

Jesus Met Nicodemus

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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.

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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.



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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 in the room to simulate nighttime. Speak softly and hold a submissive posture as Nicodemus may have done.
- **Use dramatic dialogue:** Stand in one spot when telling Jesus' words. Then turn and face that spot as you speak Nicodemus' words.

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

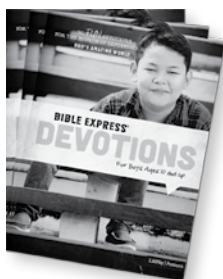
things I've seen on earth, how will you believe what I say about the things I've seen in heaven?

“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
BIBLE EXPRESS!**

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. Ask kids to share about a time they met someone new. Where did they meet? How did they feel? What did they say?

SAY • Those are some interesting experiences. Today's Bible story is about a man who met Jesus. I wonder what the man said to Jesus.

Activity page (5 minutes)

- "The Way to Jesus" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete "The Way to Jesus" maze on the activity page. Kids should complete the maze to help Nicodemus get to Jesus.

SAY • Today we are going to hear a story from the Bible about a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus went to visit Jesus at night. Why do you think he did that?

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Question pairs

Instruct kids to stand. Explain that you will ask a question. Kids should share their answers with each other, trying to



find a partner who shares the same answer. When a kid finds a partner, the pair should stand back to back.

Allow time for several more pairs to form, and then ask another question. Play several rounds as time allows.

- What is your favorite color?
- How old are you?
- How many brothers and sisters do you have?
- What is your favorite school subject?

SAY • One of the best ways to find out new information is to ask questions. Today we are going to hear a Bible story about a man who asked Jesus some questions because he didn't understand what Jesus said.

OPTION 2: One way

Before the session, prepare a paper for each kid: First, fold the square paper into fourths. Then unfold the paper and cut away one of the squares to form a wide L-shape.

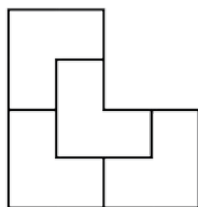
Give each kid a pencil and a prepared paper shape. Challenge kids to draw lines to divide the shape into four identical pieces. Allow several minutes for kids to work.

If a kid figures out the answer, check his work and encourage him to keep his paper hidden. Finally, reveal the answer as shown in the margin.

SAY • Did you feel frustrated if you couldn't figure out the answer? This was a tough challenge because there was only one correct way to divide the shape.

Today we are going to hear a Bible story about a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus found out that there is only one way to enter God's kingdom. We will find out what that way is.

- square paper
- pencils
- scissors



Transition to large group

Large Group LEADER

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- room decorations
- Theme Background Slide (optional)

Suggested Theme Decorating Ideas: Simulate a city street festival. Set up a tent or booth with a cloth-covered table. Hang streamers or flag banners across the ceiling, and position helium balloons at the front of the teaching area. Create a sign that reads *Welcome to the City Street Festival*. Consider projecting 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
- bottled water
- clipboard
- roll of streamers
- Bibles

[Large Group Leader enters carrying an armful of supplies: bottled water, a clipboard, a roll of streamers, Bibles, and so forth. Leader plops the supplies onto the table and stands with hands on hips.]

LEADER • Whew! Hello, there! I'm [*your name*]. I'm glad you are here! I am just setting up my booth for the city street festival. Every year, the city hosts a street festival with all kinds of games, food trucks, entertainment, and other attractions. I always set up a booth at the festival where people can come and

ask questions they have about God or the Bible. It is such a great experience. I love meeting all kinds of people, and people have really good questions.

Does anyone want to guess one of the questions people ask a lot?

Big picture question (1 minute)

Allow a few volunteers to share their ideas about common questions.

LEADER • Good ideas! The question many people want answered is, *Who is Jesus?* The best way to answer that question is to see what the Bible says about it. The Bible is God's Word, and it tells us what is true about God and what is true about ourselves.

