Jesus Teaches Nicodemus



Scripture Reference: John 3:1-21

Suggested Theme: God offers us a fresh start. Being “born again” means having a new beginning with the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and God the Father.

Memory Verse: “A person’s body is born from his human parents. But a person’s spiritual life is born from the Spirit.” John 3:6, ICB

Story Overview:

Nicodemus was a Pharisee and an important Jewish leader who visited Jesus at night to ask questions. Among other things, Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be “born again” to enter the Kingdom of God.

Background Study:

In the New Testament, Pharisees are often portrayed as judgemental and hypocritical. They jealously guarded their positions, and some were even a dangerous threat to Jesus throughout his ministry. In contrast to other Pharisees, Nicodemus seems to be genuinely interested in learning more about what Jesus is teaching. He recognises that the miracles Jesus is performing must be from God.

Pharisees were a religious sect of the Jews who were very concerned with purity. They believed in the Old Testament books and the ultimate resurrection of the dead. They were generally respected and had great influence.

It is often assumed that Nicodemus came to Jesus by night in an attempt to keep the meeting secret. Perhaps he knew that the reaction of other Pharisees would be antagonistic. Later on, we learn that Nicodemus was willing to speak up to the other Pharisees in the Sanhedrin (John 7:45-53), but perhaps he was not ready to do so at this point in time.

Pharisees were looking for God’s Kingdom, so Jesus would have caught Nicodemus’ interest when he said that a person must be “born again” to enter the Kingdom. His thoughts naturally went to a physical birth, but Jesus went on to explain that a new birth in the Spirit means a fresh start. A new beginning so that the Spirit of God can control every aspect of one’s life. New actions and thoughts are learned, so the new life is in the image of God.

There is more to life than the physical things we see, hear, and touch. We cannot see the Spirit, but we can see His effects in the world. Jesus is the only One Who has lived in both the heavenly or spiritual world and our physical world. It is only through Him that we can experience the spiritual.

Jesus’ rich teachings included a reference to the Old Testament event when the Israelites gazed up at a bronze serpent on a raised pole to be healed of their illnesses. Nicodemus was a teacher of the Law, so he

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would have known this story well.

Unlike Nicodemus, we have the perspective of history. We can look back and know that Jesus was comparing this to His death when He would also be lifted up, this time on a cross. The people would also be healed by looking at him.

> "I will be lifted up from the earth. And when this happens, I will draw all people toward me." John 12:32, ICB

Verses 16-21 could be a continuation of Jesus' teaching, but there seems to be a natural break as you read through the chapter. This could also be attributed to the writer, John, as a commentary or notes on what Jesus has been saying. In any case, one of the most well-known verses in the bible is found here.

> "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life." John 3:16 ICB

These last verses seem to bring the conversation back to light and dark. Nicodemus came to Jesus when it was night and dark. The new life in the Spirit is life lived in the light.

Way to Introduce the Story:

How many of you have ever seen a newborn baby? If so, tell us what the baby was like. Could it talk? Chew food? Crawl? No, a newborn baby has to learn to do everything.

In today's story, we will learn about a time when Jesus said that following him means starting over and learning to do everything a new way.

The Story:

John the Baptist had been preaching about the coming of the Messiah who would save the people of God. Crowds of people turned their hearts to God. Even Jesus was baptised in water to show He wanted to do everything right.

Not long after his baptism, Jesus chose twelve special followers, called apostles. As Jesus and his followers travelled from place to place, people began to notice that Jesus was special. Jesus performed miracles or signs that would be impossible for people to do without God's help.

One of those people who noticed Jesus was a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Pharisees studied the Scriptures and expected everyone to follow God's laws strictly. Many Pharisees thought they were better than others and tried to tell people what to do.

Other Pharisees did not like Jesus, but Nicodemus was very interested in what Jesus taught. Nicodemus was an important religious leader, so perhaps he did not want the other Pharisees to know he wanted to ask Jesus questions. Maybe that is why he chose to visit Jesus after it was dark outside. At night, not many people would see Nicodemus and Jesus together.

When Nicodemus met with Jesus, he wanted to talk about the miracles Jesus had done. He said, "No one could perform miracles like this on his own. God must be with you."

But Jesus did not talk about the miracles He had done. He knew that Pharisees wanted to be in God's Kingdom, so He said something very surprising to Nicodemus. "Nicodemus," Jesus said, "unless you are born again, you cannot enter God's Kingdom."

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Born again? Nicodemus was a teacher and very intelligent, but he did not understand. Nicodemus was so confused. How can a grown man go back into his mother's womb and then be born again? What did Jesus mean by this?

