

THE GOSPEL OF

JOHN

JESUS AND
NICODEMUS

STUDENT LESSON

INTRODUCTION

Everyone loves movies. I've seen so many movies that I've lost count! Hours upon hours, days upon days. If I were shown a definite number of how long I've sat in front of a screen watching movies, I would either be very embarrassed or incredibly impressed. Oh, and don't get me started on video games, too. We all listen, watch, play, and read so many stories nowadays that sometimes we run out of new things to consume! We might think *I don't want to watch that* or *I don't know if it's good*. So, what do you do when you're indecisive? You pick up a movie that you've seen A BILLION times. In my house, that movie is *Napoleon Dynamite*. If you guys haven't seen *Napoleon Dynamite*, first off you have to—it's amazing—and second, let me describe it for you. It follows the day-to-day life of a high school student in rural Idaho. The dialogue is incredibly natural as if these are just normal people having normal conversations. For first-time viewers, the story may seem boring or nonsensical. However, the appeal of the film comes in concurrent viewings. After multiple watches, you start to make sense of the plot and appreciate the dry humor that makes *Napoleon Dynamite* so special.

My family tries their best to recite just about the whole script, from the opening credits that make us want to eat, to the ending credits scene that makes us wonder what will happen next to this strange community. We say we memorized the whole movie, but we end up just kinda mumbling the whole time and talking loudly on the parts we know. Your family might have a movie that's special to them, too.

Our passage this week is the *Napoleon Dynamite* of scripture.... Well, out of context that'd be a bit odd. But with our passage containing possibly the most quoted verse in scripture, I hope you get what I mean. *Napoleon Dynamite* is a comedy all the way through. The whole thing is filled with jokes and bits that are completely hilarious and memorable. Despite this, my family still can't remember all of it. Like *Napoleon Dynamite*, the Bible is full of great quotable lines (although for *slightly* different reasons), and we memorize our favorites and mumble through the rest. Like *Napoleon Dynamite*, the Bible has details that we don't notice the first time around. I hope that, throughout this week, you'll learn more about this scene from the Bible: the story of Nicodemus and his meeting with Jesus at night.

OPEN IT

1. What are some of your favorite rivalries in movie or TV history?

READ IT

John 3:1–21

EXPLORE IT

2. When did Nicodemus visit Jesus?
3. What are some requirements for entering the kingdom of God? (You can use Jesus' imagery as a starting point.)
4. What are some of the teachings of Jesus that Nicodemus did not understand?
5. How do we receive eternal life with Him?
6. What are some differences between those who believe and those who don't, as listed in verses 18–21?

Daily Devotions

Day 2 — Today's Theme: Who Was Nicodemus?

Read John 3:1–15.

What's the Nicodemus with Nicodemus?

The Pharisees were a sect of the Jewish faith. Back when the Old Testament was hot off the press, the Jewish faith split into two sections. Think of it like how there are different branches of Christianity, too, like Protestant and Catholic. Both worship the same God but they might have slightly different practices, translations, or even interpretations of the same scriptures. The first evidence of the Jewish faith dividing is shown after the Jewish people settled in Judea after being held in Babylon. There was the Zadikim, who only followed what was written in the Law of Moses, and the Chasidim, who focused on traditions of elders in addition to the Law. Both split further into different versions as well. From the Chasidim came the Pharisees. The Pharisees separated themselves from normal life in order to completely saturate themselves with scripture and religious rituals. Similar to what we would think of as monks, they lived, ate, and breathed the Old Testament. Of the many roles in the Pharisees, Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin are kinda like the top dogs of the Pharisee sect, and the Pharisees are supposed to hate Christians, so it's a pretty big deal that Nicodemus spoke to Jesus. Nicodemus was curious about Jesus and wanted to hear what He had to say. Nicodemus is placed in the Bible to show one example of a Pharisee, a high-ranking Pharisee at that, who considered converting to Christianity. However, due to a variety of factors, (that you can list below), Nicodemus was on the fence.¹

- 7. Why do you think Nicodemus and the rest of the Pharisees had a hard time believing that Jesus is the Savior?**

- 8. Think of some people in your life who refuse Christ. What might make it difficult for people today to believe that Jesus is the Savior? What are some ways you can help to address that?**

- 9. More specifically, do you know anyone like Nicodemus—someone who knows of Jesus but has not placed their trust in Him? How could you encourage them?**

¹ Pharisees history from <https://www.preceptaustin.org/john-3-commentary>

Day 2 — Today's Theme: What Does it Mean to be "Born Again"?

