

Use Week of:

Unit 21 • Session 3

Jesus and Nicodemus

BIBLE PASSAGE:

John 3

STORY POINT:

Jesus taught that we must be born again.

KEY PASSAGE:

John 3:16

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:

What makes people special?
People are special because we are made in God's image, as male and female, to know Him.

INTRODUCE THE STORY
(10–15 MINUTES)
PAGE 198



TEACH THE STORY
(25–30 MINUTES)
PAGE 200



APPLY THE STORY
(25–30 MINUTES)
PAGE 206



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

LEADER Bible Study

Jesus' ministry had begun. His early miracles included turning water into wine, casting out demons, and healing people. John 2:23 says that "many believed in his name when they saw the signs he was doing." 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, 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 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 who has 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 to 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 Jesus and His finished work on the cross for our salvation.

The BIBLE Story

Jesus and Nicodemus

John 3

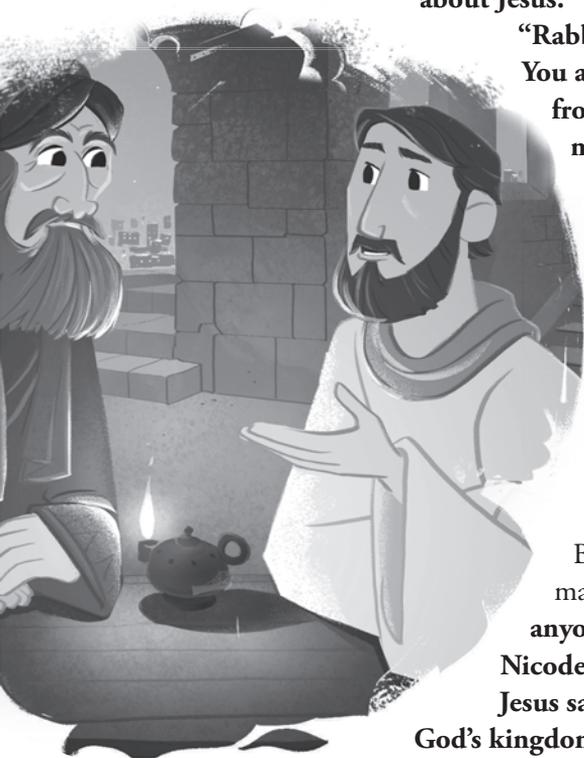
Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. **One night, a religious man came to see Jesus. The man's name was Nicodemus.** Nicodemus was a Pharisee. He studied and taught God's law, and he tried very hard to obey the law. **Nicodemus wanted to know more about Jesus.**

"Rabbi," he said, "we know that You are a teacher who has come from God. No one could do the miracles You do unless God were 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 person 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 a better kind of life—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 said, “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? **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 loved the world in this way: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. God did not 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.

Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Call for active listening:** Challenge kids to count how many times they hear the word *born* in the story.
- **Vary your voice:** Vary your voice for the dialogue of different people. For example, use one voice for Jesus and another voice for Nicodemus.

INTRODUCE the Story



SESSION TITLE: Jesus and Nicodemus

BIBLE PASSAGE: John 3

STORY POINT: Jesus taught that we must be born again.

KEY PASSAGE: John 3:16

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What makes people special? People are special because we are made in God's image, as male and female, to know Him.

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. Prompt kids to share who they go to when they have a question. Does that person always have the answers? Why?

Activity page (5 minutes)

- "Once or Twice" activity page,
- 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete "Once or Twice" on the activity page. Guide kids to use the key to decode the phrase that describes becoming God's child and receiving eternal life. (*born again*)

SAY • Your birthday is a celebration of the day you were born. Did you know if you trust in Jesus, you actually have *two* birthdays?! Today we are going to hear about Jesus' meeting with Nicodemus, and we will also learn what it means to be born again.

