**1. Motivate**

When have you had big plans only to have them unexpectedly change?

* outdoor graduation planned, had to move indoors for rain
* trip to Disney World, canceled when Covid hit
* road trip planned, car died two days before, had to rent a car
* bride backed out of the wedding at last moment
* couldn’t get a reservation for the party, all venues already booked
* got sick the day before the new job started
* flight was cancelled two days before our trip, had to scramble to get new reservations

**2. Transition**

An old Jewish proverb says, “We make plans and God laughs.”

* When we place our trust in Jesus, God’s Holy Spirit brings us into a new life
* God’s plans shape and mold us into His plans.

**3. Bible Study**

A video introduction to the lesson is available. View it at <https://watch.liberty.edu/media/t/1_t0uj3uxz> If you have no wi-fi where you teach, best to download to your computer from <https://tinyurl.com/yw6he5t5>

3.1 Enter the Kingdom of God

Listen for a surprising reply.

John 3:1-3 (NIV) Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 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." 3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

Note facts about Nicodemus in verse 1.

* he is a Pharisee
* member of the Jewish ruling council
* came to Jesus at night

What might be some reasons that he came to Jesus at night?

* afraid of what other Pharisees would think or say
* maybe a busy man, only time he had
* maybe only time Jesus could be found alone

At least on surface level, whom did he acknowledge Jesus to be? List the attributes he stated about Jesus.

* calls him Rabbi, a title for a scholar
* a teacher
* has come from God
* demonstrated by miracles
* someone who came from God

Rather than respond to Nicodemus’s compliments, note the assertions Jesus made.

* speaks to the issue of the kingdom/rule of God
* says you cannot experience the kingdom of God, the rule of God without being “born again”

Why do you think He ignored the compliments and made His statements about “born again”?

* wants to get to the Truth right away
* didn’t want to “beat around the bush”
* wants to use a physical example to teach a spiritual truth
* captures Nicodemus’ attention
* helps communicate that a believer has a brand new start on life … sins forgiven

Why would such a statement be a challenge to Nicodemus’ thinking, and indeed, all Pharisees?

* their culture thought in literal or concrete terms
* to them, “born” had to do with the physical birth process
* Nicodemus seemed to think of the absurd concept of being physically born a second time, even though you were already a fully grown adult

Why are spiritual truths often hard to understand?

* in our western culture we are used to thinking in scientific or rational terms
* when something is outside the physical realm that is scientifically demonstratable, we can easily reject it
* what Jesus did was outside the natural realm, supernatural
* what God accomplished in Jesus’ death and resurrection is supernatural, spiritual in nature
* the concepts of heaven, hell, spiritual beings such as angels and Satan are often relegated to the same category as mythical Greek or Roman deities

What are a some spiritual truths that you struggle to understand?

* the Trinity
* how Jesus here on earth was 100% human and 100% God
* how the Bible is and contains such a powerful message that changes people’s lives
* why and how God’s Holy Spirit lives in my heart and mind

3.2 New Birth by the Spirit

Listen for further explanation about “born again”.

John 3:4-8 (NIV) "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!" 5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 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."

What are options for understanding that a man be born of water and of the Spirit? What did Jesus mean?

* born of water, born of flesh, speaks of physical birthing process
* the mother’s “water breaks”
* physical birth when the baby leaves the mother’s body to begin its own separate life
* Spiritual birth speaks of beginning a new spiritual life
* we are considered dead (spiritually separated from God) in our sins
* Jesus makes us spiritually alive, united with God
* gives us new life, new relationship to “God

Note the illustration from nature used to convey a spiritual truth … He compares the concept of God’s Spirit to the wind.

What are some characteristics of wind listed by the passage?

* you cannot see wind
* you can hear its effects blowing through trees or wind chimes
* but you can feel it and see its effects – from a cooling gentle breeze to a powerful force of nature (demonstrated by weather reporters in hurricanes)

How do these characteristics of wind describe the work of the Holy Spirit?

