

session 2 study guide

new life

message

The passage you are about to read includes one of the most famous verses in the Bible. Many of you have probably heard it, and some of you may have even memorized it: “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” (John 3:16).

Often times, when we hear something repeatedly—when we become too familiar with it—it begins to lose its significance. A song played over and over again on the radio. A lecture you’ve heard one too many times.

This can happen with key verses from the Bible as well. Our eyes glaze over the passage, or our lips mindlessly recite the words without remembering the incredible meaning behind the verses. This time, as you read through these verses from John 3, try to read them with fresh eyes and truly hear the amazing promise Jesus makes.

For the most part, Jesus was surrounded by the ordinary people of His day. However, in this conversation, we see Him with one of the important Jewish leaders of His time: a man named Nicodemus.

So, who was Nicodemus?

He was a Pharisee. In many ways, the Pharisees were the most important people in the whole country of Israel. There may not have been more than 6,000 Pharisees at the time of Jesus, and they all were completely dedicated to observing every minute detail of the Old Testament Law. They were also violently opposed to Jesus and His teachings.

He was a member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was composed of 70 religious leaders and acted as the supreme court of the Jewish people.

He was rich. When Jesus died, Nicodemus brought a “mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds” (John 19:39) for Jesus’ body. Only a wealthy man could afford a gift like this.

As you read the following passage, keep these questions in mind: (1) What does it mean to be “born again”? (2) How do we attain eternal life?

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."

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 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.

"You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

"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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God" (John 3:1-21).

dig

1. This conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus can be a bit confusing. Look back over the verses and list any questions that you may have about this discussion.

2. Based on what you know about Nicodemus, what is the significance of his coming to talk with Jesus about these things?

3. Why do you suppose Nicodemus came to Jesus at night?

4. Look again at verses 1-15. In your own words, what does it mean to be “born again”?

5. What do the following verses tell you about being born again and the new life that follows?

Ephesians 4:22-24: _____

2 Corinthians 5:16-17: _____

Colossians 3:9: _____

6. Remember that Nicodemus was a Pharisee who believed the way to heaven was by following all of the Old Testament laws perfectly. How do you think he felt after hearing Jesus' explanation of the way to heaven?

7. John 3:19 says, "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." What do you think this passage means? What is the "darkness"?

apply

1. Place a mark next to the phrase below that best describes your response to the eternal message of Jesus: “You must be born again” (John 3:7).

- ☐ I have experienced new birth in my life.
- ☐ I’m not interested in experiencing new birth at this time.
- ☐ It sounds interesting, but I really don’t understand the concept of new birth.
- ☐ I’m interested in experiencing new birth.

2. Why do you need to be “born again” to get into heaven?

3. Being re-born means that the old self must die. Think about your views, attitudes and actions. List the differences between your old self before becoming a Christian and your new self that has been born again in Christ.

Old Self

New Self

4. Reread John 3:16-18. This has sometimes been called the gospel in a nutshell, as it uses only a few sentences to tell the essence of the salvation story. Imagine a friend asks you what this whole Jesus-dying-on-the-cross thing is all about. How would you explain these three verses in your own words?

5. Even if you've already committed your life to Jesus, there can be areas of your life that do not reflect the new life you have in Christ. What areas of your life do you still need to give over to Jesus?

6. What specifically is holding you back from giving these areas of your life over to God?

7. Read Luke 9:23-25. What do these verses reveal about the cost of following Christ?

8. In 1 Corinthians 15:22,31, Paul writes, “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. . . . I die every day—I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Why must the old self die every day?

reflect

If you have never accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior and want to experience the fullness of life and depth of His unconditional love, pray the following prayer:

*Dear Lord Jesus,
I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Although it may appear to be a simple prayer, it will have a life-changing impact. Be sure to share your decision with your leader so that he or she can rejoice with you and provide guidance in your new walk with the Lord.

1. Once people have accepted Jesus as their Savior, why don't their lives always reflect their new selves? Why do the old selves still pop up?

2. What holds people back from starting over with God?

3. A new life in Christ does not mean an easy life. What are some of the difficulties you will face because of following Jesus?

4. What is the status of your faith right now? How are you growing as a Christian?

5. This passage in John ends with a discussion about living in the truth (see v. 21). What does “living in the truth” mean? Do you think you are currently living in the truth?

meditation



Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;
the old has gone, the new has come!

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17