



That you may believe... Leaders Guide for Week 3

(Times are approximate) – start time: _____

Welcome

- By now the group should be getting familiar with one another so the welcome time can be shortened if you so desire.
 - If there are new people, be sure to introduce them and have the group introduce themselves.
- (+5 min)

Opening prayer

- As you pray, it would be good to ask the Holy Spirit to assist you in leadership as well as reveal something special to each of your group members during the discussion.
- (+1 min)

(Note to leaders: You may not be able to cover all the material in this Leaders Guide. Your primary objective is to go through all the Study Lesson questions. Also, some of the Study Lesson questions contain comments to help you lead your group. They are not meant to be the only "answers" by any means.)

Opening Comments

- Nicodemus is referred to as *“a man of the Pharisees... a member of the Jewish ruling council”*
- **About the Pharisees:** the word Pharisees means *separated ones*.
- They were a religious and political party in Palestine in New Testament times.
- The Pharisees were known for insisting that the law of God be observed as the scribes interpreted it and for their special commitment to keeping the laws of tithing and ritual purity.
- For instance, Pharisees could not eat in the home of a non-Pharisee, since they could not be sure that the food had been properly tithed and kept ritually pure.
- The Pharisees and their scribes enjoyed a good deal of popular support.
- They were always ready to criticize others for not keeping all the laws.
- Pharisees observed the Law carefully as far as appearances went, but their hearts were far from God.
- Often their motives were wrong because they wanted the praise of men.
- They looked down on “sinners” – especially people like tax collectors and prostitutes.
- Religious people need to remember that they, too, are sinners in God’s eyes, and that Christ died for everyone.
- **About the Jewish Council:** The highest Jewish ruling body in Roman times was the Sanhedrin.
- The Council, or Sanhedrin, was composed of high priests, elders, and scribes.
- This Council had the highest authority in legal, governmental, and religious matters
- It could exercise these powers as long as it did not infringe on Roman authority.
- Normally Rome confirmed and carried out death sentences passed by the Jewish Sanhedrin.
- So it is safe to think of Nicodemus as being a member of these religious leaders.
- From the fact the Nicodemus was a Pharisees and member of the Council; it is safe to say that he was an educated man.
- Apparently his head knowledge was strong but his understanding of spiritual things was lacking as Jesus challenged him.

John Leader Guide Week 3

- Jesus explained the differences between physical birth and Spiritual birth to Nicodemus.
- To be “*born of water*” represents being born physically (“relates to Nicodemus’ statement “enter a second time into mother’s womb”) but to be born again means to be *born of the Spirit*.
- Notice the capital ‘S’ for Spirit.
- When you see this in Scripture, it is always referring to the Holy Spirit.
- Just as there are two parents for physical birth, there are two parents (if you will) for Spiritual birth:
- The Word of God represents Jesus Christ (**John 1:1**) and He sends (**John 16:7**) the Spirit of God (**John 3:5**) who is the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit indwells every believer the instant they repent and surrender the essence of their life to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior (**Acts 10:43-48; Eph. 1:13-14**).
- In the last portion of this passage, Jesus deals with two dichotomies: Belief verses unbelief and perishing verses eternal life (**vss. 9-21**).
- The emphasis in **John 3:14-21** is on *believing* (some form of the root word is used 7 times), because salvation comes through faith (**Eph. 2:8-9**).
- The evidence of salvation is the witness of the Spirit within the believer (**Rom. 8:9**).
- Jesus pointed out the results of *believing* but He didn’t stop there.
- He also explained the results of *unbelief*, which is *condemnation*.
- **John 3:18**, “*Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son*”
- Condemnation’s simplest definition is: *eternal separation from God*.
- So we see the importance of this passage and the dialogue between Nicodemus and Jesus.
- Scripture doesn’t indicate whether Nicodemus believed or not, but there are a couple of passages that might give us a clue:
- Nicodemus spoke for Jesus when he was before the temple guards and the Pharisees, see **John 7:50** – (“*Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus earlier and who was one of their own number, asked, “Does our law condemn anyone without first hearing him to find out what he is doing?”*”)
- See also, **John 19:38-39** – (“*Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs*”) Did he or didn’t he?
- John leaves the narrative open regarding Nicodemus’ belief to make a point that everyone must make a decision.

(+13 min)

Discussion of the Study Lesson – (~35 min)

This week’s title: The Bringer of New Birth - **John 3:1-21**

Highlighted verse: “*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**

Day 1: Read John 3:1-21

1. Read **John 3:1-21** at least once, jotting down initial observations.
 - As in past weeks, try to get several reflections but watch your time.

(+7 min)

Day 2: Read John 3:1-13 along with Ephesians 2:1-9, Genesis 2:16-17, and Ezekiel 36:24-27

1. How do you understand born again in **3:3-8**? It has been said that Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture. Read **Ephesians 2:1-9**. How do these verses in Ephesians help us understand the need to be born again?

- According to **Ephesians 2:1-9** we all were all dead in our transgressions and our sins.
- Before being born again we were more than just spiritually sick or spiritually confused.
- We were spiritually dead.
- If we understand that we were or are dead, we see the need to be made born again (made alive).
- The Holy Spirit transitions us from having a dead spirit to being fully alive in Him.

