

# The Gospel of John (3:1-21)

## A House Church Outline



### 1. Praise *(Purpose: To worship God)*

- What are you thankful for this week? *(let the group's secretary write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Song Service
  - Sing a few songs of praise to God

### 2. Pray *(Purpose: To carry each others' burdens and to seek the Lord)*

- What challenges did you have this week? *(write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Go into a season of prayer

### 3. Review *(Purpose: To learn accountability)*

- Tell us how it went with what you promised to do in last week's meeting? *(e.g. Who did your share your faith with this past week? Who did you minister to? How did actioning your I WILL STATEMENT go?)*
- Where people have failed to fulfil what they said they would, do not be harsh with them but gently encourage them to try again in the coming week. Give them more support by phoning or joining them in the week.

### 4. Give *(Purpose: To be good stewards of our monies)*

- This is the time to return tithes and offerings. If done electronically, kindly ensure that you get the bank account details of your local church from your treasurer. Don't forget to complete an envelope and to send the breakdown to him/her.

### 5. Discover *(Purpose: To learn to listen to God, and be obedient to His Word)*

- **Notes for the facilitator**

- Read *Desire of Ages (DA)*, p. 167-177
- "Nicodemus held a high position of trust in the Jewish nation. He was highly educated, and possessed talents of no ordinary character, and he was an honored member of the national council. With others, he had been stirred by the teaching of Jesus. **Though rich, learned, and honored, he had been strangely attracted by the humble Nazarene.** The lessons that had fallen from the Saviour's lips had greatly impressed him, and he desired to learn more of these wonderful truths" (DA 167)
- "Since hearing Jesus, Nicodemus had anxiously studied the prophecies relating to the Messiah; and the more he searched, the stronger was his conviction that this was the One who was to come. With many others in Israel he had been greatly distressed by the profanation of the temple. **He was a witness of the scene when Jesus drove out the buyers and the sellers;** he beheld the wonderful manifestation of divine power; he saw the Saviour receiving the poor and healing the sick; he saw their looks of joy, and heard their words of praise; and **he could not doubt that Jesus of Nazareth was the Sent of God**" (DA 168).
- "**He greatly desired an interview with Jesus, but shrank from seeking Him openly. It would be too humiliating for a ruler of the Jews to acknowledge himself in sympathy with a teacher as yet so little known.** And should his visit come to the knowledge of the Sanhedrin, it would draw upon him their scorn and denunciation. He resolved upon a secret interview, excusing this on the ground that if he were to go openly, others might follow his example. Learning by special inquiry the Saviour's place of retirement in the Mount of Olives, he waited until the city was hushed in slumber, and then sought Him" (DA 168).

- Vs 2: “By speaking of Christ's rare gifts as a teacher, and also of His wonderful power to perform miracles, he hoped to pave the way for his interview. **His words were designed to express and to invite confidence; but they really expressed unbelief. He did not acknowledge Jesus to be the Messiah, but only a teacher sent from God**” (DA 168).
- “Instead of recognizing this salutation, Jesus bent His eyes upon the speaker, as if reading his very soul. In His infinite wisdom He saw before Him a seeker after truth. He knew the object of this visit, and with a desire to deepen the conviction already resting upon His listener's mind, **He came directly to the point, saying solemnly, yet kindly, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’** John 3:3, margin” (DA 168).
- “Nicodemus had come to the Lord thinking to enter into a discussion with Him, but Jesus laid bare the foundation principles of truth. **He said to Nicodemus, It is not theoretical knowledge you need so much as spiritual regeneration. You need not to have your curiosity satisfied, but to have a new heart.** You must receive a new life from above before you can appreciate heavenly things. Until this change takes place, making all things new, it will result in no saving good for you to discuss with Me My authority or My mission” (DA 171).
- “[Nicodemus] was a strict Pharisee, and prided himself on his good works. He was widely esteemed for his benevolence and his liberality in sustaining the temple service, and he felt secure of the favor of God. **He was startled at the thought of a kingdom too pure for him to see in his present state**” (DA 171).
- “The figure of the new birth, which Jesus had used, was not wholly unfamiliar to Nicodemus. Converts from heathenism to the faith of Israel were often compared to children just born. Therefore he must have perceived that the words of Christ were not to be taken in a literal sense. **But by virtue of his birth as an Israelite he regarded himself as sure of a place in the kingdom of God. He felt that he needed no change. Hence his surprise at the Saviour's words. He was irritated by their close application to himself.** The pride of the Pharisee was struggling against the honest desire of the seeker after truth. He wondered that Christ should speak to him as He did, not respecting his position as ruler in Israel” (DA 171).
- “Surprised out of his self-possession, he answered Christ in words full of irony, ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ Like many others when cutting truth is brought home to the conscience, he revealed the fact that **the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.** There is in him nothing that responds to spiritual things; for spiritual things are spiritually discerned” (DA 171).
- Vs 5: “Nicodemus knew that Christ here referred to water baptism and the renewing of the heart by the Spirit of God. He was convinced that he was in the presence of the One whom John the Baptist had foretold” (DA 171)
  - **Born of water:** Like a baby comes into the world through a medium of water in the mother's womb, so a Christian babe comes into the kingdom completely covered in water, i.e. through baptism.
  - **Born of the Spirit:** The new Christian must also be completely covered [controlled] by the Spirit. A Spirit-led lives means the person is ‘born of the Spirit’ (John 3:3-6), lives by the Spirit (Rom 8:1-17), bears the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-25) and exercises the gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:1-11) [Skip McCarty]
- Vs 6: “By nature the heart is evil, and ‘who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.’ Job 14:4. No human invention can find a remedy for the sinning soul. ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ ... He who is trying to reach heaven by his own works in keeping the law is attempting an impossibility. There is no safety for one who has merely a legal religion, a form of godliness. **The Christian's life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature.** There is a death to self and sin, and a new life

