
Lesson Overview

Biblical Passage John 3:1-21

Supporting Passage Mark 8:13-19

Memory Verse John 3:16

Biblical Truth Eternal life comes only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Context After performing His first miracle at the wedding, Jesus met a Jewish leader named Nicodemus. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, seeking answers about the Kingdom of God. In His time with Nicodemus, Jesus proclaimed for the first time the necessity of being born again through faith in order to experience eternal life.

Learning Goals

- Students will identify what is necessary to have eternal life.
- Students will identify what the guarantee of eternal life can mean to their daily lives.

Prayer Suggestions

As you prepare to teach this lesson, pray for your students.

- Pray that students will know that eternal life begins with a relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Pray that students identify will identify what the guarantee of eternal life can mean to their daily lives.
- Pray that students will desire to share with others how they can find eternal life through salvation in Jesus Christ.

Biblical Commentary

Investigation

Seeking answers about the Kingdom of God, Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. At this time, Jesus emphasized the necessity of being born again through faith in order to experience eternal life. The words Jesus spoke to a first-century Pharisee are as important to seekers of God today as they were to Nicodemus himself. This passage is so significant that it includes one of the best-known verses in all of Scripture: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son . . ." (Jn. 3:16).

Importance

This passage teaches that **Salvation is by Faith Alone**. Jesus emphasized the necessity of being born again through faith in order to experience eternal life. He said, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (Jn. 3:3, see also Jn. 3:5). Jesus stressed that the way to eternal life is only through Him, saying, "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" (Jn. 3:16). Belief in Jesus Christ is the only way to achieve salvation. Salvation is indeed by faith in God's Son alone.

Other key truths in this lesson include **Jesus is God and Savior** and **People are God's Treasure**.

Interpretation

John 3:1-3 Nicodemus was an important man in his day. He had a high-society job as a member of the Sanhedrin, a reputation as a well-known teacher, and served as a member of the **Pharisees**. After Jesus' death, Nicodemus provided "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds" for the anointing of Jesus' body (Jn. 19:39). Only the wealthy could afford to do this.

Why did Nicodemus come to Jesus at night? He might have been trying to avoid the embarrassment caused by what other Pharisees would think. It could have been that the night would better fit his schedule and purpose since there would be less chance for interruption. At any rate, some scholars believe the darkness is symbolic of Nicodemus' lack of understanding about God (vv. 19-21). Upon arrival, he began by calling Jesus "Rabbi" or "Teacher." This demonstrated great respect for Jesus, even though Jesus had never been formally trained (Jn. 7:15). Yet this compliment fell far short of capturing His true identity.

Jesus immediately addressed Nicodemus' spiritual problem. All of Nicodemus' accomplishments could not make him right with God. Jesus explained that to enter God's Kingdom, a person must be "born **again**." All of the religious status Nicodemus had worked to acquire could not earn him eternal life. He must be spiritually reborn

through God's grace into the Kingdom of God (Ro. 6:23).

John 3:4-5 Nicodemus misunderstood Jesus' response. Since he thought Jesus was talking about physical rebirth, Jesus restated and clarified His answer. Some have taken Jesus' words, "born of water," to indicate the priority of baptism in the salvation experience. While baptism is important, it is more likely that Jesus used water to refer to physical birth.

John 3:6-8 Jesus explained the need for new birth using two illustrations. During physical birth, a newborn becomes part of an earthly family. During spiritual birth from above, a person becomes a member of God's family. Adam's sin was passed down to us by birth and gives us a sinful nature (1 Cor. 15:22). Fallen people can therefore only give birth to fallen people. Likewise, only the **Holy Spirit** can give spiritual life to our souls. One must be born again (from above) to become part of God's family.

The second illustration helped Nicodemus understand the Spirit by way of the wind. The use of the word *pneuma* can mean both spirit and wind. Like the wind, the Spirit cannot be seen or manipulated. The effects they bring can identify them both.

