



Session 8
Summer 2020
Multiage

Nicodemus visits Jesus

JOHN 3:1-21

prepare



PRAYER

God of light, shine through me. May I serve as a beacon to those still in the dark. Amen.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

To hear Jesus' answers to Nicodemus

STORY SUMMARY

A Jewish leader named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night to ask him about the amazing signs Jesus was doing. Jesus talked to Nicodemus about being born of the Spirit. Jesus compared this new birth to the blowing of the wind and told Nicodemus about God's great love for the world, believing in the Son of man, and having eternal life. Those who do what is true come into God's light.

teaching tips for multiage

In today's story, Nicodemus wanted to know about God's kingdom. We may have questions too. Children are good at asking questions. Encourage their curiosity. Create a safe atmosphere in which to ask questions and voice wonders by being ready to share your own ideas. Learn along with Nicodemus that because of Jesus, anyone can walk in the light and be a part of God's kingdom.

Children will need flashlights at different times during today's session. Any kind of flashlight will work; they do not all have to be the same.

Decide which Explore options to offer. Check Supplies and To do throughout this session to see what needs to be prepared.

Layers of story

Like many of Jesus' encounters in the Gospel of John, the story of Jesus and Nicodemus [NIK-uh-DEE-muhs] is written in layers. The first layer is the simple narrative. Nicodemus, a Pharisee [FAIR-uh-see] and sincere keeper of the law, steps out of the shadows to talk to Jesus at night. It's a strange conversation. Nicodemus affirms that Jesus is a teacher from God and that his ability to perform signs comes from God. A "signs faith" is not enough, says Jesus, there is much more. Nicodemus fawns at Jesus' words, trying to coax them into a pattern he can understand. After three rounds of Jesus and Nicodemus talking past each other, we hear no more from Nicodemus. But Jesus keeps on talking.

Just under the surface of this encounter is a second layer. The writer is talking to his own beleaguered community. A gut-wrenching break is happening between the followers of the Way and the main body of Jewish worshippers. This story asks: Will believers in Jesus in the synagogue have the courage to openly declare their faith? Will they come out of the shadows? Will they be born of the waters of baptism and of the Holy Spirit? Will they live openly in the light?

We bring the third layer to this story. What does it mean for us to openly follow Jesus in a new community rather than hide in the shadows in our own culture?

"Born from above" and "born again"

The Greek words used in verse 3 and following may be translated "you must be born from above" or "you must be born again/anew." The two translations put together give us the fullest sense of what Jesus is getting at. Jesus comes from heaven. As Jesus is begotten from above, so his followers must be also. This happens through a belief in Jesus that penetrates both head and heart. In baptism, we are joined to a community where together we walk in the light. Through God's Spirit, our lives become fresh and new.

Being "born again" or "from above" is one of many ways of talking about conversion in the New Testament.



It's mentioned just this once in John's Gospel, once in 1 Peter 1:23, and a few times in the epistles of John, where the proof of it comes in right attitudes and right living.¹

This birth from above happens because God loves us with a sacrificial love in Jesus. Our salvation is the extravagant gift of a loving God who wants our good and the good of our world. We enter into the energy, joy, and light of being part of God's reign. We enter into eternal life, words often repeated in this Gospel. That is, we enter into life in its fullness, beginning now and continuing beyond the grave.

Lifted up

Remember the story of Moses lifting up a bronze serpent in the desert?² People who looked at this snake-on-a-pole were healed from poisonous snakebites. John's Gospel proclaims that, in the same way, Jesus will be lifted up onto the cross. Those who look to him in faith will truly live, now and into all eternity.

Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension to heaven are seen here as one event, framed by the language of "being lifted up." It's written as if it has already happened. Jesus is saying that people can be assured of his being lifted up to God because he has already descended from God.

An ending for the story

We never find out if Nicodemus publicly declares himself a follower of the Way. He's still lurking around at the end of the Gospel, when he contributes expensive spices for Jesus' burial (19:38-39). The writer hints that Nicodemus continues as a secret believer. As for us, reflect on the words of Saint Augustine: "Hope in [God], you whole assembly . . . you, a people being born, which the Lord has made. . . . Love what you will be. What you will be, you see, is children of God, and sons [and daughters] by adoption."³

1. See 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1-4; 5:18.

2. See Numbers 21:4-9.

3. Augustine, "Sermon 216," in *Sermons 184-229*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John Rotelle (New City Press, 1993), 171.

gather

supplies

- Prayer journals (Bonus Multiage Leaflets)
- *Shine Songbook and CD* (or digital versions)
- *Annual Shine Songbooks*
- CD player
- Flashlights
- Battery-operated or regular candle, matches

resource pack

- “Ways to pray” poster
- Bible memory poster (Ephesians 3)

to do

- Set up a prayer place, if one has not already been arranged (see page 89 of this guide).
- Gather enough flashlights so that each child will have one. If you asked children to bring flashlights, bring extras for additional children or those who forgot.

media connections

- Internet search for the video “John 3:16” from Sven-Erik Simonsson
- “Overview: John Ch. 1-12” by the Bible Project (specifically 4:40-5:15) for teacher background (YouTube)
- *Jesus and Nicodemus* painting by Crijn Hendricksz Volmarijn (Internet)
- “This Little Light of Mine” from Listener Kids (YouTube)

BUILD COMMUNITY

Community means having something in common. Have the group work together to find something that everyone has in common—anything from shoe color to breakfast cereal. Then find something that is unique about each child.