altogether. **This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit**" (DA 172).

- Vs 8: "Nicodemus was still perplexed, and Jesus used the wind to illustrate His meaning.... **The wind is heard among the branches of the trees, rustling the leaves and flowers; yet it is invisible, and no man knows whence it comes or whither it goes. So with the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart.** It can no more be explained than can the movements of the wind. A person may not be able to tell the exact time or place, or to trace all the circumstances in the process of conversion; but this does not prove him to be unconverted. **By an agency as unseen as the wind, Christ is constantly working upon the heart. Little by little, perhaps unconsciously to the receiver, impressions are made that tend to draw the soul to Christ.** These may be received through meditating upon Him, through reading the Scriptures, or through hearing the word from the living preacher. Suddenly, as the Spirit comes with more direct appeal, the soul gladly surrenders itself to Jesus. By many this is called sudden conversion; but it is the result of long wooing by the Spirit of God,—a patient, protracted process" (DA 172).
- Vs 9: How can this transformation take place?
  - "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?' Jesus asked. **Surely one entrusted with the religious instruction of the people should not be ignorant of truths so important.** His words conveyed the lesson that instead of feeling irritated over the plain words of truth, Nicodemus should have had a very humble opinion of himself, because of his spiritual ignorance. Yet Christ spoke with such solemn dignity, and both look and tone expressed such earnest love, that Nicodemus was not offended as he realized his humiliating condition" (DA 173).
- Vs 12: **"If Nicodemus could not receive Christ's teaching, illustrating the work of grace upon the heart, how could he comprehend the nature of His glorious heavenly kingdom?** Not discerning the nature of Christ's work on earth, he could not understand His work in heaven" (DA 173).
- **"Nicodemus had read these scriptures with a clouded mind; but he now began to comprehend their meaning.** He saw that the most rigid obedience to the mere letter of the law as applied to the outward life could entitle no man to enter the kingdom of heaven. **In the estimation of men, his life had been just and honorable; but in the presence of Christ he felt that his heart was unclean, and his life unholy"** (DA 174).
- Vs 14: "Nicodemus was being drawn to Christ. As the Saviour explained to him concerning the new birth, he longed to have this change wrought in himself. By what means could it be accomplished? Jesus answered the unspoken question: 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.'" (DA 174).
- Vs 14: Comparison between the raised bronze snake (Num. 21:4-9) and Christ on the cross (*drawn from Jon Paulien [The Abundant Life Bible Amplifier: John], Matthew Henry Bible Commentary, The Desire of Ages*):
  - The image was made in the likeness of the destroying serpents, so Christ was made in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3)
  - The bronze snake was without venom, so Christ was without sin (2 Cor. 5:21)
  - In both cases the remedy was conspicuously displayed
  - The cure reminded them of the plague, so in Christ, sin is set before us most fiery and formidable
  - In both cases it was by the look of faith that a cure could be wrought
  - In both cases the remedy was a stumbling block to human reason
  - In both bases the consequences of disobedience were the same