Jesus talked about Himself in the Bible, so let's try to answer this big picture question: ***Who did Jesus say He is?*** And the answer is, ***Jesus said He is the Messiah.*** When we meet over the next several weeks, see if you can hear how each of our Bible stories tells about who Jesus is and how Jesus is the Messiah.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

LEADER • We recently started studying Bible stories from the New Testament. Can anyone tell me what the New Testament is about? [*Allow kids to respond.*] The New Testament is about Jesus' life, teaching, and future return. It is also about the early Church.

Point to today's Bible story on the timeline or big story circle: "Jesus Met Nicodemus."

LEADER • Here is today's Bible story. It happened shortly after Jesus began teaching people about God. Listen closely to hear about Jesus and Nicodemus.

• Giant Timeline
or Big Story Circle

- 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 ruler of the Jews. He wanted to know more about who Jesus really is. So one night, Nicodemus came to talk to Jesus. Why do you think he visited Jesus at night? (*so no one would see him*)

Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again if he wanted to see God’s kingdom. Doesn’t that sound strange? Nicodemus was confused, but Jesus wasn’t talking about being born like a baby is born from his mother. He was talking about being born again in the Spirit.

Jesus explained that God so loved the world that He sent His One and Only Son to save the world. Jesus’ ministry was just beginning, but He knew He had come into the world with a purpose. ***Who did Jesus say He is? Jesus said He is the Messiah.*** He knew He was going to die on the cross for the sins of the people.

Jesus told Nicodemus that if he trusted God to forgive his sins, God would give him new life. Instead of focusing on keeping all the laws, Nicodemus needed to focus on Jesus, God’s promised Son, who kept all of God’s laws perfectly.

Jesus’ words must have been strange and confusing to Nicodemus. He was a Jewish teacher. The Jews believed that all Jews who obeyed God’s law would be able to enter God’s kingdom. Nicodemus would have spent a lot of time studying Scripture, praying,

and making sacrifices. But Jesus said that not even following all the rules could get a person into God's kingdom.

Christ connection

LEADER • Every person is born a sinner and needs to be born again. We are physically alive; we breathe and move, but without Jesus we are spiritually dead and separated from God. It is by the Holy Spirit—not by anything we do ourselves—that we are born again.

Being born isn't something you do; it is something that happens to you. Just like the Israelites looked to the bronze snake in the wilderness to be healed, we look to Jesus and His death on the cross for our salvation. When we trust in Jesus, God gives us His Spirit. He changes us.

Tip: 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.

LEADER • Jesus said these words when He was talking to His disciples. This is what Nicodemus learned; keeping rules and trying hard to please God does not get you into God's kingdom. We enter His kingdom by being born again—by trusting in Jesus and by being changed by the Holy Spirit.

Lead boys and girls to sing “I Am the Way.”

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

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • **Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again.**

Everyone is a sinner—spiritually dead and separated from God. How can something that is dead be made

• “Unit 21, Session 1”
discussion starter
video

alive? Watch this.

Show the “Unit 21, Session 1” discussion starter video. Guide kids to discuss why Nell couldn’t make the dead flower alive.

LEADER • People don’t have power to give new life. Eternal life is a gift that comes only from God. God can change us, and He can change others when we share the gospel with them.

Sing (4 minutes)

• “God Is Here” song

LEADER • I don’t know about you, but I sure am glad that we don’t get to heaven by keeping all of the rules. I am not good at that. Jesus lived a perfect life instead, and we can trust in Him to save us from our sin. Let’s sing!

Sing together “God Is Here.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

LEADER • Dear God, we do not understand everything about You, but we pray that You would give us understanding and wisdom as we study Your Word. Bring us out of the darkness and into the light. Help us to trust in You for our salvation. 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. Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

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Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- paper
- markers
- tape

Show the key passage poster and guide kids to read it aloud together. Write each word of John 14:6 in large letters on separate sheets of paper. Tape the papers in random order onto the floor, close enough for successive words to be reached in a step.

