

Sermon Discussion Guide

Nicodemus: An Encounter with Jesus

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April 1-2, 2017

“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 gives birth to spirit. John 3:4-6

Nicodemus was a member of the Israel Supreme Court. In his mind, it was the law that saved. Yet here came this teacher, this Jesus, telling him about God’s Spirit. Nicodemus was hopelessly lost. In the dark of night he went to Jesus, looking for answers. Just as Nicodemus was—just as we were at one time—we are surrounded by people who are lost and confused. And just as Nicodemus learned, Jesus alone can show us the way to live in this world and give us hope for the world to come. Read John 3:1-16 together and Let’s Talk It Over.

OPEN YOUR GROUP WITH A PRAYER. THIS IS ONLY A GUIDE – SELECT THE POINTS YOU WANT TO DISCUSS.

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.” “He came to Jesus at night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.’” In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.’”
John 3:3 (NIV)

1. Nicodemus had limited understanding of Jesus’ miraculous ability. How did Jesus explain, expand, and replace Nicodemus’s blind belief? See John 3:1-3.
2. Because Nicodemus asked Jesus an honest question, Jesus was able to answer him in a way that enhanced Nicodemus’s understanding—no arguing, no palms up confrontation. Thinking of Jesus’ example, what kind of preparation do we need when confronted with a friendly seeker or even someone hostile to God or to us?

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.” “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. John 3:8-9 (NIV)

3. When Nicodemus asks Jesus how to be born again, what example from nature does Jesus use? (See John 3:8-9).
4. Like the wind, the Holy Spirit is moving and draws people to Jesus. How did the Holy Spirit draw you to Jesus?
5. The story of Nicodemus shows us that when we are searching for truth, it’s really Jesus searching for us. What would you tell someone who says, “I don’t think this person can ever be saved”?

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.

6. John 3:14-15 tells us that the “Son of Man must be lifted up.” What if you lived your life to make Jesus known rather than making yourself known? What would it look like?
7. As we read about God’s love for us in John 3:16, we should remember to show this love to others. How can you reach out in love to those around you?

Diving Deeper (optional)

1. John 3:8 tells us that Jesus told Nicodemus, “The wind blows wherever it pleases.” The wind is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. Do a search for the word *wind* in the Bible. How else is the word used and what more do you learn about the Holy Spirit through this exercise?



REVIEW ANY ASSIGNMENTS OR COMMITMENTS MADE DURING YOUR PREVIOUS MEETING.

Sermon Discussion Guide Leader Notes

Suggestions for This Week’s Study

- How have simple stories helped you learn great truths? Share a favorite.
- Who do you know who needs an encounter with Jesus? Recognize that reaching others for Christ is not complicated but requires civil conversations that go straight to the point. Our goal is to lift up Jesus.
- In your closing prayer, reflect on the fact that you were once as hopelessly lost as Nicodemus—but God saved you. We don’t know where the wind of his spirit is blowing, so pray to be as flexible as the wind and ready for whoever he brings across your path.

Preparing to Lead Your Group

- ✓ **PRAY** for insight as you begin to prepare for leading your group. Ask for God’s wisdom, that the Holy Spirit will be the teacher and that you will be God’s instrument to lead the group to greater understanding and a willingness to commit to becoming more like God. Prayer should be your primary source of personal preparation for leading your group.
- ✓ **PLAN** where you want to take your group in the next 60-90 days. Is your group strong in some areas and weak in others? How can you challenge the members to live more balanced Christian lives? Consider God’s five purposes for the church: Fellowship, Discipleship, Ministry, Mission and Worship, and make a plan to encourage your group members to growth and commitment in their weak areas.
- ✓ **PONDER YOUR PROGRESS** after each session and at the end of a series. Reflect on what went well and what didn’t. Re-evaluation is key to your growth as a leader. Consider whether your plan is being effective in moving the group to greater understanding and commitment. How are you doing with leading the discussion: is it stimulating, challenging, and meaningful? Are you able to keep the group on track? Do you need to make some changes?

Using This Sermon Discussion Guide

- Talk It Over is a tool to aid you in meeting the needs of your group. We’ve designed it so it can be completed easily within 30-45 minutes. As the discussion leader, you should preview and evaluate the questions based on the needs of your group. Decide in advance what is most important to focus on, should time not allow for the entire lesson.
- Feel free to adapt the format to meet the needs of your group. If your group is mature and wants to dig deeper, consider using the Diving Deeper section or add additional Scripture and ask suitable questions. Remember that this is only a guide.
- The questions relating to Bible study methods are helpful to develop Bible literacy and spiritual maturity in our lives. You can help your group be aware of their needs in these areas by using these questions as a regular part of each discussion.
- Personal applications are essential for growth and should be included in every discussion. When discussing how they will apply principles, group members may state very general goals such as “I need to spend more time in prayer.” It is important for you to help people make goals that are very specific and commit to specific plans of action by asking, for example, “How are you going to begin?” An example is to get up 25 minutes earlier each morning, spending 15 minutes reading the Bible and 10 minutes in prayer. Encourage each group member to be accountable to the group for personal progress at the next meeting.
- Your goal as the leader is to bring the group into a stimulating discussion that helps the members recognize their needs for personal life change. Ultimately you want them to be willing to commit to change with accountability to the group. Accountability helps us to persevere in our commitments and achieve the blessings of success.