- Vs 14: “Those who had been bitten by the serpents might have delayed to look. They might have questioned how there could be efficacy in that brazen symbol. **They might have demanded a scientific explanation. But no explanation was given. They must accept the word of God to them through Moses. To refuse to look was to perish**” (DA 175).
- “**Not through controversy and discussion is the soul enlightened.** We must look and live. **Nicodemus received the lesson, and carried it with him.** He searched the Scriptures in a new way, not for the discussion of a theory, but in order to receive life for the soul. He began to see the kingdom of heaven as he submitted himself to the leading of the Holy Spirit” (DA 175)
- “How, then, are we to be saved? ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,’ so the Son of man has been lifted up, and everyone who has been deceived and bitten by the serpent may look and live. ‘Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.’ John 1:29. **The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour.** Then the Spirit of God through faith produces a new life in the soul. The thoughts and desires are brought into obedience to the will of Christ. The heart, the mind, are created anew in the image of Him who works in us to subdue all things to Himself. Then the law of God is written in the mind and heart, and we can say with Christ, “I delight to do Thy will, O my God.” Psalm 40:8” (DA 175).
- “For a time Nicodemus did not publicly acknowledge Christ, but he watched His life, and pondered His teachings. In the Sanhedrin council he repeatedly thwarted the schemes of the priests to destroy Him. When at last Jesus was lifted up on the cross, Nicodemus remembered the teaching upon Olivet: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” The light from that secret interview illumined the cross upon Calvary, and Nicodemus saw in Jesus the world's Redeemer. **After the Lord's ascension, when the disciples were scattered by persecution, Nicodemus came boldly to the front. He employed his wealth in sustaining the infant church that the Jews had expected to be blotted out at the death of Christ. In the time of peril he who had been so cautious and questioning was firm as a rock, encouraging the faith of the disciples, and furnishing means to carry forward the work of the gospel. He was scorned and persecuted by those who had paid him reverence in other days. He became poor in this world's goods; yet he faltered not in the faith which had its beginning in that night conference with Jesus**” (DA 177).
- Vs 19: “Here John explains how condemnation comes upon men. It is not because God has willed that some men be lost, but because some men have preferred darkness to light. The sentence is not arbitrary, but the inevitable result of the law that ‘the wages of sin is death’ (Rom. 6:23). Every man’s fate is determined by his own reaction to the light. **While men remain unenlightened there is no condemnation** (Ps. 87:4, 6; Eze. 3:18–21; 18:2–32; 33:12–20; Luke 23:34; John 15:22; Rom. 7:7, 9; 1 Tim. 1:13), **but when the light of truth shines into their hearts ‘they have no cloke for their sin’** (John 15:22). Men who are unwilling to give up their evil ways prefer darkness, and in so doing blind themselves to the light (2 Cor. 4:4). On the other hand, Jesus has promised that those who choose to follow Him ‘shall not walk in darkness’ (John 8:12) and that no one shall be able to “pluck” them out of His hand (ch. 10:28)” – *SDA Bible Commentary*
- *Read John 3:1-21. Preferably let one person read it. Let everyone then put down their Bibles and get the group to reconstruct the passage in their own words. This teaches the group to be careful in quotation Scripture correctly and to use it as the basis of their discussions.*

- **Discussion Questions** (*use only a few*). *The notes in italics after some of the questions below are for the facilitator, and not to be read out to the group.*
    - What can we learn about the status and character of Nicodemus from this passage?
    - Nicodemus sought an interview with Jesus **at night** because he was afraid that an open interview might affect his reputation and position. What are some reasons why Christians too may want to hide their faith? Give examples of such situations? (*ask one question at a time*)
    - According to the passage, how does a person become born again?
    - What do you think are some of the evidences of being born again?
    - What do you think Jesus meant by being ‘born of water and the Spirit’? (vs 5)
    - What do you think Jesus was trying to say in vs 6?
    - What point do you think Jesus was making by comparing the work of the Spirit to wind? (vs 8)
    - Why is it particularly important for teachers and leaders to understand and experience the ‘fundamentals of conversion and salvation’ themselves? (vs 10)
    - What is the connection between the uplifted snake (Num. 21:4-9) and the uplifted Christ?
    - Go through John 3:16 phrase by phrase, and discuss why this verse so powerfully captures the gospel.
    - Nicodemus hid Christ’s words in his heart for 3 years, where it apparently bore little fruit. It was only at the Saviour’s death that he boldly came out as a follower of Jesus. What does this tell us about the pace at which different people ‘ripen’? What cautions are there for us in dealing with various people? (*ask one question at a time*)
    - What valuable lessons can be learned in doing personal ministry for people? What are some of the benefits in working with people one-on-one? (*ask one question at a time*)
    - What does vs 18-19 say about how people are condemned? What does this tell us about God? (*ask one question at a time*)
  - **Application Questions** (*select a few depending on your time. One has to be the I WILL STATEMENT*)
    - Share your ‘born again’ experience with the group.
    - How would you describe what it means to be born again to someone?
    - Identify one person you would like to share your conversion experience with this week.
    - I WILL STATEMENT: Formulate an I will statement in response to what you have discovered in the Word. Let the group’s secretary also record these in an A4 notebook. Ensure that everyone gets a chance to give their I WILL STATEMENT. You have to be specific. E.g. “I plan to share Jesus with my ‘born again’ experience this week with a friend that I gym with.”
- 6. Share** (*Purpose: To be witnesses of our faith*)
- Do you have anyone you could share today’s lesson with this week? *Be specific.*
- 7. Closing prayer**