John 3:9-11 Since Jesus refers to Nicodemus as Israel's teacher, it seems that this Pharisee must have enjoyed elite status among the rabbis of his day. But his study of the Scriptures should have taught him God's ability to change human lives. He should have known from God's Word that only God gives a person a new heart and a right spirit (Ezk. 36:25-27). Nicodemus, the earthly teacher, did not understand Jesus' message. The conversation demonstrated that Jesus is the only true Teacher who can explain the deep mysteries of God.

When Jesus used the plural pronoun *we*, He was probably referring to Himself and His disciples, who had received His instructions. When He used the plural pronoun *you*, He was probably referring to Nicodemus and the other Pharisees who had ignored Jesus' spiritual teaching.

John 3:12-15 Nicodemus had difficulty understanding Jesus' teaching on the new birth. To explain this concept to him, Jesus used two earthly analogies: physical birth and the wind. But how was Nicodemus going to understand the deep things of God, such as the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God, if he could not understand the basics?

Jesus reminded Nicodemus of a familiar Old Testament story. In the Book of Numbers, God sent a plague of fiery serpents on the disobedient Israelites during the exodus. Their poisonous bites resulted in many deaths. Moses brought the people's contrite confession to God, and God provided a divine antidote: God told Moses to set a bronze serpent atop a pole in the camp. Whoever looked at the bronze serpent would live (Num. 21:5-9). In the same way, Christ would be lifted up on the cross. Whoever looked to Him would gain spiritual life. All humankind has been bitten and poisoned by deadly sin, but those who look to Jesus by faith are given eternal life (Ro. 6:23).

John 3:16 This verse is often called the gospel in a nutshell. In one sentence, John summed up God's plan for saving humanity. This verse reveals Christ as the source of eternal life. This eternal life comes through faith in Jesus, and it describes more than just duration of existence. It is also the quality of life in Christ. People have only two options: believe in Jesus or perish. Perishing is the opposite of gaining eternal life in Christ. Those who perish completely fail to fulfill God's purpose for life. As a result, they are excluded from His fellowship forever. This offer of eternal life is made to the entire world. No one is turned down based on race or culture or any earthly circumstance. The only requirement is faith in Jesus.

John 3:17-21 Humanity is God's treasure. God displayed His love for His treasure by sending Jesus—not to condemn this sinful world, but to be a sacrifice for its sins. Condemnation comes not by a lack of love or effort on God's part, but by a lack of faith on the part of the unbeliever.

The difference between belief and unbelief does not lie in guilt or innocence. It is in the attitude individuals take toward light. Unbelievers avoid the light because it exposes their sin. Believers bask in the light and enjoy fellowship with Jesus and with each other (1 Jn. 1:5-9).

Implications

Because of the popularity of religious tolerance, it is easy to be confused about the biblical concept of eternal life. People often believe that being raised in a Christian family will automatically earn them eternal life. But God's Word is clear: **Salvation is by Faith Alone**. There are not different ways to eternal life; there is only one—Jesus Christ. That truth does not sit well with people who argue that God will honor any honest attempt to obtain eternal life.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a religious leader more concerned about being true to his religion than to God. We must make sure we never promote our religion, denominations, or churches more than God. Our responsibility is to promote God's glory through the way we live our lives. Authentic faith can only be discovered through accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Like Nicodemus, people today cannot experience God because they are religious. Knowing about God and knowing God are not the same. Nicodemus knew about God until he met Jesus. In our culture, we must make sure we never substitute the study of God for experiencing God. That is the lesson Nicodemus learned as well as the end result of his encounter with Christ. To lead religious people to a saving knowledge of God requires that we first explain the futility of a legalistic approach to faith and then the joy of a love-based relationship with God.

Teaching Plan

Connect

Review Questions: His First Miracle

(5–8 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will answer five review questions from the previous lesson.

Print one copy of the "Review Questions" activity sheet for your use.

After greeting students, use the review questions to test what they can recall from the previous lesson as well as to provide the context for today's lesson.

Master Teacher Option: What Am I?

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will give clues to help a volunteer guess his or her identity.

