

Jesus Met Nicodemus

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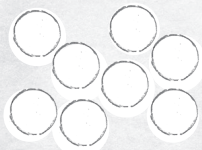
BIBLE PASSAGE: John 3:1-21

MAIN POINT: Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again.

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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Who did Jesus say He is? Jesus said He is the Messiah.

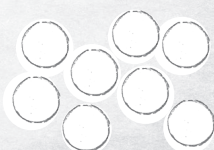
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Leader BIBLE STUDY

Jesus' ministry had begun. His first miracle was at a wedding, turning water into wine. He cleansed the temple in Jerusalem and performed signs, and "many trusted in His name" (John 2:23). Jesus likely spent a large part of His day teaching. When the day was done, He spent time alone or with His disciples. One night, however, a man named Nicodemus approached Jesus.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews; that is, he was a religious leader who taught God's law, and he was a member of the Sanhedrin—a Jewish governing body. Nicodemus was part of an exclusive group of apparently moral men. He held to the belief that if a person was a

law-abiding Jew, he would be accepted by God. Jesus gave Nicodemus a lesson that would turn his belief system on its head.

Jesus was a carpenter (Mark 6:3), so the religious teachers likely assumed He didn't know theology. But they had seen Jesus' miraculous signs in Jerusalem. Nicodemus had to conclude, "You are a teacher come from God" (John 3:2).

Nicodemus initiated the conversation, but Jesus chose the subject. His words perplexed Nicodemus: "Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Jesus explained that spiritual birth is not unlike physical birth in that a person cannot do it himself. It is something that happens to him.

Jesus reminded Nicodemus of an Old Testament account, the disobedient Israelites and the bronze snake. The Israelites could not help themselves, but when they trusted in God and looked to the bronze snake lifted up on the pole, they were healed. (Num. 21:4-9)

Emphasize with kids that every person is born a sinner—spiritually dead and alienated from God. It is by God's Spirit—not our own effort—that we are born again. We look to Christ and His finished work on the cross for our salvation.



MINISTRY GRID
training made simple

Additional resources for each session are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

Jesus Met Nicodemus

John 3:1-21

- **Set the scene:** Dim the lights and use LED tea lights to create a nighttime, candlelit scene as you tell the story.
- **Act it out:** Write the names Nicodemus and Jesus on sticky notes. Invite two kids to wear the sticky notes and pantomime the story as you tell it.

Jesus had traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. One night, a religious man came to see Jesus. The man's name was Nicodemus (NIK uh DEE muhs). Nicodemus was a Pharisee. He studied and taught God's law, and he tried very hard to obey the law. Nicodemus wanted to know more about Jesus.

“Rabbi (RAB igh),” he said, “we know that You have come from God. You are a teacher, and no one could do the miracles You do unless God is with him.”

Nicodemus had that right. Jesus said, **“I tell you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**

Now Nicodemus was confused. He thought that keeping all God's laws was how a person got into heaven. Besides, what Jesus said didn't make any sense! **“How can anyone be born when he is old?”** Nicodemus asked.

Jesus said, **“A man cannot enter God's kingdom unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.”** When a baby is born, he gets physical life from his parents. Physical life doesn't last forever. But the Spirit gives people spiritual life so they can live with God forever.

Jesus said, **“Don't be surprised I told you that you must be born again.”**

Nicodemus still didn't understand. **“How is this possible?”** he asked.

Jesus replied, “We talk about what we know, and we tell others about what we have seen. But you don't believe what I'm telling you! When you don't believe what I say about

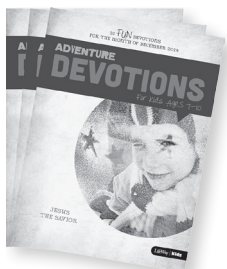
things I've seen on earth, how will you believe what I say about the things I've seen in heaven?

“No one has ever gone up into heaven, except the Son of Man. He came down from heaven. Do you remember how Moses raised up the bronze snake in the wilderness? Everyone who looked at it was healed. Like that, the Son of Man will be raised up, so that everyone who believes in Him will have eternal life.”

