

# Everyone Who Believes

Jesus offers eternal life to all who believe in Him.

JOHN 3:4-18



...with  
...without  
...as made.  
...he was the  
...darkness; and  
...ed it not.  
...from God, whose  
...for a witness, to hear  
...t, that all men through  
...e.  
...that Light, but was sent to  
...of that Light.  
...the true Light, which lighteth  
...that cometh into the world.  
...as in the world, and the world was  
...y him, and the world knew him not.  
...he came unto his own, and his own  
...eived him not.  
12 But <sup>12</sup>as many as received him, to them  
gave he power to become the sons of God,  
even to them that believe on his name:  
13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of  
the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man,  
but of God.  
14 And the Word <sup>14</sup>was made flesh, and  
dwelt among us, (and <sup>15</sup>we beheld his glory,  
the glory as of the only begotten of the  
Father,) full of grace and truth.

**JOHN'S WITNESS OF CHRIST**  
15 John bare witness of him, and cried,  
saying, This was he of whom I spake, He  
that cometh after me is preferred before  
me: for he was before me.  
16 And of his fulness have all we received,  
and grace for grace.  
17 For the law was given by Moses, but  
grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.  
18 No man hath seen God at any time;  
the only begotten Son, which is in the  
bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

The Greek word *monogenes* underlying only begotten means "only child" (Judg. 11:34; ...ally means "pitched ... an allusion to God's ... Israelites in the taber- ... 9: 33-37). In the past God ... his presence to His people in ... and the temple. Now God has ... dence among His people in the ... re Tesh, Jesus Christ (John 1:17). ... nences to God's glory mark back to ... usages that describe the manifestation ... od's presence and glory in theophanies ... ppearances of God), the tabernacle, or the ... mple (Exod. 33:22; Num. 14:10; Deut. 5:22). ... The Greek word *monogenes* underlying only ... begotten means "only child" (Judg. 11:34;



## What do you most look forward to with the start of a new year?

A new year represents a fresh start. This is the day we start that new diet; the day we begin to finish that project; the day we take that first step toward completing a 5k run without walking. This is a new year with no history or regrets. Jesus told Nicodemus that his life could be characterized by newness if he would believe in Him.

# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

John 3 is one of the most familiar passages in the New Testament, primarily because it contains the gospel in a sentence (John 3:16). Similarly, most believers know something about Nicodemus and his nighttime discussion with Jesus. Unfortunately, familiarity sometimes causes readers to overlook details of this encounter, limiting their comprehension of important truths.

Coming to see Jesus, Nicodemus thought he was offering a compliment by acknowledging that Jesus was acting under God's direction. Jesus needed no human affirmation. Instead, He focused the conversation on Nicodemus's need for a right relationship with God.

Jesus had a way of turning statements back on the speaker. Using the phrase "born again," he roused the Pharisee's inquisitiveness and simply but profoundly addressed several vital truths. First, human beings must experience a spiritual rebirth to have a right relationship with God. Second, faith in God's Son is the only way people can undergo such transformation. Third, without being born again, each person remains condemned. Fourth, Jesus

did not come to condemn; people were already condemned because of unbelief. Finally, Jesus came so everyone who believes in Him might be saved.

The scene suddenly changes in the second half of this chapter, but the theme remains the same. Jesus and His disciples moved into the Judean countryside near the place where John the Baptist was baptizing. John's disciples were concerned that more people were following Jesus than John. Rather than being threatened by this news, John explained that his preaching prepared the way for Jesus the Messiah. John admonished his followers for concentrating on the earthly rather than the heavenly. Jesus was the One who came from above. He alone can give eternal life.

# JOHN 3:4-18

**4** “How can anyone be born when he is old?”

**Nicodemus**<sup>A</sup> asked him. “Can he enter his mother’s womb a second time and be born?”

**5** Jesus answered, “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the

**kingdom of God.**<sup>B</sup> **6** Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

**7** Do not be amazed that I told you that you must be born again. **8** The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don’t

know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

**9** “How can these things be?” asked Nicodemus. **10** “Are you a teacher of Israel and don’t know these things?”

Jesus replied. **11** “Truly I tell you, we speak what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but

you do not accept our testimony. **12** If I have told you about earthly things and you don’t believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly

things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven — the **Son**

**of Man.**<sup>C</sup> **14** “Just as Moses lifted up the snake **in the wilderness,**<sup>D</sup> so the Son of Man must be

lifted up, **15** so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. **16** For God loved the world

in this way: He gave his **one and only Son,**<sup>E</sup> so that everyone who believes in him will not perish

but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to **condemn**<sup>F</sup> the world, but to save the world through him. **18** Anyone who

believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he

has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God.

