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Conversations with Jesus

Lisa Scheffler, author

Week 2 | John 3:1–15

## Introduction

Our central passage for the week comes from the Gospel of John. It is where we get the idea of being “born again.” The account of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus gives us a clear picture of what Jesus’ birth means for all of humanity. As you read this story, notice how Jesus interacts with Nicodemus, and think about how this interaction shows us who Jesus is.

# Day 1

## Read

### John 3:1–2 (NIV)

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

## Study

* What do we learn about Nicodemus from these verses? John makes a point to tell us that Nicodemus comes to see Jesus at night. Why do you think that is?
* Read the [Faithlife Bible notes for John 3:1–2](https://biblia.com/books/fsb/Jn3.1) for insight into Nicodemus.

## Think about

* The religious leaders of his day had a big problem with Jesus. He didn’t act the way they thought the Messiah should act. They were offended by his teaching, and by his association with those they considered beneath them. It was as if the world’s most renowned chef visited Manhattan to host a dinner party but cooked for the homeless instead of the city’s prominent food critics.

Yet they couldn’t dismiss Jesus all together. He’d done miracles. Surely those were a significant sign. But how could this lowly carpenter from Nazareth be the anointed one of God? You can almost imagine the gears turning in their heads as they tried to figure Jesus out. So, when Nicodemus comes to see Jesus, hoping for some answers, the Pharisee takes a measured, almost conciliatory tone. He calls Jesus, “Rabbi,” a term of respect, and acknowledges the amazing things Jesus has been doing. But he’s not willing to concede more.

Have you noticed people in our day trying to figure Jesus out? Maybe they like aspects of Jesus’ teaching, but hesitate to acknowledge that he could be more than a wise teacher? Why do you think they resist? What approach can Christians take to invite them to learn more about Jesus?

## Pray

* Ask you read about Nicodemus’ encounter with Jesus this week, ask the Spirit to teach you from God’s word. Pray that you will come to a greater understanding of what it means to be “born again” and how to help others understand that as well.

## Talk about

Have a meaningful conversation about this passage with one of your CF Encouragers, your small group, or join us virtually in the Faithlife Community. (Search groups for Engage God Daily. For full instructions, [click here](https://cfhome-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/lscheffler_cfhome_org/EYNh8cUxJRxClFV-Wt6QNe0BtkK34MHJDqeHamAwxlGmbQ?e=RL3RSh).)

* As we have meaningful conversations about Jesus, we need to remember that the people we’re talking to may not have the same understanding of the terms we use to discuss our faith. People may have a different understanding of words that appear in this week’s passage such as “kingdom” and “spirit,” and no understanding of concepts like “born again.” What other “churchy” words do Christians need to be able to define clearly for those outside the faith?

# Day 2

## Read

### John 3:2–4

2He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

4“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

## Study

In his interactions with people, Jesus quickly gets to the heart of the matter. He will not allow Nicodemus and the other Pharisees to judge his actions by their manmade criteria. He won’t justify his “signs.” Jesus makes it clear that the only criteria that matters is God’s, and God is the one doing the judging. “Nicodemus claims he can ‘see’ something of who Jesus is in the miracles; Jesus insists no-one can ‘see’ the saving reign of God at all, including the display of miraculous signs, unless born again.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

N.T. Wright points out that “The Judaism that Nicodemus and Jesus both knew had a good deal to do with *being born into the right family*. What mattered was being a child of Abraham. Of course, other things mattered too, but this was basic. Now, Jesus is saying, God is starting a new family in which this ordinary birth isn’t enough. You need to be born all over again, born ‘from above’.” [[2]](#footnote-3)

## Think about

* In order for us to really understand what Jesus is saying, we need to think carefully about what is meant by both “kingdom of God” and “born again.” The kingdom of God is not a geographic location; it’s a reign. It’s the state of being under the control and dominion of God, where the life-giving power of God vanquishes sin and death. In his kingdom, God’s authority goes unchallenged, so his goodness, justice, peace, and harmony reign. Can you imagine a better existence than living in God’s presence, among his people and under his reign? No conflict or violence between people. No disease or degenerative effects of aging. No fear. No hatred. No pain. No anguish. No death.

