

Jesus Teaches Nicodemus (John 3:1-12)

3 Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. **2** He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

3 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.^[a]”

4 “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

5 Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. **6** Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit^[b] gives birth to spirit. **7** You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You^[c] must be born again.’ **8** The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”^[d]

9 “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

10 “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? **11** Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. **12** I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?”

Footnotes:

- a. [John 3:3](#) The Greek for *again* also means *from above*; also in verse 7.
- b. [John 3:6](#) Or *but spirit*
- c. [John 3:7](#) The Greek is plural.
- d. [John 3:8](#) The Greek for *Spirit* is the same as that for *wind*.

3:16

THE NUMBERS OF HOPE

THE MOST FAMOUS CONVERSATION IN THE BIBLE

SCRIPTURE FOCUS:

John 3:1–12

LESSON OBJECTIVE:

To discover that real life can only be found in a faith relationship with Jesus Christ and to commit to living within that relationship.

“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).

REWIND

Nicodemus had to visit Jesus in secret. After all, he was a prominent Jewish leader, a member of the Pharisees. This was the group that had investigated John the Baptist and was now building a case against Jesus. Nicodemus, however, abandoned his role as a prosecutor in order to seek personal answers. Nicodemus knew enough to make him wonder if Jesus really was the fulfillment of the prophecy that was central to the Jewish faith. His colleagues weren't convinced, but Nicodemus was intrigued.

Even though he was curious, Nicodemus reserved judgment. He misunderstood Jesus's words about the new birth. He couldn't seem to grasp the idea that life change is a God-thing; he believed that God could be found in keeping the law and doing the right things. Heaven—for Nicodemus, the Pharisees, and traditionalists—was something to be earned. Jesus offered what Nicodemus was seeking; Nicodemus just wasn't so sure about Jesus's plan.

RETHINK

Your doubts about a faith-based relationship might not be the same as those Nicodemus had. Maybe you wonder if God really cares for you as much as the Bible says he does. Maybe you question God's willingness and desire to intervene in the problems you are facing. For you, salvation might be nothing more than insurance against spending an eternity in hell; it has no present value. Nicodemus tried religion and found it empty. You might be in the same situation.

REACT

Read John 19:38–42. Nicodemus was a changed man. He initially encountered Jesus secretly, but he later took a bold stand for Jesus in a society that was hostile toward Jesus and his followers. The disciples were in hiding when Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus claimed Jesus's body and prepared it for burial.

How has your faith changed you? In what ways are you taking a stand for Jesus?

What are some of the situations in which you, like the disciples, hide your relationship with God?

How do you think God feels when those who claim to love him hide their faith? (Mark all that apply.)

___ *He is thrilled.*

___ *He understands.*

___ *He is heart-broken.*

___ *People of faith never hide their faith.*

Later, Nicodemus would be able to explain what it means to be born again. Not because he studied it, but because he experienced it. When it comes to your faith, are you studying it or are you experiencing it?

Fill in the blanks:

For _____ so loved th ⁻⁶⁻ _____ that he gave his one and only _____, that whoever believes in him shall not _____ but have _____ life.

It is interesting to look at two contrasts in this verse: God— world; eternal—perish. This is the contrast that resonates throughout Scripture. The world’s ways cause us to perish; God’s ways lead us to eternal life. There is no other way to obtain eternal life. This single verse of Scripture offers several unbelievable truths—truths that we often find hard to grasp.

In the space beside each phrase, write what that phrase means to your spiritual life.

1. *God so loved -*

2. *that He gave His one and only Son -*

3. *shall not perish but have eternal life -*

Maybe this is the first time you’ve thought about it in this way. Many of us read through that verse without thinking much about its meaning to our lives. Yet this verse sums up the very core of our faith. Without a thorough understanding of the truths in this verse, our faith will be built on a weak foundation.

What, other than faith, have you tried in order to make sense out of life? (Check all that apply.)

- ___ religion
- ___ relationships
- ___ the pursuit of prosperity
- ___ possessions
- ___ popularity
- ___ philosophy
- ___ power
- ___ other:

Describe how you discovered your solution(s) wasn’t working.

Complete Nicodemus’s statement from your own perspective.

“Jesus, I’ve heard about your works and

_____.”

Nicodemus had religious credentials that he thought were enough. He worked for a religious organization, spoke the religious language, and participated in religious activities. He might not have been the best person in the world, but he certainly wasn’t the worst. He was in good standing with God . . . or was he?

Jesus told Nicodemus that being good wasn’t good enough. Even being religious wouldn’t make it possible for Nicodemus to understand what Jesus was talking about. Even though Nicodemus thought he had the spiritual life under control, he was missing the main ingredient—he had never been born again.

Describe the time when you were “born again.” Where were you? Who was there? What was the experience like?

What does it mean if you don’t remember being born again? It means you might be suffering from Nicodemusitis—the misconception that a person can earn eternal life. You don’t earn it. You can’t purchase it. You don’t get into heaven as part of the family plan. This way of thinking might be new to you; it was new to Nicodemus.

Nicodemus was a professional questioner. He took everything literally. When Jesus said that a person must be born again, Nicodemus was quick to jump on the literal impossibility of such an idea. The Pharisees were good at that.

Some of us would make good Pharisees because we tend to overlook the spiritual significance of biblical instructions, choosing instead to nitpick the minutia. Like defense attorneys, we badger the prosecution’s witness, hoping to poke holes in the testimony. If we can just find one loophole, then that instruction won’t apply to us.

What do you think pops into the minds of non-spiritual people when they hear the words “born again”?

- physical rebirth*
- spiritual rebirth*
- religious nonsense*
- total confusion*

If someone asked you to explain what it means to be “born again” in everyday words, what would you say?

REFLECT

When Jesus suggested that Nicodemus needed to be born again, he was implying something specific--the word he used means Nicodemus needed to be born anew, or born from above. Nicodemus was powerless to bring this about; he needed God to do this in his life through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Why is it so hard for people to get over the idea that they can (and need) to contribute something to be right with God and be in a relationship with him?

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This conversation with Nicodemus leads to what many believe is the most important verse in the entire Bible. People who have hardly read a word of Scripture even know the words in this verse.