Then Jesus told Nicodemus about God's great plan. Jesus said, **“God showed His love in this way: He sent His One and Only Son to save the world. Everyone who believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life.**

“God didn't send His Son to declare the world guilty, but to save the world. Anyone who believes in Him is found not guilty, but anyone who does not believe in Him is guilty already.”

Christ Connection: Nicodemus needed new life—eternal life—but he could not do anything to earn it. Eternal life is a gift that comes only from God. God showed His love in this way: He sent His One and Only Son to save the world. Everyone who believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD'S WORD?
GET
ADVENTURE!**

Invite kids to check out this week's devotionals to discover that Jesus told Nicodemus about God's plan. Later, Jesus promised to give believers—those who have been born again—the Holy Spirit. (John 14:26) Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Small Group OPENING

SESSION TITLE: Jesus Met Nicodemus

BIBLE PASSAGE: John 3:1-21

MAIN POINT: Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again.

KEY PASSAGE: John 14:6

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Who did Jesus say He is? Jesus said He is the Messiah.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive, ask them if they have ever attended a “Meet the Teacher” event, perhaps with their parents.

SAY • Many schools provide an opportunity for parents to meet teachers and talk about what to expect in a certain class. In our story, we will learn that a man named Nicodemus met a very important teacher. Whom do you think he met?

Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “Infant Insights” activity page. Ask kids to circle the babies and mark an *X* over the adults.

SAY • Obviously, people who are not babies cannot be newborns. However, we will hear today about a special circumstance that does allow people to be born again, even if they are already grown up! Do you have any guesses about how that could be?

- “Infant Insights” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Riddled with questions



Challenge the kids to answer the following riddles:

1. When I see you, you see you too. What am I? (*A mirror; when you face it, it shows your reflection.*)
2. I must get wet in order to dry, if you use me too often, I may start to cry. What am I? (*A towel; if you use the same towel too much, it will drip.*)
3. The stronger I get, the less you can see, but turn on a light and I will flee. What am I? (*darkness*)
4. The letter I start with and end with is *E*. Open me up; there's a letter in me. What am I? (*An envelope; the letter inside is a written letter.*)
5. I cling to your heels when you walk or you run, but some kick me aside when their day is done. What am I? (*shoes*)

SAY • Riddles can be confusing but are often fun. In our Bible story today, we will learn about some things Jesus said that were confusing at first too.

OPTION 2: Saving jacks

Form groups of three or four kids. Scatter all 10 jacks on the floor. The first kid will toss up the ball, grab one jack, and catch the ball before it bounces twice. Then the next player will attempt the same feat. When all the kids have collected one jack, start over trying for two jacks per toss.

- jacks, 10 per group
- rubber balls, 1 per group

SAY • In our game, the jacks could not do anything to make you grab them. In our story today, we will hear about the one way we can be saved by Jesus, and how we can do nothing to earn salvation.

Transition to large group

Large Group LEADER

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- room decorations
- Allergy Alert download
- Theme Background Slide (optional)

Suggested Theme Decorating Ideas: Decorate your space to resemble a street festival. Set up a tent or booth and hang streamers or flag banners across the ceiling. Position helium balloons around the teaching area. Consider setting up carnival games or other attractions. You may project the theme background slide.

Countdown

- countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

- leader attire
- traffic vest

[Large Group Leader enters wearing festive clothing and a brightly colored traffic vest.]

LEADER • Hello, everyone! I'm guessing you are here for the street festival? Unfortunately, it doesn't start until tomorrow. There won't be any art to buy or food trucks to visit until then.

I am one of the event coordinators. I help get the booths set up before the festival officially starts. If you'd like, you can stick around while I get this booth set up. I'd love to have your company.

My church is sponsoring this booth to help people learn more about Jesus. We are going to set up some games that people can play while they ask questions about God. We are hoping this will bring many people closer to Him. Do any of you have questions about Jesus?

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • Often people ask questions to try and learn what Jesus said about Himself. Some people will tell you that Jesus was just a man or that He was just a teacher. We know that's not true because of what Jesus said about Himself. So here's the big picture question: *who did Jesus say He is?* You'll have to listen to today's story to find out!