Enlist a volunteer, and ask him or her to step outside the room. Explain to the remaining students that they will create an identity for the absent student that everyone will know except that student. Say: **The goal is for us to help the student discover his or her identity by asking questions. For example, if the student were a kite, you would ask questions like the following: "Do you enjoy flying in the sky? What happens if you get stuck in a tree or on a power pole? Would you prefer not to be attached to string?"** Emphasize that the questions are not to be answered but rather are intended to serve as clues to the student's identity.

Lead the class to determine what the volunteer's identity will be, and then call him or her back in. Explain that the volunteer must guess his or her identity based on the questions that members of the class will ask. Lead students to ask their questions. Allow the volunteer three chances to guess his or her identity. If the volunteer does not guess correctly, provide the answer. Play another round with another volunteer if time permits.

Conclude by saying: **Questions are a good way to discover the truth. In this lesson, we will look at a man who asked Jesus questions to find out the truth about eternal life.**

Explore

Master Teacher Key Study: Nicodemus' Questions

(15-20 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will study John 3:1-21 to identify what is necessary to have eternal life.

Print one copy of the Master Teacher Key Study for your use. Also provide a copy of the Student Worksheet and a pen for each student.

Learning Goal: Students will identify what is necessary to have eternal life.

Pass out pens and copies of the Student Worksheet. Then, use the Master Teacher Key Study to teach John 3:1-21.

Transform

Deeper Discussion

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will identify what the guarantee of eternal life can mean to their daily lives.

Learning Goal: Students will identify what the guarantee of eternal life can mean to their daily lives.

Express that when we place our faith in Christ and receive the gift of salvation and eternal life, our lives are changed. Use the following questions to encourage students to consider how the assurance of salvation and eternal life could influence their daily lives:

- **Why do people today also struggle to understand the importance of being born again?**
- **What transformations have occurred in your life so you can say, "I have been born again"?**
- **If you have a relationship with Jesus, what truths from today's discussion would be important to share with your friends?**
- **How difficult is it to proclaim Christ as the only way to salvation in today's culture? Why is this the case?**
- **Why do you think some people choose to live in darkness instead of turning to Christ?**

Divide students into twos or threes. Instruct students to take turns sharing a word that describes what it means to have eternal life in Christ. After a minute or so, lead students in praying, thanking God for the incredible love He has for us all. Close by leading students to recite John 3:16.

Master Teacher Option: Danger Ahead

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will consider reasons why people often keep their faith hidden.

Provide dry erase board and markers.

Learning Goal: Students will identify what the guarantee of eternal life can mean to their daily lives.

Read John 3:1-2. Instruct students to join with another student and then lead them to discuss this question: **What are some reasons Nicodemus came to Jesus at night?** After a minute, lead partners to raise their hands if they have identified each of these responses: *He was afraid of his fellow Pharisees; nervous about his interest in Jesus; unsure of what he believed.* Point out that the Pharisees compartmentalized their faith, meaning that they created categories in which they allowed God full reign while denying Him lordship in others.

Point out that Nicodemus had concerns about publicly embracing Jesus' offer of salvation. Lead students to discuss with their partners: **What are some reasons that people keep their faith hidden?** After a minute, call for several volunteers to share one of their responses. Then, lead students to identify ways their faith is part of their daily lives and list these on the board. Lead students to discuss with their partners: **In what ways does your relationship with God affect others?** After a minute or so, lead students to discuss: **How does your confidence in having eternal life impact the way you live daily?**

After discussion, lead students in the following prayer experience. Say: **"For God so loved the world. . ."** Then, instruct students to think of names of persons whom God loves but who do not know Christ as Savior and Lord. Say: **". . . that He gave His one and only Son . . ."** Direct students at one time to speak other names for Jesus or His characteristics, such as the Good Shepherd, the Risen Lord, the Prince of Peace, holy, loving, or risen. Then, instruct students to complete the verse with you: **". . . that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."**

Take Home Activity

Family Devotion

(10-15 minutes at home, easy set-up)

Distribute copies of the Family Devotion to students and encourage them to share the devotion with their family.

A copy of the Family Devotion will be included in your lesson PDF download.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)

Use these questions to review the content from Lesson 10: "His First Miracle"
The correct answer for each question is printed in bold, italic font.