**LOW
PREP**

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Look-and-live tag

Play a game of freeze tag. Choose one player to be *It*. *It* will try to tag other players. If a player is tagged, she must freeze

in place. She can only be unfrozen if another player stands in front of her and holds out his arms out to “heal” her and bring her back into the game. Play for a few minutes and then choose new players to be *It*.

SAY • Do you remember an Old Testament story about the Israelites’ being bitten by snakes? God told them to look at a snake on a pole. When they did, they were healed. Jesus told a man about that story. We’ll find out why.

OPTION 2: How in the world?

Write four questions on separate index cards regarding how things work. Examples of questions:

1. How can flies land on the ceiling?
2. How do glasses help people see?
3. Why is the ocean salty?
4. Why does ice cream cause a “brain freeze”?

Provide a pencil and two index cards to each kid. Read one question and invite kids to write a brief answer. Kids can write on the back and front of each index card.

If kids do not know the correct answer, encourage them to write their best guess. Then call for kids to read their answers. Let kids vote which answer they think is correct. Then give the correct explanation. Play again for each question.

SAY • Those were some hard questions to answer!

Sometimes answers are difficult to understand! In the Bible story we will hear today, a man asked Jesus, “How can anyone be born when he is old?” We’ll find out what Jesus said.

- index cards, 2 per kid
- pencils

Answer Key:

1. Hairs on a fly’s footpads produce sticky “glue” made of sugar and oil.
2. Eyeglasses bend light coming toward the eye to correct vision.
3. Rain breaks down rocks on land and washes salty elements (sodium and chloride) into the ocean.
4. The cold quickly constricts the blood vessels in the roof of your mouth.

Transition to teach the story

TEACH the Story



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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What makes people special? People are special because we are made in God's image, as male and female, to know Him.

Countdown

· countdown video

Show the countdown video as you transition to teach the story. Set it to end as the session begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

· leader attire
· disposable gloves
· stethoscope
· travel mug

[Leader enters wearing dark pants, a solid-color shirt, and disposable gloves. Leader wears a stethoscope around his or her neck and carries a travel mug.]

LEADER • Hi there! It's me, [*your name*]. [*Sip from the travel mug.*] Whew, I am tired today. People need paramedics at all hours of the day, you know. I don't work a late shift very often, but I haven't quite caught up on sleep from working a couple nights ago. Minor injuries, chest pain, and breathing problems are some of the common calls we receive. You never know what surprising call you're going to receive from dispatch. I want to share a Bible story with you today about a time Jesus encountered a man at night. Let's find out what happened.

Tip: If you prefer not to use themed content or characters, adapt or omit this introduction.

· Big Picture Question
Poster

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • Jesus met all kinds of people while He was on

earth, and He loved them. As you hear today's Bible story, think about our big picture question: *What makes people special? People are special because we are made in God's image, as male and female, to know Him.*

Say that with me: *What makes people special? People are special because we are made in God's image, as male and female, to know Him.*

God is not distant; He is personal and wants us to know Him. One way we can know better God is by reading His Word—the Bible.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

· Giant Timeline

LEADER • When Jesus traveled throughout the land of Judea, He changed the lives of many people He met. **People came to Jesus, and He healed them.** Jesus' miracles proved that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. At the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus read Isaiah's words and announced that He is the promised Messiah.

The people rejected Jesus, and He traveled to Jerusalem. That's where Jesus was when a man named Nicodemus came to talk to Him at night. Listen to this Bible story to find out what Jesus and Nicodemus talked to about.

· Bibles
· "Jesus and Nicodemus" video
· Big Picture Question Poster
· Bible Story Picture Poster
· Story Point Poster

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to John 3. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video "Jesus and Nicodemus."

LEADER • After a long day of teaching, Jesus would spend His time alone or with His disciples. One night, when He was alone, a man came to visit Him. What was the man's name? (*Nicodemus*) Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. That means he was a religious leader who taught God's law, and he was a leader in the Jewish government. Like other Jews, Nicodemus thought he knew how to be accepted by God—by obeying the laws. His encounter with Jesus changed him forever.