But Jesus explained that He was not talking about physical birth. He was talking about being born of water and spirit. Many people knew about the water in baptism, but what was meant by being born again by the spirit?

A person's physical body is born from a mother and father. To be born again happens in the heart by the Holy Spirit.

No one can see the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that the Spirit is like the wind. We cannot see the wind or know where it comes from, but we see the kinds of things the wind blows around. We cannot see the Holy Spirit, but when we see the good things people do, we know that the Holy Spirit is living and working in that person.

Being born again is having a new beginning with the Holy Spirit, God and Jesus.
Jesus explained that there are some things we can see and others we cannot. We see things on this earth, but we do not see spiritual things like heaven. God sent Jesus from heaven to save the world.

Jesus taught Nicodemus many important things that night. He even reminded Nicodemus of a time in the Old Testament when bronze statues of snakes were lifted up in the desert. When people looked at the snakes, they were healed of their sicknesses.

But Jesus was talking about something that would happen in the future. Jesus was talking about the end of His life when He would be lifted up on the cross to heal the world of its sickness of sin.

God wants everyone to be born again and live in His Kingdom. He sent His Son to earth to die on the cross and give everyone a chance to live forever with Him.

Jesus is the Son of God. He brings light to our dark world. This is why these important words are written in John 3:16.

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son. God gave his Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life."

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

Review:

- Who visited Jesus during the night? (Nicodemus)
- What was Nicodemus' role or job? (He was a teacher of the Law, called a "Pharisee")
- Why did Nicodemus want to meet with Jesus? (He wanted to ask Him questions about His miracles and teachings)
- What did Jesus tell Nicodemus he must do to enter the Kingdom of God? (Be born again)
- What does it mean to be born again? (Having a new beginning with the Holy Spirit, God and Jesus)
- What does Jesus say is like the Holy Spirit, and why? (the wind, because you can't see where it comes from or where it goes, but you can hear it)
- What do you think Nicodemus learned from his conversation with Jesus?
- What did you learn from Nicodemus and Jesus' conversation?
- What did you learn about God or Jesus from this story?

Reflection:

- What do you think the place Jesus and Nicodemus met at looked like?
- How do you think Nicodemus felt about meeting Jesus and talking with Him?
- Why do you think Nicodemus wanted to meet Jesus at night?
- Nicodemus was a teacher of God's law and knew many things. How do you think he felt when Jesus told him he didn't understand about being born again?
- Nicodemus asked Jesus questions. What questions would you have asked Jesus?
- If you were Nicodemus, would you have believed in Jesus after having this conversation, or not?
- Why is it important to be born again?
- Part of being born again is asking God to forgive you. God forgives us when we truly repent and we have a new beginning with God. Do you go to Jesus and ask for forgiveness? If not, what stops you from going to Jesus?
- Jesus wants us to live with him in God's Kingdom. What do you think living with God in His perfect Kingdom will be like?
- What part of the story did you find most interesting?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- Read Your Bible, Pray Every Day
- He's Still Working on Me Song

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- Goodbye World Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Jesus Hokey Pokey
- This Little Light of Mine
- Fruit of the Spirit
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Tell the story by candle or torch/flashlight to set the mood for Nicodemus visiting Jesus by night.
- Use the activity Drawing Contrasts and allow the children to talk about what it means to be born again (in the Spirit) to be born to parents as a baby. You and your children will come up with more ideas, but a few are listed below to get you started.
  - One column will contain words and thoughts related to the physical. This might include looking and acting like your parents, learning to talk, crawling, eating baby food first, seeing and smelling things, this body will get old and die someday, etc.
  - The other column will contain words and thoughts about being born again. Be sure to refer back to what Jesus said, but this may include Trying to be like the Spirit (and God and Jesus), believing in God even though we do not see Him, learning to talk in a new way (kind words, no swearing), using our bodies in good ways (helping others, etc), when we are reborn our spirits live forever.
- Memorise John 3:16. Click here for ideas.
- Play a simple word game. Bible Wordz Game is an adaptable game where children form words from letter tiles. The words relate to words found in the Bible lesson.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Make a wind chime. Jesus used the wind to explain the Spirit.
- Design and cut simple Jesus and Nicodemus figures from coloured paper. Glue these onto black paper. Use star and moon stickers or glue and glitter to decorate the night sky.
- Print or write the words from John 3:21 on white or light-coloured paper. Glue this onto black paper to show the contrast between dark and light.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page (Crafting the word of God)
- Colouring Page (My Wonder Studio)
- Colouring by number picture (Sunday school zone)
- Game: Printable matching game (Sunday school zone)
- Craft: Video explaining how to make an easy windchime (Full-Time Kid)
- Craft: John 3:16 craft pattern (Park Baptist Church)

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