## Key Words

A. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin. He was curious about Jesus’s teachings and eventually became a believer.

B. *Basileia* (Greek) suggests kingship or kingly power. Jesus also referred to the “kingdom of heaven” to describe the reign of God on earth that was initiated by His own incarnation. See also Matthew 5:20; 24:14; and Mark 1:14-15.

C. Jesus described Himself as the Son of Man throughout the Gospels. The phrase is also found some 93 times in the book of Ezekiel to underscore the prophet’s humanity.

D. To end a plague of snakes in the wilderness, God directed Moses to hang a bronze snake on a pole. Those who looked on the snake in faith were healed. See Numbers 21:6-9.

E. An example of John’s emphasis on Jesus’s unique relationship with the Father. The term implies equality with God, not simply a relationship with God.

F. Falling under God’s judgment. Jesus’s mission focused on providing salvation, not executing God’s wrath.

# EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

## **1. BORN AGAIN?**

(John 3:4-8)

Believers must help others understand the truth about salvation.

**According to Jesus, what does being born again allow someone to do?**

**What do people find confusing about salvation coming through faith in Jesus alone?**

## **2. HOW?**

(John 3:9-13)

Believers can have confidence in knowing that Jesus is the Messiah.

**How might Nicodemus's religious heritage and training have hindered him from understanding what Jesus meant?**

**How do a person's questions about Jesus reveal what they trust for truth?**

## **3. BELIEVE**

(John 3:14-18)

God lovingly offers salvation to all who will accept Jesus.

**Why is it so important for people to understand that salvation is available to everyone who believes in Jesus?**

**What makes God's gift of salvation so appealing? What would get in the way of a person accepting this gift?**

## **APPLY THE TEXT**

Discuss as a group the ramifications of salvation being offered to all who believe in Jesus.

**How does this truth impact how the group functions? What needs to change for the group to demonstrate this truth to a greater degree?**

### **KEY DOCTRINE: The Kingdom**

The Kingdom is the realm of salvation into which men enter by trustful, childlike commitment to Jesus Christ. (See Luke 18:15-17; Colossians 1:13.)

### **BIBLE SKILL: Identify the imagery in a verse or passage and discover what it communicates.**

Compare John 3 with 1 Peter 1:23 and 1 John 5:1. How does being born spiritually convey the idea of spiritual transformation? Compare this passage. How is being born of God linked to faith in Christ and love for God? How does the picture of the new birth help you grasp the relationship believers share with the Heavenly Father

# TALK IT OUT

## **Start by quoting John 3:16. How old were you when you first learned this verse?**

John 3:16 is probably the most widely recognized verse in the Bible. The verse is taught to children in Vacation Bible School and is foundational for many believers in sharing their faith with others. The verse has often been described as the gospel in a nutshell. John 3:16 starts (and ends) with God's love—His *agape* love. This is a self-sacrificing, focused-on-the-needs-of-others kind of love.

## **What does it mean to you that God loves you unconditionally?**

The second part of the verse is a perfect example of God's *agape* form of love—He gave up His Son as the sacrifice for our sin. Jesus, our Lord, Savior, and the Messiah provides the opportunity for salvation and eternal life to all people.

## **Why do so many people reject God's gift of salvation?**

Memorize and share John 3:16. Create a screensaver with the verse for your phone to serve as a conversation starter.

## **Prayer Requests**

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# DAILY EXPLORATION

## Day 1: JOHN 3:4-8

### *Highlight verse 5.*

Nicodemus was a good man and a religious man—one with a firm understanding of the Old Testament. A man could not become a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin if he were otherwise. This meeting was evidence that in spite of all of Nicodemus's achievements and honors, something was still missing—something deep inside. Jesus understood Nicodemus's need. He explained that to enter the kingdom of God a person had to be *born again*. Nicodemus's questions in verse 4 reveal he did not understand what Jesus was saying; he was applying what Jesus said to a physical birth rather than a spiritual one. Jesus contrasted the two births, the physical and the spiritual. *Born of the Spirit* refers to the transformative presence of God in a person. This state cannot come about by human effort or achievement; it only comes from above.

