

## John 3:1–17 — Bible Study Handout

### Setting the Scene

- **Nicodemus**
  - Pharisee, respected religious leader, member of the Jewish ruling council.
  - Educated, devoted, morally serious, yet searching.
  - Comes **at night**, possibly for privacy, caution, or symbolic spiritual uncertainty (Keener).
- **Why This Matters**
  - Faith often begins with questions, not certainty.
  - Even spiritually mature people can sense there's more.

### Background of John's Gospel

- **Purpose**
  - Written so readers may believe Jesus is the Messiah and have life in His name (John 20:31).
- **Major Themes**
  - Light vs. darkness
  - Belief and eternal life
  - New birth
  - God's love revealed in Jesus
- **Date**
  - Likely AD 85–95 (Kostenberger).
- **Focus**
  - Personal encounters that reveal Jesus' identity.

### How This Passage Fits the Bible

- Connects to **Old Testament promises** of new hearts and new spirits (Ezekiel 36:26–27).
- Links to **Numbers 21**, Moses lifting the serpent for healing.
- Points forward to the **cross**, where Jesus is “lifted up.”
- Shows salvation as both **forgiveness and transformation**.

### Wesleyan Perspective

- **Prevenient Grace**
  - God is already at work in Nicodemus before he understands.
  - God draws people before they respond (Collins).
- **New Birth**
  - An inward change produced by God through faith.
  - Includes forgiveness, renewed desires, and spiritual awakening.
- **Ongoing Grace**
  - Transformation continues after conversion through sanctification.

### Passage Breakdown

#### John 3:1–2 — A Seeker Comes

- Nicodemus recognizes God's activity in Jesus.
- Faith often begins with curiosity and partial understanding.

#### John 3:3–8 — Born Again / Born From Above

- New birth is spiritual, not physical.
- The Spirit moves like wind:
  - Invisible
  - Powerful
  - Beyond human control
- Life with God is received, not earned.

#### John 3:9–15 — Understanding Through the Cross

- Nicodemus struggles, which opens deeper teaching.
- Jesus references Moses lifting the serpent:
  - Looking in faith brought healing then.
  - Looking to Christ brings life now (Kostenberger).

### **John 3:16–17 — The Heart of the Gospel**

- God’s motivation: **love**.
- God’s target: **the world**, not just religious insiders.
- God’s purpose: **salvation**, not condemnation (Wright).
- Eternal life begins now as relationship with God.

### **Important Theological Truths**

- Christianity isn’t about becoming religious enough.
- Transformation starts with God, not human effort.
- Faith means trusting what God has done through Jesus.
- Judgment results from rejecting offered light, not lack of opportunity.

### **Apologetic Insights**

- Nicodemus appears later in John, supporting historical credibility.
- The concept of new birth answers a universal human longing for change.
- Christianity uniquely offers transformation rooted in divine action, not self-discipline alone.

### **Application for Today**

- Many people feel stuck in habits, grief, or patterns they can’t break.
- Jesus offers new beginnings regardless of age or history.
- Questions and doubts don’t disqualify faith.
- Spiritual change often begins quietly, like Nicodemus’ nighttime visit.

### **Reflection Questions**

- What questions about faith do you carry right now?
- Where do you feel stuck or unable to change?
- What does “new birth” mean in your own experience?
- Do you tend to see God as loving or condemning?
- What might trusting Jesus look like in this season?

### **Key Takeaways**

- God loves the world, including you.
- New life comes through the Spirit.
- Faith is trust, not performance.
- Jesus came to save, not condemn.
- Transformation is possible.

### **Cross References**

- Ezekiel 36:26–27
- Numbers 21:4–9
- John 1:12–13
- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Ephesians 2:4–5
- Titus 3:5

### **Memory 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