

Getting to know God

John 3.1-17

A respected Pharisee, Nicodemus, comes for a secret meeting with Jesus. Jesus gives him a cryptic message that no one can see God's kingdom unless they are born again. Nicodemus struggles to see beyond the literal sense of this, so Jesus explains that it is spiritual rebirth that is needed as we follow where the free-flowing Spirit leads.

Now read **John 3.1-17** see p.2 for text.

A note on the passage

Because Jesus' true home is with God in heaven, he is in the unique position of being able to speak with authority about what he sees. Nicodemus would have understood the reference to the bronze serpent as a symbol of God's provision of life. Now Jesus was explaining the new dimension: that he, the Son of Man, would also be lifted up (in his crucifixion). This would result in eternal life for all who believed in him.



Ask yourself: How might seeing an unclear reflection in a pool illustrate how we experience God? How comfortable are you with the idea of mystery?

In *The Chronicles of Narnia* by CS Lewis, the image of Jesus is portrayed by the character of Aslan the Lion. In the third book, *The Horse and His Boy*, Lewis demonstrates well the mystery and closeness of God in the actions of Aslan. Read or listen to chapter 11 of the book (there are several versions on YouTube). Pause to wonder how God has been close to you when perhaps you did not know it...and thank him.



John 3.16 is a Bible verse that we are often encouraged to memorise. Play a game to help you remember it.

Prepare 27 small identical blank cards. Write one word of John 3.16 on each card. Turn all the cards face (words) down and shuffle. In a game similar to 'pairs', take turns to turn over two cards – but instead of identical pairs, you are trying to find pairs of consecutive words from the Bible verse. If you make a correct pair, you keep it. If you don't, turn them back over. The winner is the person with the most correct pairs. At the end of the game, use all the cards to build the whole verse.

PAINT

You will need: thick white paper, a white wax crayon or small candle, diluted watercolour paints, a brush.

Explore how the image of God is sometimes clear and sometimes obscure, by doing a wax resist painting. Use your white crayon or candle to draw an image that you feel represents God, or God in your life. It will be hard to see! Now paint the paper with any colours you choose and watch the 'hidden' image reveal itself. You could do this in pairs, drawing an image for each other to paint and reveal; then talk together about what the images you each drew mean to you.

Daily Prayer

Spend some time each evening quietly reviewing your day, perhaps by thinking through each hour in turn. When did God feel close to you today? When or where did you feel far from God? Ask God to show you why that might be. Ask God to reveal times when you perhaps did not notice God's presence. Talk with God about your hopes and fears for tomorrow.

WORD CLOUD

Read John 3.5-8 then put it aside. On a sheet of paper, write words from the passage, or any that come to mind having read it. Write your most prominent thoughts using large letters, and less important ones in small text. Display the resulting word cloud where you can see and read it every day this week. If you are moved to do so, add new words. Think about the words and how their importance or prominence changes as the week progresses – can you say why?

Choose a version of the passage to read. The first is the ROOTS version for children, the second is the NRSV text which may be suitable for older children, young people and adults.

Late one night, a man called Nicodemus visited Jesus. Now Nicodemus was a Pharisee and he was an important Jewish leader. He said to Jesus, 'I know God has sent you to teach us. You couldn't perform the miracles you do if God was not with you.'

Jesus replied, 'You are right. Let me tell you this. If you want to understand God's kingdom you must be born again.'

Nicodemus looked puzzled. 'But how can anyone be born again when they have already been born? How can anyone be born if they have already grown old? I don't understand what you mean.'

Jesus answered, 'To enter God's kingdom you must be born by water and by the Spirit. A human gives life to a child, but only God's



Spirit can give life to a child of God. Everyone must be born again.'

'What do you mean? How does this happen?' Nicodemus asked.

Jesus replied, 'You are an important teacher in Israel and you don't know these things! I have told you about things here on earth and you don't believe me. So you will never believe me if I tell you about things in heaven.'

Jesus continued, 'God loved the world so much that he sent his Son into the world. He did this so that anyone who believes in him will have everlasting life. God didn't send his Son into the world to tell the world how bad it was. He sent his own Son to earth to save the world.'

John 3.1-17

Did you know?

- Pharisees were people who tried to keep every part of the Jewish law very strictly.
- A miracle is a wonderful sign or event that can only be done by God's power.

John 3.1-17 (NRSV)

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, "You must be born from above." The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

'Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

'Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.'