## Pray

* As we grow in our understanding of what God is offering us through Jesus, we should find ourselves with a growing desire for others to know him too. Pray that you would be filled to overflowing with hope and gratitude — so much so that you look for opportunities to point people to Jesus.

## Talk about

* What do you notice so far about how Jesus is interacting with Nicodemus in this story? Discuss what we could learn from this encounter about having meaningful conversations.

# Day 3

## Read

### John 3:5–8

5Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ 8The 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.”

## Study

* Nicodemus not only seems to misunderstand the requirements for entering the kingdom, but the nature of the kingdom itself. “To a Jew with the background and convictions of Nicodemus, ‘to see the kingdom of God’ was to participate in the kingdom at the end of the age.”[[3]](#footnote-4) But with his arrival on earth, first John the Baptist and then Jesus himself announced that the kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:15, Matthew 10:7). God’s kingdom, in the form of his saving and transforming reign, has already been inaugurated in the person, works, and message of Jesus. [[4]](#footnote-5) Eventually the kingdom will be realized in all its fullness. But even now, it is here. This is something Nicodemus didn’t understand.

## Think about

* As a respected member of the Jewish ruling class who followed the law, Nicodemus probably thought he would be a welcome inhabitant of this kingdom. Perhaps the heavenly host would even roll out the red carpet for someone of his stature. But the Pharisee would be just as ill-suited for life in God’s kingdom as a poor, uneducated Gentile. How could any human with their proclivity toward selfishness, envy, greed, and pride live and thrive in God’s kingdom? It would be like inviting fish to live on dry land, or mammals to live in the clouds. Only a supernatural transformation could make such an existence possible. As Jesus says, flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. Earthly creatures will have to be re-born of the Spirit to live in his kingdom.

In his life on earth Jesus demonstrated what his future rule would look like. It will be characterized by compassion, justice, love, goodness, and peace. Through his death, resurrection and the coming of the Spirit, he has enabled the transformative power of the Kingdom to come into and work through the hearts of its citizens. The regeneration of God’s physical creation will happen after Christ’s second coming, but the regeneration of human hearts has already begun.

## Pray

The Spirit is moving, and like objects blown by the wind, his impact can be seen in the lives of people who trust in him. Those re-born into the family of God will more and more resemble their Father and help permeate this world with his attributes. When Christians show mercy, compassion, faithfulness, and love and when they work for justice, healing, reconciliation, and peace, they are breaking into this present age with a foretaste of future reality. And when we share the good news that the kingdom of God is at hand in the person and work of Jesus Christ and invite others to accept and live according to that news, by the Spirit’s power, we will see the kingdom grow.

Pray for the Spirit to move in our community in powerful, undeniable ways. Pray that in your words and actions, you reflect the reality of Christ’s kingdom even now, and that people will experience Christ through you.

## Talk about

* Think about people in your life who aren’t Christians. Based on the verses we looked at today, why is it important to tell them the good news of the kingdom and the new birth?
* With Nicodemus, a learned Pharisee, Jesus challenges his preconceived notions by inviting him to see the world in a new way. Discuss what we could learn from Jesus’ approach.

# Day 4

Have you given our [Pastors Pregame podcast](https://subsplash.com/christfellowship-tx/lb/ms/+hg732gk) a try? We go deeper into the sermon topic for each week. This week, we’re joined by Jimmy Miller, our special guest speaker for this Sunday and Pastor Bruce’s son. You can find it on our website, [cfhome.org/pregame](https://subsplash.com/christfellowship-tx/lb/ms/+hg732gk) or subscribe through the Apple Podcast App.

## Read

### John 3:9–12

9“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?