1. Which of Jesus' relatives was present at the wedding in Cana?
 - a. Jesus' brother James
 - b. Joseph, Jesus' earthly father
 - c. *Mary, Jesus' mother***
 - d. John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin
2. What happened to the wine at the wedding feast?
 - a. It turned sour.
 - b. *It ran out.***
 - c. It was not good.
 - d. It was stolen.
3. Who informed Jesus that the wine had run out?
 - a. the disciples
 - b. the father of the bride
 - c. the servants
 - d. *Mary, Jesus' mother***
4. What did Jesus tell the servants at the wedding to do?
 - a. *Fill the jars with water***
 - b. Go and get more wine
 - c. Go to the wine cellar to find more wine
 - d. Go and press more grapes
5. What did Jesus do with the water in the jars?
 - a. He drank it all.
 - b. He poured it out.
 - c. *He turned it into wine.***
 - d. He washed His hands, arms, and elbows.

Students: Christ
Lesson 11, Master Teacher Key Study

NICODEMUS' QUESTIONS
(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Use this outline and any of the corresponding activities to share the Biblical Truth with students.

Introduction: How many verses from the Bible would you guess that you have memorized—at least for a time? Which one is your favorite? Which one is the easiest to remember? For many people, John 3:16 is one of the first verses they commit to memory. While people may think this verse is found in one of Jesus' sermons, it actually occurred in an intimate conversation between Jesus and a man named Nicodemus. Jesus shared God's love for the world by providing a way to receive new spiritual life.

1. We experience a new life only through the Spirit's work in our lives (John 3:1–9).

Biblical Background: Jesus got straight to the point with Nicodemus, a revered teacher of the Jewish people (vv. 1-2). Despite the impressive resume that Nicodemus had as a Jewish ruler and teacher, Jesus made it clear that only the Spirit can create the inner change needed for a new life (vv. 3-4). The flesh cannot do anything to attain that which is given by the Spirit. Jesus used the analogies of water and wind to help Nicodemus understand that **Salvation is by Faith Alone** (vv. 5-9).

Illustration: *National Geographic* organized an exhibit about King Tut, a famous pharaoh from ancient Egypt. King Tut was mummified and buried in an elaborate way. The most famous of his burial items is the magnificent golden mask that lay over his face. Despite the amazing golden cover, the truth was that a dead body remained underneath.

Application: No matter what we try to do, only the Holy Spirit can change us. We can try to live good lives, do good things, and give the right answers—but these actions are purely from our own human efforts. However, we cannot rely on our own efforts to change our lives and to prepare us for eternity. Only the Holy Spirit can create new life in us.

2. We receive salvation only through faith in Christ's life and death (John 3:10–17).

Biblical Background: Because Nicodemus did not understand what He was saying (vv. 10-13), Jesus referred Nicodemus to the Old Testament event when Moses raised up a serpent on a stick to save the people of Israel from death. Jesus said that the Son of Man would also be raised up (on a cross) and would in that way provide eternal life to all people who believe in Him (vv. 14-15). Because God loves the world so much, He provided a way for the world to be rescued from the judgment that their sinfulness demands (vv. 16-17). Jesus is the way to salvation.

Illustration: A search on YouTube quickly locates a video clip of Oprah, who has professed to being a Christian, claiming that Jesus cannot be the only way to eternal life. Other popular celebrities also make this same claim. Jesus takes the guesswork out of how to have eternal life. We don't have to wonder which ways are right or how much work we have to do. He is God's plan to bring salvation to the world.

Application: We can take heart that God loves us so much that He sent His Son for our salvation and

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redemption. This salvation, however, comes only from faith in Christ. He is the only way to salvation and the only one who sacrificed Himself to take the punishment for our sinfulness.

3. We have a future determined by our response to Jesus (John 3:18–21).

Biblical Background: Jesus told Nicodemus that the judgment of humanity is based on people's individual response to the Light, Jesus. Some people will not choose Jesus because they do not want Him to change their lives. Other people, however, seek the truth of God's salvation and desire His work in their lives (vv. 18-20). The eternal future of every person will be based on how he or she responds to Jesus (v. 21).

