loves. She

must wait for Him, and He's promised to return for her. Someday soon He will come, riding on a white stallion, to carry her away to the home He has prepared for her. Then, they'll live happily ever after.

1. Awwww! Don't you love happy endings! But we'd better start back at the beginning. The Bible says God loved us before we even knew about Him, kind of like a secret admirer. Fill in the blanks of this familiar passage.

"But God _____ His own _____ toward _____, in that while we were still _____, Christ _____ for us." —Romans 5:8 NKJV

2. Why would God do something like that? Why does Paul say He was willing to save us, according to Ephesians 2:4-7?

3. Let's take a look at two verses that will take your breath away. In 1 John 4:9, 10, what are the two things God did in order to show us His love?

*God is interested in the
tiniest things in the world.
He cares about us and
what we consider
important. He gives us the
desires of our hearts. He
completes what He begins.
He knows us by name.*

Luci Swindoll



*God speaks to us clearly.
He means what He says.
What He says He'll
provide, we can
count on that.*

Luci Swindoll

4. How do we know that this sacrifice was a show of love? Scripture tells us so! What does Jesus tell us in John 15:13?

5. We know what real love is because Jesus modeled it for us. What does the beloved disciple tell us in 1 John 3:16?



It's a game we played when we were too small to talk. Sitting on a parent's knee, with our hands wrapped around their fingers, we were asked, "Guess how much I love you?" Then they'd lift up our hands and stretch out our arms as far as they could reach and say, "This much!" It was the kind of play intended to get giggles out of us, but it also reinforced for us the fact that we were loved with a love that was "so big."


6. Probably the most famous passage of Scripture is John 3:16. Let's freshen it up a bit by comparing some of the various translations of it.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (NKJV).



Being touched by God's extravagant grace ignites something within us that causes others to notice.


Patsy Clairmont



Receiving God's Love

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life (NLT).

God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die (CEV).



*Isn't it a comfort to know
that God's love is never
miserly, never punishing of
our secret, doubt-plagued
thoughts?*

Marilyn Meberg

*For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the
world that He [even] gave up His only begotten
(unique) Son, so that whoever believes in
(trusts in, clings to, relies on) Him shall not
perish (come to destruction, be lost) but have
eternal (everlasting) life (AMP).*

God So Loved



This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life (MSG).

*How does one find God?
He is in our prayers
guiding our words, He is
in our songs as we
worship Him, and He is
filling our mouths when we
comfort a friend or speak
wisdom to someone who
needs hope. Count your
blessings. He is in
them, too.*

Patsy Clairmont

Have any of these versions helped you to see something new in this old favorite?

7. Jesus loved us enough to die for us. What did that love accomplish on our behalf, according to Revelation 1:5?

*He has delivered us from
the power of darkness and
conveyed us into the
kingdom of the Son of
His Love.*

Colossians 1:13 NKJV

8. What else does God's love do for us, according to Colossians 1:13?

9. Love is wonderful in its own right. But God's love for us comes with so many ramifications—and good ones at that. What's just one more benefit of God's great love for us according to 2 Thessalonians 2:16?

DIGGING DEEPER

Many prophecies describe Jesus as the coming Bridegroom and the church as the waiting bride. Bridal imagery is really quite popular! Take a look at these various Scriptures, each touching on a different facet of the bride's anticipation.

- Isaiah 61:10
- Isaiah 62:5
- Jeremiah 2:32
- Revelation 21:9



PONDER & PRAY

You're a bride, awaiting her Prince, her Bridegroom's coming. Are you ready for His return? No bride wants to head down the aisle without every hair in place, every fold of satin smoothed, every detail attended to. She primps and preens and plucks. There are facials, manicures, pedicures. But what do we do to prepare for Jesus' return for us? Are we ready—relaxed and radiant—or are we up to our elbows in other matters—distracted, disheveled and disobedient? This week, consider the lengths Jesus was willing to go to secure your love. Consider the state you were in when He found you. And consider ways in which you can prepare your heart for Christ's coming.



TRINKET TO TREASURE

This week, we have celebrated the "so great" love of God for us. It wasn't hindered by our ignorance of it, our ungratefulness for it, or our inability to return it. God's love found us when we didn't deserve it, but it came when we needed it most. This week's trinket is a small key. It can serve to remind you that Jesus came to earth in order to set you free—to rescue you from the slavery of sin. His love unlocked the bars, unlocked our heart, and opened up a whole new world for each of us.

† NOTES & PRAYER REQUESTS †

Lined writing area for notes and prayer requests.