

## STUDY GUIDE

**NEW VISION**  
THE MIDDLE  
JESUS AND  
NICODEMUS  
JOHN 3:1-21  
09/10/2017



# NEW VISION

## MAIN POINT

True life change does not begin by simply changing our circumstances or our behaviors, but with a heart changed by Jesus Christ through faith in Him.

## INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**How do you typically react to change? Do you enjoy change or does it make you nervous? What does this say about your personality?**

**What is the biggest life change you've been through recently? What do you remember most about that experience?**

**For Christians, our conversion (when we entered into a personal relationship with Jesus through belief in Him as Savior and Lord) is the biggest change that has taken place in our lives. What are some of the ways you were changed when you met Christ?**

An honest assessment of human nature shows that we have a notoriously fickle relationship with change. Sometimes we crave it; sometimes we loathe it. Regardless of our preferences towards change in general, it is an essential part of becoming and growing as a Christian. This study of John 3:1-21 shows us that real change begins and ends with faith in Jesus.

## READ AND REBUILD THE STORY READ JOHN 3:1-21

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER TELL THE STORY (LUKE 5:27-32) DO AS BEST YOU CAN, DO NOT STOP AND TEACH, TRY NOT TO MAKE POINTS (COMMENTARY), JUST TELL THE STORY.**

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**REBUILD THE STORY AS A GROUP: CHRONOLOGICALLY REBUILD THE STORY FROM MEMORY. ASK QUESTIONS IF NECESSARY. LIKE – "WHAT HAPPENED FIRST?", "WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?", "DID WE LEAVE OUT ANYTHING?" FINALLY, HAVE PARTICIPANTS LOOK AT THEIR BIBLES AND SEE IF ANYTHING WAS ADDED OR LEFT OUT OF THE STORY AS THEY GO THROUGH IT ONE MORE TIME**

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**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 3:1-15.**

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**What do we learn about Nicodemus in these verses? What was missing in his life, according to Jesus (v. 3)?**

**What do you believe Jesus meant about having to be born again to see the kingdom of God?**

To be “born again” means to experience a birth from above. Jesus was talking about salvation. Salvation is the term for the Holy Spirit’s work in the life of an individual to bring a person into the family of God. This happens when a person expresses belief in Jesus’ death and resurrection and accepts His role as Savior and Lord. Only those who believe in Jesus can be saved from sin (all the ways we disobey God) and enjoy eternal life with Him. Before we’re born again, we may have a clue that something isn’t right, and our lives have to change.

**Read Genesis 3:22-23, from the story of the fall of man and when sin first entered the world. What consequences did Adam and Eve face as a result of their sin?**

**What does it mean to be separated from something? Why do you think separation from God was the punishment for the first sin? How does this separation impact us today?**

**How have you seen sin distort or twist people’s identities, including your own? Spend a few minutes discussing the impact of sin in our world, creation, and your personal life.**

We have all rebelled against God. It started with Adam and Eve (the first humans) in the garden of Eden, when they doubted God’s goodness. And we’ve continued the streak of thinking our ways are better ever since. Thank God that our spiritual story does not stop with this dark picture of sin. From the beginning of creation, God had a plan to save us by His great grace. The term “grace” refers to the good favor God shows to us by offering us a relationship with Him, through Jesus, even though we are sinful people by nature and don’t deserve it. That grace is the foundation of real life change.

**HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 3:16-18.**

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**What does it mean to “believe” in Jesus? Why is this so important?**

**How does Nicodemus’s story help us understand the type of real life change God wants to do in our lives?**

God’s love made salvation available to the whole world through the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus, who paid the price for our sins. But salvation comes only to those who believe in Christ and His death on the cross (3:18). When we believe in Him, we are restored in our relationship with God, no longer separated from Him or under His judgment. The result of this restoration is eternal life, meaning that after our physical death, we will live forever in the presence of God. John has been writing about changed lives—the message of Jesus to Nicodemus. Salvation is the work of God internally through the Holy Spirit, which demonstrates itself outwardly in godly living.