## Study

* Why does Jesus insist that Nicodemus should be able to accept the necessity of a new birth (verses 10–11)?
* Nicodemus shouldn’t have been so surprised by Jesus’ explanation of a spiritual rebirth. It wasn’t an idea out of nowhere. “Regeneration by the Spirit is not an uncommon theme in the OT (see Isa. 44:3; Isa. 59:21; Ezek. 11:19, 20; 36:26–27; Joel 2:28–29; Ps. 51:10), and Jesus expected the revered teacher of Israel to understand these things.”[[5]](#footnote-6)

## Think about

It’s not just the idea of new birth that Nicodemus is rejecting, it’s Jesus himself. While Nicodemus may have been willing to credit Jesus as a teacher from God who could perform miracles (3:2), he wasn’t willing to connect the dots even with Jesus holding the pencil. Commentator Colin Kruse summarizes Nicodemus’ failure this way: “At bottom, Nicodemus’s failure was not a failure of intellect but a failure to believe Jesus’ witness: *you people do not accept our testimony* (3:11)*.* The failure to believe was more reprehensible than the failure to understand, since it betrayed a fundamentally inadequate appreciation of who Jesus is.”[[6]](#footnote-7)

## Pray

Nicodemus was “Israel’s teacher.” As a member of the Jewish ruling council, he knew the Scriptures and the writings of all the Jewish rabbis — past and present. No doubt, he’d sat around with his colleagues for hours debating points of theology. Yet, even when standing in the presence of the eternal Son of God, he struggles to recognize him. At least Nicodemus is there asking questions. His fellow Pharisees had a blind spot so big that they couldn’t see the Messiah.

Pray that the Spirit would remove any blind spots in your perception that might cause you to miss God’s work in this world, or even more tragically, work against it. Pray that he would remove prejudices and give you spiritual discernment. Pray that you will not be prideful and stubborn, but humble, wise, and willing to hear and believe what the Spirit reveals.

## Talk about

* As Christians, we want to hold on to what is true, but be open to reform when needed. Discuss how we can do both.
* Have you ever changed your position on some secondary or minor issue related to your faith? Explain your process.

# Day 5

## Read

### John 3:10–15 (NIV)

10“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? 11Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. 14Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,15that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

## Study

* As the one who truly came from heaven (verse 14), Jesus is delivering the authoritative word on God’s kingdom. Jewish mystics told stories of prophets who ascended to heaven and returned to earth with revelation, but Jesus stands before Nicodemus as *the* revelation.[[7]](#footnote-8) The Messiah is literally within Nicodemus’ grasp, but he is slow to believe. So Jesus uses a well-known story from the time of Moses ([Numbers 21:4–9](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Nu21.4)) to illustrate the ultimate means by which God will offer salvation to the world. He had descended from heaven to be lifted up.
* Read the Faithlife Bible Study notes on [John 3:13–15](https://biblia.com/books/fsb/Jn3.13) for more insight.

## Think about

During his final days in Jerusalem, Jesus tells the crowd, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). From his death on the cross we can be granted eternal life. We only have to “look up” to the Savior, place our faith in him, and receive.

Jesus is also “lifted up” in that God the Father has exalted the Son, giving him full reign, so “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10–11). Jesus is King and the new birth grants us access to his Kingdom.

## Pray

Prayer is essential to having truly meaningful conversations about Jesus. As we saw this week, the new birth is an act of the Spirit. So, make prayer your biggest action step today. Pray to grow in your love for God and love for others. Write down names of people in your life who don’t believe the gospel and pray for them this week.

## Talk about

Pray together for the move of the Spirit in your life, your family, your church, and your community. Pray for Christ Fellowship’s vision. Ask the Spirit to reduce anxiety, addiction, and loneliness in our area. Pray for more and more meaningful conversations where people experience Christ in us.

1. D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 187–188. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Tom Wright, [*John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10*](https://ref.ly/logosres/evry64jn01?ref=Bible.Jn3.1-13&off=4644&ctx=+sometimes+imagine.+~The+Judaism+that+Nic) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Carson, John, 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 110–111. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Carson, *John,* 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Kruse, *John,* 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)