* God’s Spirit is sovereign, does as He pleases
* we cannot know His source, His end … we do see the results of His work
* we can see changed lives … in our own lives, in the lives of others

Why do you think the Holy Spirit is a more effective means of changing a person’s life than methods such as counselling, support groups, hypnotism or will power?

* God’s Spirit changes you from the inside
* God changes your motivation
* He is with you all the time, a psychologist is only with you during a session
* God knows what you are really like, you can fool a psychologist
* will power efforts are only as good as the strength of our will … it may be making the wrong decisions

3.3 Trust in Jesus for A New Birth

Listen for a reference to an Old Testament story.

John 3:14-17 (NIV) Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 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.

Recall the “snake event” in Numbers 21:4 – 9.

* the people suffering from snake bites had merely to look at the snake image on the pole
* John here says that this was a symbolic event that looked forward to Jesus being “lifted up” on a cross

⇨ Note that in *both* situations, it was God’s purpose to *save* … *not* to condemn

How does the historical illustration support Jesus’s message to Nicodemus?

* we are dying spiritually, all we must do to be rescued spiritually is look to Jesus in faith
* Jesus offers a new life, a new relationship with God … just believe in His offer of forgiveness

Why do you think John 3:16 is one of the favorite verses of the Bible?

* it is the Gospel in a nutshell
* it so succinctly summarizes what God has done and how to receive it
* it describes so effectively God’s love and its availability

Note the verse in the Amplified Bible*. “For God so [greatly] loved and dearly prized the world, that He [even] gave His [One and] only begotten Son, so that whoever* ***believes and trusts in Him****[as Savior] shall not perish, but have eternal life.”*

The key phrase in this verse that describes our response to what God has made possible in Jesus is “believes and trusts in Him.” Consider the meaning of that phrase

* receive personally what Jesus said as “truth for me”
* believe what God says – about my spiritual need, about His solution to the problem
* believe in His love, His power, His authority to whom I surrender

How has trusting Jesus changed your life?

* peace and joy
* God’s presence – reassuring, guiding, encouraging, empowering
* Holy Spirit works through us to produce the Fruit of the Spirit
* gives us spiritual gifts, abilities
* Jesus is my shepherd

Use the last page as a handout so your learners can take home the application points of this week’s lesson.

Application

Think.

* Evaluate yourself and your relationship with God by asking this simple question: Am I trying to earn God’s favor and salvation?
* If necessary, explore the meaning of grace.

Decide.

* If you’ve concluded that you’ve tried to earn salvation, make the decision today to trust in Jesus and the Holy Spirit’s power to forgive and save you.
* Tell Jesus that you surrender your life to Him and trust Him as Lord and Savior.

Act.

* Speak to a trusted believer or a pastor about your decision.
* Join a local body of believers so you can live out your faith biblically

Fix the Story

Several words in the Bible story below are incorrect. Some are a close spelling, others are simply the wrong word. All the correct words are listed alphabetically on the right. Cross out the incorrect word(s) and write the correct words above them. Look up the story in John 3 if you need help. There might be some words in the list you don’t need. Editing help and other interesting activities are at <https://tinyurl.com/yw6he5t5>

again

baby

baby

believe

Damascus

die

Heaven

kingdom

live

loved

Nicodemus

old

save

sea

seen

too

water

People often ask, “How can I get to Jerusalem?” The Bible tells how Moses asked this of Jesus. Nicodemus went to talk to Jesus. I hope you are from God. I have scene you do miracles. “ Jesus told hymn, “Unless a person is born three times, he cannot see God’s palace.” Nicodemus didn’t understand. “How can I become a stranger again and be born? I am too young.” he said. Jesus said, “You must be born of wine and the Spirit.” God enjoyed everyone so much, He sent His Son from heaven to see them. When you believe this, you will run forever.” Finally, Nicodemus understood. Just like a teenager grows, Nicodemus’ love for Jesus grew two.

Art by Richard Gunther