WORSHIP TOGETHER

Light a candle and invite the children into a time of silence. Let the silence settle for about a minute, then pray about wanting to learn more about God. Sing or listen to “Sing Allelu!” (track 8, page 12).

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Nicodemus went to Jesus and asked questions. Encourage the children to ask Jesus questions too; they can write or draw their questions under “Wonder” on page 3 of their prayer journals (Bonus Multiage Leaflets). Allow each child to spend some quiet time in the prayer place (see To do). Display the “Ways to pray” poster from the resource pack there for children to use.

Bible memory

Darken the room. Give each child a flashlight. Have everyone shine their lights on the Bible memory poster and read the passage together. Then turn off the flashlights and try to recite the passage from memory. If children get stuck, shine a light on the poster to refresh their memory.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.
—Ephesians 3:20–21

experience

SHARE THE STORY

Ask a child to find the book of John in the Bible; use a bookmark for nonreaders. Have ready the Story images from page 92 of this guide. As you read the story from page 188 in *Shine On*, lay the images in front of you. Begin with the moon. When you read about being born, present the baby image. Continue with the wind image as it is mentioned. Use the question mark image when Nicodemus asks, “How can this be?” Finally, as the story talks about the light, present the light image.

WONDER AND REFLECT

Reflect on the story together, pondering the following questions. Leave space for silent reflection, responses, and questions from the children.

- I wonder what signs Nicodemus heard or saw Jesus do.
- I wonder about the times you'd like to start over again.
- I wonder how we know the Spirit of God is there if we can't see it.
- I wonder what Jesus meant by “good and true.”
- I wonder what questions you would ask Jesus.

PEACE NOTES

To walk in God's light is to be in a right and whole relationship with God. Stand in a circle. Give each child a flashlight (turned off), then darken the room. Ask the group to think about what it means to “do what is good and true.” Give them time to think, then invite one child to begin with an idea. After sharing, the child turns on his or her flashlight and shines the light at another child's feet. That child then shares an idea and in turn shines his or her light on someone else. Continue until everyone has shared. The last child can shine a light on the first child's feet. Collect the flashlights for use in Bless.

For smaller groups: Set up a path of electric candles or tealights. Talk about an example of walking in God's light and then turn on the first candle. Walk to the next candle and again brainstorm another example. Do this until you have lit a path.



Nicodemus visits Jesus

John 3:1–21
Shine On, p. 188

supplies

- Bible
- *Shine On: A Story Bible*
- Flashlights
- Electric candles/tealights (optional)

storytelling props

- Story images (from Additional resources)

to do

- Prepare the Story images from page 92 of this guide.

explore

CREATE

The Spirit is like the wind. We can't see it, but it is there. Make the invisible visible by creating art with air. Provide paper, homemade paint, and straws. Make the paint by combining equal parts cornstarch and water ($\frac{1}{4}$ C / 60 ml total is enough for two children). Use food coloring to make different colors. Put some paint on the paper, then use the straw to blow designs in the paint. Hold the straw close to the paper and at an angle for best results.

supplies

- Paper
- Cornstarch
- Water
- Food coloring
- Small bowls (for paint)
- Spoons
- Straws

MOVE

Jesus says we can be born again and be accepted as part of God's kingdom. Play the "Together we can" game, where no one is left out. The instructions are on page 84 of this guide; the game tiles have been cut apart from the "Together we can" game in the resource pack.

supplies

- "Together we can" game instructions (from Additional resources)
- "Together we can" game tiles (from resource pack)
- Coin
- Game pieces

RETELL

Give each child a copy of the Story images from page 92 of this guide. Provide coloring materials and scissors. Punch a hole in the top left corner of each story image and use yarn to tie the images together in order.

supplies

- Story images (from Additional resources)
- Crayons/markers/colored pencils
- Scissors
- Hole punch
- Yarn



LEAFLET

On page 2 of the Multiage leaflet, children can play a game with a partner. They can draw or write responses to the situations on page 3, and make a wind pinwheel using the cutout and instructions on page 4.

supplies

- Multiage leaflets
- Dice
- Containers of beads/beans/scraps of paper
- Timers
- Pencils
- Crayons/markers/colored pencils
- Scissors
- Glue
- Hole punch
- Chenille stems (pipe cleaners)
- Dowel rods or additional pencils

other ideas

- Play a "starting over" game, such as "Freeze tag." A child tagged by the player who is It must freeze in place, but another player can tag and unfreeze the frozen player.
- Provide a questions jar for children to fill with questions they would like to ask Jesus.

bles

PRAY

Gather together in a circle. Ask a child to mark with stickers the categories on the “Faithful followers” poster from the resource pack that fit Nicodemus (*New Testament, talked to Jesus*).

Pass out the flashlights. Ask the group to shine their flashlights into the center of the circle as they echo this prayer:

Dear God, the light is for everyone.

The light is good.

The light is love.

Amen.



SEND

Now ask the children to shine their flashlights onto their own feet.

Send them with these words from Psalm 119:105:

**Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.**

Make sure to send leaflets home with the children, as well as any flashlights that children brought.

supplies

- Multiage leaflets
- Flashlights
- Small stickers

resource pack

- “Faithful followers” poster



I try to make a point of teaching children about the Bible, that it's not just any book; it's special.

—Polly Jones
Marion, Virginia

leader's closing prayer

How often, in the midst of a mess, do you wish you could start anew? Jesus gives us a fresh start. What a relief. And what a reason to praise God!

Dear God, Jesus invites me to your kingdom. Jesus hands me his light. I beam with thanks! I shine with love! Amen.