**HAVE A FINAL VOLUNTEER READ JOHN 3:19-21.**

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**According to Jesus’ words in verses 19-21, how will we see and recognize belief?**

**Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17. What characterized Paul’s life before he placed his faith, or trust, in Christ (v. 13)? What changed in Paul’s life? What role did Jesus play in Paul’s life change?**

## APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**General Questions** to ask after each story. These questions may lead to follow up questions that you ask as you dig deeper into the groups/individuals response to the initial questions.

Where do you see yourself in this story?

What do we learn about Jesus/God in this story?

What do we learn about man in this story?

What is Jesus teaching you personally through this story?

What application/adjustment do you need to make in your life due to the truth discovered in this story?

### Extra Questions:

**When God shows His power in a person's life by saving him or her, what changes?**

**What things cause you to not trust in God's ability to bring about change in your life?**

**What would you say to people who believe God's grace can't provide forgiveness for their sins? Do you ever feel that way yourself?**

## PRAY

Thank God for the simple truths of His gospel message—that Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins and restore us to God—and the confidence we can have in our salvation. Pray that in the midst of your roles that encompass family, work, and social contacts, you will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to spread the good news of the gospel by living in obedience to God and by sharing the gospel with others.

## COMMENTARY

### JOHN 3:1-21

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3:1-2. Nicodemus shows up only in John's Gospel. The text does not tell us Nicodemus's motive for coming to Jesus. When Nicodemus called Jesus "Rabbi," he (a member of the Jewish ruling council) placed himself in the role of student. The conversation that unfolded led him to eternal life with God.

3:3-4. If we view these first fifteen verses of chapter 3 as a series of questions and answers, the first question might look like this: "Are you here to bring in the kingdom?" And Jesus' first answer is, "You will never see the kingdom without being born again." The "kingdom" refers to God's family and rule, both on earth today and eternally in heaven. Jesus got right to the heart of the problem. He told the teacher he must be "born again," a word which appears again in verses 7 and 31. Unless God changes our hearts His way, from the inside out, any discussion of the kingdom is useless. Now the second question surfaces: "How can a man be born when he is old?" The physical world is often unexplainable just like the spiritual world, and Jesus later used the wind as an example to make that point. A person cannot respond to spiritual truth in natural ways.

3:5-7. The second answer must have hit Nicodemus right between the eyes: "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit." Verse 3 deals with the way of the new birth, and verse 5 talks about the process. Being "born of the Spirit" means the change provided at the time of faith in Christ.

3:8. In this fascinating conversation, Jesus moves from the metaphor of birth to that of a breeze. Human effort can only produce human results (John 1:13), but the "pneuma"—the Spirit—is a different story. This is a spiritual mystery known only to God and difficult to explain in terms humans can grasp. God brings the breeze when and where He chooses. Life change comes from the presence of the Holy Spirit.

3:16. Eternal life comes not because of anything we do. Salvation comes as a free gift when we believe what God has said. "Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Four times in three verses (vv. 16-18) Jesus uses variations of the word "believe," perhaps the most important key word in John's Gospel. Jesus classified the entire human race into two groups—those who believe and are not condemned, and those who do not believe and are condemned already. The gospel begins with God's love, continues through the cross and the empty tomb, and results in eternal life for those who believe. The verb "perish" speaks of eternal death in contrast to eternal life. It represents the opposite of preservation, since death is the opposite of life. Those who refuse God's gift are alienated from Him without hope for both the present and the future.

3:17-18. Did all this happen for judgment and condemnation? No. That was never God's purpose. Notice how central Jesus is to the passage. Verse 17 talks about God's saving the world through Him. Every human being has a choice—eternal life or eternal death. And as the Bible describes it, to perish is not to cease to exist, but to experience utter failure, futility, and loss—an eternity without God.

3:19-21. Now we see the verdict. People reject Christ because of evil deeds and because they hate the light. God does not label their deeds evil because they love darkness; they love darkness because that is their very nature. What possible excuses keep people from Christ? This passage tells us they refuse light because it shows up the darkness in their own lives. Believers possess eternal life, but unbelievers do not. Believers are not condemned, but unbelievers are condemned already. Believers live in the light, while unbelievers live in the darkness. The last phrase of this paragraph should encourage all of us. Those who practice the truth, who continuously live in the light of God's Spirit, demonstrate that their righteousness—the right standing we have before God once our sins are forgiven—has been brought about by God.