• Big Picture Question
Poster

Giant timeline (1 minute)

LEADER • We had been learning about Jesus' life and ministry. We learned about Jesus' ancestors; His birth; Jesus growing up, being baptized, and going into the wilderness to be tempted. After Jesus returned from the wilderness, He began His public ministry. That means He began to teach people and perform miracles. Many people wanted to know about Jesus and see Him in action.

• Giant Timeline

Today we will learn about one of the religious leaders who visited Jesus at night to see what Jesus would say about Himself. Nicodemus talked to Jesus to learn about Him. Our story is called, "Jesus Met Nicodemus."

- Bibles
- “Jesus Met Nicodemus” video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to John 3:1-21. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “Jesus Met Nicodemus.”

LEADER • Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a religious leader for the Jewish people. Nicodemus visited Jesus at night so that no one would see. For the most part, the Pharisees did not like Jesus. They did not want to give up their control over people or admit that they were sinners too. Nicodemus was interested in what Jesus had to say about the kingdom of God, so he visited Jesus anyway.

While speaking with Jesus, Nicodemus learned something that confused Him. **Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again.** Nicodemus was an old man. He could not be born if he was already grown, could he?

Well, Jesus wasn’t talking about physical birth. Jesus was talking about being born spiritually into God’s family. Jesus explained that anyone who was not born spiritually would not spend eternity with God. Then Jesus explained that God loves the world to the point that God sent Jesus, His One and Only Son, to save the world. Jesus explained that only people who believe in Him will be saved. Jesus knew that He had come into the world to save sinners by dying on the cross.

Pharisees like Nicodemus believed that obeying all of God’s laws was the way to enter God’s kingdom. This was different from what Jesus taught. Jesus said that if Nicodemus trusted in Him, his sins would be forgiven. Even though Nicodemus and the other

Pharisees spent lots of time studying and trying to obey God’s laws, they still needed someone to save them from their sin. Only Jesus can save people when they trust in Him. *Who did Jesus say He is? Jesus said He is the Messiah.* Jesus explained that He is God’s Son, sent to save everyone who believes in Him.

Christ connection

LEADER • We are all like Nicodemus. We are sinners and cannot save ourselves. No amount of obedience can make up for the sin and disobedience in our hearts. We are born that way—broken and helpless. That’s why God sent Jesus. Jesus lived the perfect life we could not and died on the cross for our sins. On the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead to show that His death was the perfect sacrifice to defeat sin. When we trust in Jesus for our salvation, God forgives us and gives us new life. We are “born again” into God’s family as new people free from sin.

Note: You may use this opportunity to use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together John 14:6. Then sing “I Am the Way.”

LEADER • Jesus said these words to His disciples just hours before the religious leaders sent Him to the cross to die. Jesus wanted to make sure that His followers knew the truth that He is the only way to be saved from sin. Nicodemus learned the same thing. Only Jesus can save us. When we trust in Him, we are born in the Spirit into God’s family.

• Key Passage Poster
• “I Am the Way” song

• “Unit 21, Session 1”
discussion starter
video

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Have you ever seen something dead be brought back to life? Is that even possible? Watch this video as you think about those questions.

Show the “Unit 21, Session 1” discussion starter video. Discuss with your group why the plant would not come back to life. Talk about the ways we are dead in sin, and explain that only Jesus can bring us back to life.

LEADER • Nicodemus was a sinner, just like all of us. He thought he could obey the law enough to earn God’s favor. We know that our sin makes us dead spiritually. When we trust in Jesus, we are born again spiritually into God’s family.

• “God Is Here” song

Sing (4 minutes)

LEADER • God is so good to give us Jesus so we can be born into His family. Let’s sing praises to Him for what He has done.

Sing together “God Is Here.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

LEADER • Father, we are dead in sin until we believe in Your Son. Help us to see how much we need You. Teach us to rely on You each day. Help us to tell the world about You and the gospel of Jesus. Amen.