(+5 min)

2. Nicodemus struggled to understand the need to be born again.

a) Keeping in mind that Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a member of the ruling council, why do you think he struggled with the need to be born again?

- John does not clearly answer this question.
- When we consider that Nicodemus was a religious leader it seems possible he would have struggled with the idea that he would need to be born again.
- Is it possible he would have thought his religious behavior and actions would have made him acceptable to God?
- If he did not understand he was dead he would not have seen the need to be born again.
- Today the same idea holds true.
- Many people today feel that their religion saves them, that they do not need to be born again.

(+4 min)

b) Read **Genesis 2:16-17** (and consider chapter 3 of Genesis) and read **Ezekiel 36:24-27**. As a scholar of Scripture, should Nicodemus have had a better understanding of the need to be born again?

- These passages in Genesis and Ezekiel demonstrate our need for a new heart and new spirit.

(+1 min)

Day 3: Read John 3:14-21

1. For what purpose did God send Jesus? (**John 3:16-21**)

- As an expression of God's love.
- So we may have eternal life and not perish.
- So Light would come into the darkness.

(+2 min)

2. In the beginning of chapter three John emphasizes the need to be born again. The word *believe* appears several times in **verses 15-18**. What is the relationship between being *born again* and *believing*? Why does being born again come before believing in the third chapter of John?

- It is sometimes thought that believing comes before being born again.
- But that is not what is presented in this passage.
- If we are dead we can not take any action unless God first works through the Holy Spirit (**3:5-8**).
- Being born again is the work of God.
- There is also a need for our response – to believe.
- We see in this passage both God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility.

(+4 min)

Day 4: Read John 20:31

1. Consider how **John 3:1-21** relates to John’s purpose in writing this Gospel. “...that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name” (**John 20:31**). From **John 3:1-21** what are we to believe?

- Believe in Jesus.
- Believe we have a need to be born again
- Believe God loves the world
- Believe God has provided a way for people to have eternal life and not perish

(+2 min)

2. How does **John 3:1-21** unfold the meaning of “*life in His name*”?

- Identifies the need to be born again.
- By believing one receives eternal life.
- By not believing one eternally perishes.
- Believers are living in the light, not in the darkness.

(+2 min)

Day 5: Read John 3:1-21

1. Consider **verses 3:18-21**. These verses emphasize the importance of our personal response to Jesus Christ. How would you describe your response to him? How does your response involve both belief and a change in behavior?

- The first part of question 1 is personal – be careful of time and let the Holy Spirit guide your leading!
- The second part of question 1 is:
 - First there is the response to believe.
 - Next there is the response to live in the light (not darkness) and to hate evil
 - We are saved by faith alone but faith is never alone. True believing always results in new behavior.

(+5 min)

2. When you read these verses think of family members and friends that you care about. If some of these people do not believe in Jesus what good news could you share with them?

- This may take some time – some additional questions which may be helpful – How would you begin? What would you want to include in your sharing? How might you practice sharing in a safe environment?
 - A verse you might share from this chapter is **John 3:16**
 - Be sure to pray for the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit and rely on Him more than yourself.
- (+5 min)

Closing Comments

- In closing, it might be interesting to briefly note what Jesus reveals about Himself in this passage.
- (3:2) - The religious leaders observed His wisdom and thought Him to be a Teacher from God.
- (3:3-5) – Jesus knew what Nicodemus really needed to hear.
- (3:6) – Jesus knew the difference and explained the difference between the flesh and Spirit.
- (3:11) – Jesus said He spoke from experience.
- (3:12) – Jesus knew heavenly things (which Nicodemus obviously didn't).
- (3:13) – Jesus speaks of Himself as the Son (Son is mentioned 5 times) of Man!
- (3:14-15) – He refers to Himself again as the Son of Man and that He must be lifted up.
- He refers to the Old Testament experience found in Numbers 21:9 where those who did not look up to the serpent image would die.
- This was a foreshadowing of the need for people to look up to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior in order to be saved.
- (3:16) – God gave His Son (Jesus) to save all who would believe in Him.
- (3:17) – Jesus said the world would be saved through God's Son (Jesus/Himself).
- He didn't come to judge the world (this time).
- (3:18) – Jesus said believers in the Son (Jesus) of Man would not be judged but unbelievers were already judged.
- (3:19-20) – Jesus said He is the light that came into the world.
- Unfortunately, there were those living in darkness and desiring to continue to live in darkness because they didn't want their sins to be seen.
- So we learn much about Jesus in these 21 verses!
- And there is much more to be learned from them if we would continue reading and studying them!
- John's emphasis is that God sent His Son (Jesus) into the world, that Jesus is His Son, that belief in Him is necessary to be born again, and that Jesus is the light of the world so that all who believe in Him will have eternal life.

(+4 min)

Closing Prayer

- You might touch on something someone said that brings to life these words of John.
- You might pray that if anyone in your group has not made that decision for Jesus as their Lord and Savior, that the Holy Spirit would guide/encourage them to do so.

(+1 min)