What did Jesus say must happen for a person to enter the kingdom of God? Look at John 3:5,7. [*Allow kids to read the verse and respond.*]

Jesus said, "Unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." 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.

Why did God send Jesus to earth? Look at John 3:16-17. [*Allow kids to read the verse and respond.*]

Christ connection

LEADER • Nicodemus needed new life—eternal life—but he could not do anything to earn it. Every person is born a sinner—spiritually dead and separated from God. Eternal life is a gift that comes only from God. It is by God's Spirit—not our own effort—that we are born again. We look to Jesus and His finished work on the cross for our salvation.

God showed His love in this way: He sent His

Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided on page 205 to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

one and only Son to save the world. Everyone who believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life.

Questions from kids video (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 21, Session 3” questions from kids video. Prompt kids to think about what happens when a person trusts in Jesus. Guide them to discuss how they think a person might feel after trusting in Jesus. Would a person feel different? Why or why not?

• “Unit 21, Session 3” questions from kids video



Missions moment (3 minutes)

LEADER • **Jesus taught that we must be born again.** As Christians, we want other people to know this, too. We can all have eternal life through Jesus. In Nevada, a young woman named Anna asked, “What can I do to have a relationship with Christ?” Missionaries Heiden and Neena Ratner and Christian athletes of Walk Church introduced Anna to Jesus and taught her how to be born again. Let’s watch a video about her story.

• “Anna’s Story” missions video

Play the “Anna’s Story” missions video. Then pray that more people in Nevada will know Jesus and follow Him.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together John 3:16.

• Key Passage Poster
• “In This Way (John 3:16)” song

LEADER • There are lots of different people in the world, so who can get in on this good news? Anyone willing to come to God, to return to Him, to see Him for all that He is, and to receive His promise to save and rescue us from the wrath to come. This is happening

all over the world. God is saving people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. Let's sing.
Lead boys and girls in singing "In This Way (John 3:16)."

Sing (4 minutes)

• "Jesus Messiah" song
• Bible

Open your Bible and read aloud Psalm 96:10-11.

LEADER • Salvation is found in no other name than the name of Jesus. We are not saved by doing good works because our works would never be good enough. We are saved by putting our faith in Jesus, who lived the perfect life we failed to live and died the death we deserve for our sin. We rejoice in this good news.
Let's sing.

Sing together "Jesus Messiah."

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • Lord God, we praise You because You are good. You saw us in our helplessness and loved us. You sent Your Son to bring light to the darkness and give life to the dead. Thank You for the gift of salvation through Jesus. You are all we need. Amen.

Dismiss to apply the story

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. Provide *I'm a Christian Now!* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

APPLY the Story



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KEY PASSAGE: John 3:16

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: What makes people special? People are special because we are made in God's image, as male and female, to know Him.

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- paper
- pencils
- scissors (optional)

Display the key passage poster. Instruct kids to sit around a table and read John 3:16 aloud together. Give every kid a pencil and position a piece of paper in front of one kid.

Explain that when you say go, the first kid will write the first word of the key passage at the top of the paper and pass the paper to his left. The next kid will write the second word, pass the paper, and so on around the table until kids complete the verse.

Ask a kid to read the verse aloud to check their work. Then cut off or fold over the written verse and play again.

SAY • Our key passage comes from today's Bible story! To whom did Jesus say these words? (*Nicodemus*)

Invite volunteers to recite the key passage from memory.