No one can enter God's kingdom by human effort or natural means. God's Spirit moves within the human spirit to convince us that we are sinners. He illumines Scriptures and magnifies Jesus as God's Son who died and rose again. As we respond in repentance and faith, God accomplishes that mysterious act of salvation and we can be born again.

**What do people find confusing about salvation coming through faith in Jesus alone?**

## Day 2: JOHN 3:9-13

### *Consider how human reason cannot understand God's supernatural work.*

As a Pharisee, Nicodemus believed one's righteous works and achievements made a person right with God. Jesus, though, was teaching something radically different. What was necessary was for a person to be born from above. Jesus questioned Nicodemus's understanding of the Old Testament and his spiritual discernment. A prominent authority like Nicodemus should *know these things*.

In verse 13, Jesus explained why His words were uniquely reliable. No other human had ever been to the heavenly realm, known heavenly things from personal experience, and come from the heavenly realm—except *the Son of Man* Himself. The verb tense John used in stating Jesus descended from heaven indicates a unique event in history. This points back to Jesus, the Word, existing from eternity past, becoming flesh, and dwelling in our midst (1:1-14). This uniqueness set Jesus apart, affirmed the fact He was (and is) the Messiah, and serves as the basis for our being able to trust in Him.

**How does your background influence the way you understand and respond to Jesus?**



### Day 3: JOHN 3:14-15

*Look for parallels between the Israelites in the desert and people today.*

Having spoken about the Son of Man descending from heaven, Jesus next spoke about Him being *lifted up*. In doing so, He was referencing a story from Numbers 21. Snakes had bitten the Israelites while they were in the wilderness. After Moses interceded on their behalf, God instructed him to make a likeness of a snake and lift it up on a pole. When the Israelites looked at the snake, they recovered (Num. 21:4-9). Jesus was foretelling His death, when He would be lifted up on a cross and become the source of life for all who had been infected by the serpent's life-destroying deceit.

Jesus explained how the life He offered was different from what the Israelites experienced in the desert—the life He offered was *eternal*. And rather than looking at the image lifted up, the requirement for eternal life was that each individual *believes in him*. Jesus's death on the cross provided atonement for sinful humanity. Persons who look to Him with faith as the crucified and risen Lord will have eternal life.

**Why is it so important to understand that salvation is available to everyone who believes in Jesus?**

### Day 4: JOHN 3:16

*Notice who takes the initiative in salvation.*

Nicodemus must have been surprised when Jesus explained that God was making this offer to *the world*. Jews could not fathom God loving beyond His own people. Indeed, Christianity is unique in teaching that God's love is not limited by race or nationality.

For God to give *his one and only Son* referred both to the Messiah coming to earth in human form and to His atoning sacrifice on Calvary. This one statement emphasizes the Father's sacrificial, self-giving love. Salvation comes at His initiation and His expense. This gift is offered to *everyone who believes in him* (see 1:14; 1 John 2:2). Faith provides the "how" of salvation. God does the work of regeneration, but He chooses to do so upon one's faith. To believe is to have a personal, trustful response to God's gift of forgiveness, grace, and eternal life. To perish is the opposite of having eternal life. Eternal life is made possible to all who believe in Jesus because, as the prologue of John's Gospel stated, "in him was life" (John 1:4).

**What makes God's gift of salvation so appealing to you?  
What would get in the way of someone accepting this gift?**

## Day 5: JOHN 3:17-18

*Note the two groups of people in these verses.*

God's intention and desire is to *save the world*, not to *condemn* it. That desire was behind the virgin birth, Jesus's sinless life, His death on the cross, and His resurrection, so that a rebellious and disobedient world might believe in God's one and only Son.

Scripture divides the world into two groups: those who believe and those who do not (v. 18). Those who do not believe are condemned; those who believe are not condemned. The reason for the condemnation is because the non-believer has not put his or her faith in Jesus. A person who fails to believe is already condemned because all born to Adam's race inherit a sinful nature. This too would have been news to Nicodemus. First-century Jews believed that when the Messiah came, he would judge Gentiles but not Jews. Jesus stated that those who avoid God's judgment will be those who believe in His one and only Son. The glorious news of the gospel is that grace, faith, and eternal life are still offered to all who believe.

**How can you use what Jesus shared with Nicodemus to initiate a conversation with someone about Jesus?**

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### APPLY THE TEXT

Who do you know, friend or family member, who is not a believer? Look for ways to use what Jesus shared with Nicodemus to initiate a conversation with them about Jesus.