Illustration: Have you ever taken one of those surveys in a magazine or on Facebook that guarantees to tell you the truth about things such as the future of your relationships, your ideal car, your best friend, or your personality? Based on your responses, the test judges you and sometimes your future. Although these surveys can sometimes be fun, they aren't always very accurate. All of us, though, will be seriously faced with our decision regarding Christ. We will all face the real consequences of that decision.

Application: We will be judged based on our response to Jesus' life and His offer of salvation. Inviting the Holy Spirit to change our lives requires our willingness to let the Light expose our sins and forgive them. By recognizing Jesus as Lord of our lives, we are given salvation by His grace and through faith in Him.

Conclusion: We can do nothing to gain eternal life apart from the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. God provided a way of salvation through His Son, Jesus, who sacrificed His life for our sins. Once we place our faith in Him, the Holy Spirit enters our lives and changes us into new creatures who seek to follow Christ in spirit and in truth.

LESSON 11

NICODEMUS' QUESTIONS

CHRISTOS
STUDENT EDITION

Biblical Passage: John 3:1-21

Memory Verse: John 3:16

“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.”

1. We experience a new _____ only through the _____ work in our lives (John 3:1-8).
2. We receive _____ only through _____ in Christ's life and death (John 3:9-17).
3. We have a _____ determined by our _____ to Jesus (John 3:18-21).

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why do people today also struggle to understand the importance of being born again?
- What transformations have occurred in your life so you can say, “I have been born again”?
- If you have a relationship with Jesus, what truths from today's discussion would be important to share with your friends?
- How difficult is it to proclaim Christ as the only way to salvation in today's culture? Why is this the case?
- Why do you think some people choose to live in darkness instead of turning to Christ?

Write the significance of each word underneath it:

BORN

AGAIN

WHY?

Why did God send Jesus?

THE WAY

Belief in _____ as the Savior is the only basis for salvation.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT . . .

“I have traveled the world. I have searched high and low. I have found nothing that satisfies my mind, my heart, and the deepest longings of my soul like Jesus does. He is not only the way, the truth, and life; he is personal to me. He is my way, and my truth, and my life—just as he can be for anyone who reaches out to him.”—*Lee Strobel, The Case for Faith*

LESSON 11

NICODEMUS' QUESTIONS

Biblical Passage: John 3:1–21

Have you ever thought about how many times you misplace things during the day? Encourage each family member to share some of the things they frequently misplace, such as car keys, cell phones, important letters and bills, homework, receipts, pens, and even the TV remote control. Using humor, discuss a recent search conducted by the entire family for an item that one person misplaced. Point out that helping each other makes the process of searching for misplaced items go a little smoother. Discuss: **How do you feel when you can help each other find the things that have been lost?** State that for Christians, there is no greater feeling than helping someone find Christ.

Read John 3:1–21. Jesus had a conversation with a Pharisee named Nicodemus. He was an educated man, well on in years, and Jesus told him that he needed to experience a rebirth. Can you imagine the look on Nicodemus' face? But Jesus was talking about more than just an emotional, momentary experience. He was talking about a spiritual transformation.

Jesus explained that the Kingdom of God is not some far off place reserved for believers when they die. Rather, His Kingdom is here, and believers enter it eternally when they begin a relationship with Jesus through faith. Believers are spiritually born into a transforming life in which Jesus molds believers into the person He wants them to be. This relationship lasts a lifetime, and then, believers leave this earthly life to spend eternity with Him.

Every member of the family can help each other understand that if they have been born again, eternal life has already begun for them. Now, we take hold of Christ as He leads us through this life, molding, shaping, and transforming us more into His image. We crave the light and are repelled by the darkness. Conversion isn't about just gaining heaven—it's about a life in Christ—it begins in this life and never ends. Does each member of your family know Him?

CONNECTION QUESTIONS:

- What are the first memories you have of your children at birth?
Share some of those earliest memories with them.
- According to John 3:1–21, what does it mean to be born again? How does that happen?
- Have you been born again? If so, how do you know?
If not, would you like to begin a new life in Christ today?