Dismiss to small groups

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. You may provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Small Group LEADER

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Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- pillow
- stopwatch (optional)
- “I Am the Way” song

Display the key passage poster where kids can see it. While holding a pillow, say the first word and toss the pillow to another kid. She must say the second word as quickly as she can before tossing the pillow to a third kid. Continue until kids have said the key passage. Play again as time allows. Consider using a stopwatch to time the kids. Play again to see if kids can improve their time.

SAY • We will be memorizing this key passage over the next few weeks. It helps us remember that Jesus is more than just a good man or a wise teacher. ***Who did Jesus say He is? Jesus said He is the Messiah.*** Jesus made it clear that no one could be born again without Him.

Sing “I Am the Way.”

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- flashlights

Tip: Set clear expectations that kids may not point lights at their eyes.

Form two teams of kids. Instruct kids to line up at the front of the room. Give the first player in each line a flashlight. Ask the following questions one at a time, allowing the kids to use their flashlights to signal they know the answer. The kid who “flashes” first gets to answer the question for a

point. If he is incorrect, the opposing team may steal. After each question, kids will pass their flashlights to the players behind them and move to the end of the line. The team with the most points wins.

Questions:

1. Who visited Jesus at night? (*Nicodemus, John 3:1-2*)
2. Who was Nicodemus? (*He was a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews; John 3:1*)
3. What did Jesus say must happen for a person to see the kingdom of God? (*A person must be born again, John 3:3*)
4. What Old Testament story did Jesus talk about? (*Moses and the bronze snake, John 3:14*)
5. How did God show His love to the world? (*He gave His One and Only Son, John 3:16*)
6. Everyone who believes in Jesus will have what? (*eternal life, John 3:16*)
7. ***Who did Jesus say He is? Jesus said He is the Messiah.***

SAY • Nicodemus wanted to know about Jesus. As a Pharisee, he probably worked very hard to obey God as best he could. Jesus explained to Nicodemus that he could not earn his way into heaven. **Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again.** As strange as that might sound, it is true. We are sinners who must be born again also.

When we are born physically, we are spiritually dead. Our sin makes it impossible for us to know and love God. When we trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit makes our hearts come to life, and we are born into God's family! Our sin is forgiven and we will live forever with God.

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

Activity choice (10 minutes)

- paper plates, 1 per kid
- paint
- paintbrushes
- cups
- water
- paper towels for cleanup

OPTION 1: Handprint world


Distribute a paper plate to each child. Invite kids to paint their paper plates to look like the earth. Provide cups with water to rinse brushes between using different colors. They can use green handprints to make the continents around the globe. Help the kids write out John 3:16 on the back of their plates.

SAY • John 3:16 is one of the most well-known verses in the whole Bible. Did you notice it in our story today? Jesus explained to Nicodemus that God loved the world in such a way that He sent His Son to save the world from sin and death. We are all born sinners, spiritually dead. When we trust in Jesus, we are born again into God's family. We are made spiritually alive and changed to live for God. When you take your picture home, remember that the whole world needs Jesus. Jesus died to save the world. Make time to share about Jesus with a friend who might not know about Him.

OPTION 2: Flashlight tag

Dim the lights and give each child a flashlight. Select one child to be *It*. Only his flashlight should be on. As he tags other players, they can turn on their flashlights and begin tagging others as well. The game ends when all players have turned on their lights.

SAY • Nicodemus visited Jesus at night when it was dark. He might have hoped to hide his visit from the other religious leaders. Jesus explained that sinners love darkness because it helps them hide, but He is the Light of the world (John 3:19-20). When we



LOW PREP

- flashlights, 1 per kid

believe in Jesus, we become glimmers of the Light in the world. We can shine the truth into places where people want to hide their sin in darkness. God can use us to tell others about Jesus so His light can spread and fill the whole earth!

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a way they can spend time with Jesus each day.

SAY • Nicodemus was unsure of who Jesus really was. He asked questions to learn from Jesus. Nicodemus made time to talk to Jesus and listened to His answers. We can make time to read our Bibles and pray so that we can know Jesus more too.

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray, asking God to help your group grow to love God more and put their faith in Jesus to be born again.

- pencils and crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible Story Coloring Page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.