You mean, like, get back in my mom's belly and get back out again?

Being born again is a topic addressed quite a few times in the Bible. Being born again means that you "were spiritually dead, and now you've been made alive to God." Got it? Understand it completely? Uhhh-huh. Do you *actually* know what it means to be born again? Let's break down that definition! First, when someone is "spiritually dead," it means that they are separated from God. Most of us forget this part, but it's an entire half of the definition of being born again. Only with our spiritual death can we truly appreciate God's love.

We can use the term spiritually dead to describe all those who do not believe. Spiritually dead people do not yet trust God or what the Word says about Him. The first spiritual death can be found in Genesis when God warned Adam about eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God said, "*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*"² So, Adam ate from the tree and died, right? YES! But not physically. He died in a different way—spiritually—and would later die physically. Adam did not fully trust in what the Lord said.

From that point on, it was entirely up to man to make sacrifices to God to temporarily appease Him for their sins. Their sins were not forgiven yet. The forgiveness wouldn't come for at least a couple thousand years when a certain Someone came along and made the ultimate sacrifice. That certain Someone is the guy we all know and love, Jesus Christ. With the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus, who is fully God and fully man and free from sin, we are forgiven of all our sins, past, present, and future. Once we believe that, we are made alive to God, the second half of our definition. Being made alive to God means that we have eternal life with God. We can live life free of sin knowing that we are forgiven in the eyes of God.

10. In your own words, what does it mean to be born again? If you have been born again, what are some evidence you've seen in your life that tell you that you've experienced change?

11. What does Jesus mean in verse 8? Have you witnessed anything like this in your life?

John 3:8 "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."

12. Can you recall a time in your life before you put your trust in Jesus? Were there any reasons why you may have delayed putting your faith in Him?

² Genesis 2:17

Day 3 — Today's Theme: Jesus References the Old Testament

Read John 2:3.

It's all an allusion

During the events of Numbers, the people of Israel were still on the way to The Promised Land under the direction of Moses. The people of Israel were ungrateful for the food that the Lord provided. So, they complained. The people whined, *"Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"* So what did God do? *"The Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died."* People began to freak out and begged for forgiveness from Moses. So Moses prayed for direction. The Lord instructed Moses to *"Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live."* All they had to do was look at the pole and they would be cured of the venom the snakes infected them with. So the people did, and the Bible says anyone who looked at it was cured. Amazing, right? This pole with snakes on it is exactly what Jesus is referring to in the verses. John 3:14 and 15 state: *"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."* The snakes were sent because the people sinned, the venom represents the consequences of our sins, and the bronze snake represents the forgiveness we receive from God.³

13. Now that you know about the story in Numbers and how Jesus refers to it, what are some ways you can compare Jesus to the snake and pole Moses uses?

14. How can we use this allusion to share God's Word with our friends that don't know Him?

³ Numbers 21:4-9

Day 4 — Today's Theme: The Dark vs. The Light

You don't know the power of the Dark Side

Take a look at John 3:16. Yes, I'm pretty sure you know it by heart. However, take a minute to look at the rest of that paragraph. Pay attention to the symbolism of light and dark here.

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. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: **Light** has come into the world, but people loved **darkness** instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the **light**, and will not come into the **light** for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the **light**, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God."

15. What is Jesus talking about in these verses? What does He mean when He talks about Light and Dark?

16. Nicodemus visits Jesus at night. What connection might this have to this section?

17. What do you think it looks like practically for someone to stay in the dark that Jesus is talking about?

Think about these observations Jesus makes about those who live in the light and those who live in the dark. Consider the consequences Jesus warns us of as you pray and ask God to assist you in living a life in the light. You won't be perfect, but with your faith and trust in God, you can live in the light.

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