Kids should step on one word at a time in the proper order to complete the key passage. Allow each kid a chance to step through John 14:6.

SAY • Great job, everyone. We will work to memorize this key passage over the next few weeks. John 14:6 reminds us that we can't do anything to earn our way to heaven. Like Nicodemus, we need new life—eternal life. Eternal life is a gift that comes only from God. When we trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, God forgives our sin and gives us eternal life.

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- chalkboard or dry erase board
- chalk or markers

Play a fill-in-the-blank review game. Draw a blank on the board for each letter in the Bible story main point: **Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again.**

Form two or three teams. Call on the first team to

choose a letter. If the letter appears in the puzzle, fill in the corresponding blanks. Then give the next team a turn. If a team guesses a letter that is not in the puzzle, ask a review question. If they answer correctly, they may guess another letter. Teams will guess one letter at a time until they complete the puzzle.

1. Who visited Jesus at night? (*Nicodemus, John 3:1-2*)
2. What was Nicodemus's job? (*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 • In today's story, Jesus told Nicodemus about God's great plan.


Open your Bible and read John 3:16-17 aloud.

SAY • Nicodemus was a religious leader. He probably worked very hard to obey God's rules and to do the right things. But Jesus said that wasn't enough to get into God's kingdom. **Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again.**

Being born isn't something you do; it is something that happens to you. Because of sin we are spiritually dead, but Jesus came to give us new life. When we trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, God forgives our

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

sin and changes us—giving us new life so we can say no to sin and live for Him.



LOW PREP

- box or gift bag
- 6 to 8 common items: small toy car, unsharpened pencil, crayon, block eraser, ball of foil, spoon, ruler, and so forth

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Into the light

Place several common items into a box or gift bag. Choose a volunteer to stand in front of the group. Hold the bag behind her back and challenge her to pull a specific item from the bag without looking.

Encourage the volunteer to feel the items to select the correct one. When she chooses the item, she should hold it up to see if she is correct. Place the item back in the bag and choose another volunteer to take a turn.

Once kids have displayed several of the items, play again by handing the volunteer an item behind her back. She should describe to the group how the item feels (long, short, round, smooth, and so forth) and let the group identify it.

SAY • Nicodemus talked to Jesus at night. He did not know the truth about God. **Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again.** Jesus came to tell people the truth about God and to bring them into the light.

OPTION 2: Questions for Jesus

Before the session, write the following references on separate index cards: *Matthew 18:21-22*; *Matthew 22:36-40*; *John 6:28-29*; *John 10:24-25*. Hide the cards in plain sight around the room.

Form four groups of kids and distribute Bibles. Choose one kid from each group to search around the room for an index card. When she finds a card, she should bring it back to her group.

Instruct each group to find the Scripture passage in their

Bibles. One kid in the group should read the verses aloud. Call on groups one at a time to share their verses. First, the group should share the question that someone asked Jesus. Then they should share the answer Jesus gave.

SAY • Many people asked Jesus questions when He was here on earth. In our Bible story today, **Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again.** What question did Nicodemus ask about that? (*Nicodemus asked, “How can anyone be born when he is old?”; John 3:4*)

Invite a volunteer to explain what Jesus meant by being born again. Emphasize that this is not a physical rebirth, but a spiritual one. When we trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior, God forgives our sin and changes us—giving us new life so we can say no to sin and live for Him.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Lead kids to list things they can do on their own and things they need others to do for them. Point out that being born again is not something we can do for ourselves, but when we trust in Jesus, God gives us eternal life.

SAY • Let’s pray. Lord Jesus, thank You for obeying God perfectly and for dying on the cross so we can have eternal life. Help us to rely on You for everything we need. We love You. Amen.

As time allows, lead kids to complete “One Way” on the activity page. Instruct kids to use the provided words to fill in the missing words of John 14:6. (Answers: *way, truth, life, Father, Me*) Then guide kids to unscramble the circled letters to complete the sentence. (Answer: *eternal*)

- pencils
- Journal Page
- “One Way” 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.