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LEADER'S GUIDE

NO ONE IS SO GOOD • THE GOSPEL



Photograph by Greg Schneider/Worldwide Challenge

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

JOHN 3:1-18

This passage contains probably the most quoted and best known statement in the Bible. “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). Jesus made that statement to Nicodemus, a religious leader who had come to see Jesus. Jesus used the opportunity to explain the essence of the gospel to him, and to call him to faith. In their conversation, we see that Jesus makes His forgiveness available to everyone.

In verse 1, we are introduced to Nicodemus, a Pharisee. The Pharisees were a group of Jewish leaders who taught in the synagogues. They were often legalistic and hypocritical. Though they went to great lengths to obey the letter of the law, they often ignored the spirit of the law. In the gospels, we see that Jesus reserved His harshest words for the Pharisees. (See Luke 11:37ff)

Though we can't be certain about the motivation of Nicodemus, it's likely he visited Jesus at night because he wanted to speak to Him in secret. The Pharisees already had a building animosity toward Jesus that would culminate in their plot to have him crucified. Nicodemus, however, saw that Jesus was a righteous man, and sought to speak with Him when he couldn't be spotted by the other Pharisees.

The Need To Be Born Again

Nicodemus begins by commending Jesus for His teachings and miracles. Jesus replies by immediately declaring that, “No one can see the kingdom of heaven unless he is born again.” He used a metaphor that Nicodemus did not understand. He assumed Jesus was being literal. His response shows he didn't know what Jesus meant by being “born again.”

Jesus clarifies Nicodemus' confusion in the next couple of verses. The new birth he was referring to wasn't physical, but spiritual. Our primary problem is spiritual, and so our spirit needs a new start, or a new birth.

The key verse in this passage is verse 7. Jesus says again, “You must be born again.” The you is plural and refers to all of us. It even includes people like Nicodemus, who have impressive religious resumes, or people who think they are good enough to deserve heaven on their own. Being born again is what we all must do if we are to see the kingdom of God and spend eternity with Him.

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

In this text, we have a detailed account of Jesus sharing the gospel. He's having a conversation with a man who possesses an impressive religious resume. Despite the man's credentials, Jesus tells him that in order to enter the kingdom of God, he must be born again. No one is beyond the need of Jesus forgiveness. We all need a new spiritual rebirth.

We want to hear from you! Please send your feedback on this study to cru.comm@uscm.org.

The Spirit: The Means By Which We Are Born Again

In verse 8, Jesus uses another difficult analogy. He says, “The wind blows where 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.” He is showing us that God (the Spirit) is as uncontrollable and unpredictable as the wind. He is the one who, in His time, produces new life.

The Son: The Reason We Can Be Born Again

In verse 14, Jesus makes the radical claim that faith in Him is the key to experiencing this new life. He uses another illustration, this one from the Old Testament. In Numbers 21, Moses is leading the Israelites through the wilderness. The people rebelled and complained, so God sent poisonous snakes among them, and many of the Israelites died. God showed them the consequence of sin, and He wanted to teach them about His power to forgive and heal. So He instructed Moses to make a bronze snake, and place it on a pole where all the people could see it. When anyone who had been bitten would look at the snake, trusting God, he would be healed. (Incidentally, this is why hospitals and ambulances use the image of a snake wrapped around a pole to symbolize healing.)

Jesus claimed He was like the bronze snake. He would be lifted up (on the cross) like the snake. When anyone would look to Him, they would be healed, and receive eternal life.

How We Receive This New Birth

Then, still with the snake image in mind, Jesus uttered His most quoted promise: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

That verse summarizes the essence of the gospel. In that brief statement, Jesus identifies the two possible destinies all of us face—perishing and eternal life. Second, He describes God’s solution to our problem—His Son. Third, He declares our need to believe in Him in order to receive eternal life. Finally, He reveals God’s love, His motive for going to the cross on our behalf.

There are two main ideas that you want to communicate through this study: 1) anyone can experience new birth and have eternal life by believing in Jesus, and 2) everyone must place their faith in Christ and be born again, even people who are good or religious. Everyone needs what only Jesus can offer.

This study is accompanied by an article. Take the time to read it over before the study. Hand it out to the group at the end of the study and have them read it this week.

WHAT IF THERE'S A PROBLEM?

In John 3:5, Jesus says that a person can't enter the kingdom of God without being born of “water and Spirit.” Some have said the water means Christian baptism, while others have seen a reference to John's baptism. Both are unlikely. In the Old Testament, water and Spirit were common symbols for cleansing, and for the New Covenant. This is what is in view here, and why Jesus is surprised that an expert in the Scripture would not know what He is talking about.

WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

You may have people in your group who need to trust Christ themselves. If so, take some time to explain the gospel. You may want to share “The Four Spiritual Laws,” or “Would You Like to Know God Personally?” with individuals either during the study or privately afterwards.

The second application of this study is to teach your group to share the gospel. The last question invites the group to think through how they would summarize the gospel. After everyone has had a chance to do this exercise, have a few people share what they wrote. Then give each member a copy of “The Four Spiritual Laws” or “Would You Like to Know God Personally?” Briefly walk them through the booklet.

You might ask the group to think of one or two people they could simply give the booklet to and ask them to read it over. Consider taking your group members with you to share the gospel with someone.

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.”

WHAT ARE THE ANSWERS?

1. The Pharisees were a group of religious leaders who were often at odds with Jesus. They were often legalistic and felt threatened by Jesus' influence.
2. He wanted to speak to Jesus privately without drawing the attention of his peers who would likely disapprove.
3. Jesus uses that phrase to describe the new life the Spirit begins in us when we receive Christ.
4. Allow the group to discuss.
5. Allow time for the group to look up the verses.
6. People often misunderstood Jesus, and failed to see the spiritual message. In John's gospel, it is those to whom the Father reveals it, that are able to discern its true meaning and respond.
7. Allow the group time to look up the verse and summarize.
8. Just as the wind is uncontrollable and unpredictable, so is the Spirit of God. He works how He pleases to produce new life.
9. Perishing, and eternal life.
10. Gave His son.
11. See notes above and read Numbers 21.
12. Because He loves us. Believe in Jesus.
13. Allow the group to write out a brief summary of the gospel and have a few people share what they wrote.