Matthew, Mark and Luke are the most similar of the four Gospels. John, while telling the same basic Jesus Story, tells it in a different way. He includes a lot of material not found in the other three. This week’s story is one example. The story of Nicodemus is found only in John.

As you read this story, which includes arguably the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16, use the following background material to aid your understanding:

1. In v.1, John tells us that Nicodemus was a Pharisee. Unlike most of the other appearances of the Pharisees in the Gospels, here Nicodemus seems genuinely curious about Jesus. He isn’t “out to get” Jesus. Nicodemus appears two other times in John’s Gospel. Be sure to look at 7:45-52 and 19:38-42 to discover more about this man. These passages imply that Nicodemus became a follower of Jesus.

2. Nicodemus comes to Jesus impressed with his teaching and the signs (miracles) that he had performed (3:2). Be sure to notice, however, that Jesus is quick to point out there is more to who he is than his teaching and miracles—far more.

3. Don’t miss how Jesus uses the theme of “birth” to describe what it means to know him. To know Jesus is more than learning a few details about him or memorizing a Bible verse or two. To be a part of his kingdom is a radically different way of understanding life—a rebirth. Note, too, the Spirit’s role.

4. Be sure to look at Numbers 21:4-9 in the OT for background on John 3:14. Jesus looks ahead here to the significance of the cross. Just as God’s people in the time of Moses looked to the bronze serpent and were saved, now we look to the cross for our salvation.

5. In John 3:16, *eternal life* has a quantitative element and a qualitative element. The words are more than a look toward the future. They can be translated: *whole and lasting life*. Eternal life is life in God’s Kingdom—a life that can begin now.

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**Memory Verse**

“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.”

John 3:16
Small Groups

1. Talk about what you know to be true about the Pharisees. How does Nicodemus seem different from the Pharisees that appear in many other Gospel stories?

2. What does Jesus mean when he talks about being born from above in v.3? Why does Nicodemus misunderstand?

3. Nicodemus knows there’s something different about this Jesus—see v.2. But how does Jesus show Nicodemus there is far more to him that his teaching and signs (miracles)?

4. Read and talk about the OT story Jesus refers to in 3:14 (see Numbers 21:4-9). Why is this story a forerunner to the story of the cross?

5. See #5 in the Notes section on page one. How does this change your understanding of eternal life? Eternal life is more than a future reality—it’s also a present reality. Why is this important?

6. Notice how often the words believe or believes occur in the story. Remember, one of the three threads woven through the Bible front to back is our response of faith. So, what does it mean to believe in Jesus?

Families

1. Nicodemus came to Jesus because he wanted to learn more. He was a Pharisee who knew so much about Scripture (the OT), but yet he still had questions. Asking questions and listening are two important ways that we learn. Ask your child what questions s/he has about Jesus and learn together.

2. Read aloud John 3:1-12. What part stands out to your child?

3. When Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born again to see the Kingdom of God, Nicodemus couldn’t imagine what Jesus meant. Talk about having new life in the Spirit….loving and trusting God. How does this shape the way we live?

4. Go outside to feel the wind and see the effect it has on the moving leaves (or use a fan indoors). Reread verse 8. We don’t know how the Spirit gives us new life, but we see the joy, peace and love when someone knows Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

5. Learn the memory verse together. Has anyone in your home ever received a gift they did not open? God gave us the gift of His Son so that we could have a wonderful life with Him. When we accept Jesus into our lives, we open the very best gift of all!

6. Say the memory verse daily together and then give thanks to God for His love.

Prayer

Gracious God,
You loved the world so much that you gave your only Son so that everyone who believes in him might have whole and lasting life. Thank you, Lord, for your love that changes the world. May this love even change us. Amen.