Discussion & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Story Point Poster
- Small Group Timeline and Map Set (005802970)

Distribute Bibles. Guide boys and girls to open their Bibles to John 3. Explain that Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus at night in Jerusalem. [*Point out Jerusalem (H4) on the New Testament Israel Map.*]

SAY • **Jesus taught that we must be born again.** Without Jesus, we are spiritually dead. Our hearts are hard,

and we love sin more than we love God. But God can soften people's hearts. Jesus offers new life to those who trust in Him for salvation. Let's answer our big picture question: ***What makes people special? People are special because we are made in God's image, as male and female, to know Him.***

Choose a volunteer to read aloud John 3:14-16. Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss:

1. How was the bronze serpent being lifted up like Jesus being lift up? *Lead kids to connect that like the serpent, Jesus was lifted up on the cross. He died for our sins and was raised from the dead. Like the Israelites with snakebites, we can't do anything to save ourselves. But we can look to Jesus for salvation.*

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Num. 21:8-9.)

2. Can a person get into heaven by doing enough good things? Why or why not? *Emphasize that God wants us to obey Him, but the Bible says everyone sins. (Rom. 3:23) If we had to obey God perfectly to go to heaven, no one would ever get to heaven! We are accepted by God when we trust in Jesus, who lived a perfect life and died the death we deserve for our sins.*

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Eph. 2:8-9.)

3. How is being apart from God like being in the dark? How can we bring friends and family members into the light of the gospel? *Explain to kids that the Bible says that Jesus is the light of the world. Before we trust in Jesus, we live in darkness. Discuss the difficulty of seeing in the dark. God lights up the path of our lives and shows us what is true. We can tell others about what Jesus has done and pray for them.*

(Option: Choose a volunteer to read Eph. 5:8-10.)

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

LOW PREP

- construction paper
- marker

Tip: Use this activity option to reinforce the missions moment from Teach the Story.

- Allergy Alert
- disposable bowl
- 1 cup of water
- 1½ cups cornstarch
- paper towels or wet wipes (for cleanup)
- spoon (optional)

Activity choice (10 minutes)



OPTION 1: Prepare the way

Write the following phrases on construction paper and put the papers on the floor around your room:

1. *Make Friends*
2. *Eat a Meal Together*
3. *Explore the City*
4. *Invite them to Your Home*
5. *Give them a Bible*
6. *Talk about Jesus*
7. *Pray for Your Friend*
8. *Invite them to Church*
9. *Enjoy Spending Time with Them*
10. *Tell Them How to Become a Christian*

Make a simple path around the room with the papers. Prepare to take your kids on a “journey with missionaries” who are preparing the way for people to come to Jesus.

SAY • Missionaries like Heiden and Neena Ratner in Las Vegas, Nevada, are leading people to Jesus. Let’s take a walk around the room and see some of the things a missionary does to lead people to Jesus. We can do these things, too!

Walk the path together, stopping at each paper and asking a volunteer to read the words. Ask kids to share examples of how they might tell someone about Jesus, using these steps.

OPTION 2: Make *obleck*

Demonstrate how to make *obleck*, a substance that acts like both a solid and a liquid. First, pour 1 cup of water into a disposable bowl. Gradually add 1½ cups cornstarch. Stir thoroughly or mix with your hands. Adjust the consistency of the *obleck* by adding more water or cornstarch.

Show kids how the oobleck reacts to touch by slowly pulling your fingers through it. It will flow and drip like a liquid. Poke or punch the oobleck. Applying pressure to the mixture will make it feel hard like a solid.

If you wish, allow kids to experiment with the oobleck. Invite them to knead it, roll it, or pour it. Provide paper towels or wet wipes for cleanup.

Remind kids that **Jesus taught that we must be born again** to enter God's kingdom.

SAY • Without Jesus, we are spiritually dead. Our hearts are hard, and we love sin more than we love God. But God can soften people's hearts. Jesus offers new life to those who trust in Him for salvation.

Option: Review the gospel with boys and girls. Explain that kids are welcome to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas. Then pray, thanking God for making the way for us to have new life when we trust in Jesus.

As time allows, lead kids to complete "Crossing Paths" on the activity page. Kids should use the clues and Bible references to complete the crossword puzzle.

- pencils
 - Journal Page
 - "Crossing Paths" activity 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.