

**OASIS:**  
**“THE MAN WHO CAME BY NIGHT”**  
**DONE IN SYNC WITH**  
**THE “LIVING GOD’S STORY” JOURNEY**  
The Passage – John 3:1-21



***Preface:** Welcome to our LC Bible study in our sermon series “Living God’s Story.” As you know, this year we are working our way through the Bible, from Genesis through Revelation. So fasten your seat belt—it is quite a ride! These LC studies will complement the sermons, often using the same biblical texts, and will help your LC go deeper in personal understanding and application. These italicized portions are meant to resource and help you in leading.*

**Study’s BIG idea:**

Not only does Jesus answer our questions before we ask them; He offers us the greatest solution before we realize our greatest need. To be redeemed, we need a new beginning – we need to be reborn.

Possible starter questions (3 min.): For many, the first Bible verse learned was John 3:16. Whether we learned it as children or as adults, describe what you understood about God, Jesus and salvation at this point of your faith.

John 3:16 is used as a cultural symbol as well. Many times, only its reference is used at sporting events, on billboards, or even under athlete’s eyes. How do you think those outside the Church perceive this verse and its use?

Transitional comment: Jesus was always at work explaining how revolutionary and life-altering His message was. This brought a broad range of feelings including questions, confusion, freedom, anger and joy. In this study, we want to see what Jesus shared with Nicodemus. Even though the Pharisee was looking for a different set of answers, Jesus was offering the answer Nicodemus needed. (If you haven’t already prayed, pray for the Holy Spirit to lead your study, opening our eyes and hearts.)

**John 3:1-21**

**1** Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. **2** He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

**3** Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

**4** “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

**5** Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. **6** Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. **7** You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ **8** The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

**9** “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

**10** “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? **11** Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. **12** I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? **13** No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. **14** Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, **15** that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” **16** 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. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. **19** This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. **20** Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. **21** But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

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O – What are your initial observations of the passage?

O – John 3 includes the most familiar Bible verse. It’s warm, invitational and charged with profound theology. Are there any parts in the surrounding context that you see as confusing or perhaps, not as “user-friendly”?

O – How does Nicodemus begin the conversation with Jesus? Identify the two great acknowledgements that he makes of Jesus.

I – Why does Nicodemus arrange for a meeting in the cover of night?  
*(Possibilities include: Fear of criticism, desire for uninterrupted conversation or perhaps a private investigation before committing himself publically for or against Jesus.)*

A – What would be the present-day equivalents for a seeker to investigate the Christian faith? How should that influence us as we worship, serve and live?

I – What do you think of Jesus’ words in verse 3 as he responds to Nicodemus’s compliment? As readers, we notice Jesus does not express gratitude for the compliment, nor even validates the Pharisee’s sentiment. What do you think Jesus is trying to do?  
*(Jesus’ discernment reveals that Nicodemus’s indirect approach concealed a deeper need. We see Jesus cutting to the chase and answering the question that hasn’t been asked yet.)*

A – Have you ever experienced God answering or addressing an issue that you were not looking to address? Describe your experience.

O – Immediately, we get the sense that this conversation with Jesus is not going how this religious leader has expected. From his opening statement, speculate what you think he may have wanted to ask Jesus.

I – Why do you think Jesus immediately moves to the idea of the need to be reborn?

A – Commentators have speculated on what Nicodemus is trying to say here in Verse 4. Some, assuming that he is completely confused, take him literally while others suggest

that being a prominent teacher, he would be too astute to mean this verbatim and is perhaps trying to say “I’m too old to change; is my case not hopeless?”  
What would you say to someone who described themselves as a “hopeless case?”

O – What words, themes & practices do you observe in this exchange in verses 4-8?  
(*water, Spirit, theme of rebirth, the practice and spiritual understanding of baptism*)

I – Both concepts of baptism, physical and spiritual baptism, are not only counter-intuitive for Nicodemus but threatening. Can you explain why?  
(*Being physically baptized by water would involve humiliation, a virtual acknowledgement that he, a Pharisee, needed to repent just as a Gentile outside the law needed repentance. Being spiritually baptized is the identity changer for all followers of Christ.*)

A – Billy Graham popularized the use of quoting Jesus’ illustration of the wind in his evangelistic crusades. How would you contextualize the idea of the Holy Spirit today that is both tangible and mysterious, evidenced yet unseen?  
(*wireless phones, internet, radiation, sound waves ...*)

O – What does Jesus say about the Spirit here?

I – Can you explain why this would be so foreign to Nicodemus?  
(*A first century Pharisee like Nicodemus knew nothing of the Holy Spirit personally. It simply wasn’t part of their theology. The role of the Holy Spirit is yet another paradigm-shifting moment in Jesus’ ministry. In Nicodemus’s Old Testament understanding, the Spirit came upon the prophets for mysterious reasons. Given his training and context, he would not have naturally understood it as necessary for his salvation – like all of us, he needs it to be revealed to him.*)

A – Among the critiques of modern conservative evangelism is that we do not emphasize enough the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. What do you think are some of the reasons for this critique? More importantly, how can we apply Jesus’ words concerning the Holy Spirit in our lives?

O – What Old Testament reference do we see Jesus using in verse 14?  
(*The bronze serpent from Numbers 21:8*)

I – Jesus uses the idea of the bronze serpent from Numbers 21:8. Aside from demonstrating that he has read the Pentateuch, what is he stating to Nicodemus?  
(*The bronze serpent symbolized God’s way of saving men who are under the condemnation of sin and who are suffering from its effects. Furthermore, it was the cure God provided on the basis of faith rather than of works.*)

I – What comes to mind when we read Jesus saying in verse 14 “the Son of Man must be lifted up?”  
(*It is a direct reference to His own crucifixion. John uses the term “lifted up” [hypsōō] 3 other times in his gospel. The remaining uses are reserved exclusively in crucifixion references - 8:28, 12:32, 34*)

A – What are today’s “bronze serpents”? What are our cultural symbols of salvation?  
(*In terms of physical safety, symbols include life-preservers, “H” for hospitals, defibrillators found in public spaces have a unique symbol. You can alter this question in numerous ways.*)

O – Keeping in mind our introductory question, what comes to your mind now when you read the well-known words of 3:16 in this context?

I – Why do you believe that this verse has found such a foothold throughout the age of the Church?

*(Some have said that it is the best abbreviated paraphrase of Christian theology. Salvation is not restricted to any race, color, or class, but it is God's standing invitation for all to believe and live in loving relationship with him.)*

A – What aspects do you think are lost when “John 3:16” is flashed on a cardboard sign during a commercial break? What should we as the Church, a LIFE Community and as individuals do to preach the message of John 3:16 without using better signage?

O – Jesus finishes this scene by using which metaphors in verse 19-21?

*(He uses the metaphors of light and darkness to illustrate truth and knowledge contrasted with disbelief and condemnation.)*

I – Night is used metaphorically throughout John to represent separation from the presence of God. Why do you think Jesus is doing this at this point?

*(Perhaps he is not only reminding Nicodemus that they are meeting at night, but that the heart must be illuminated by the light of truth to be reborn.)*

O – Describe the conclusion of this scene.

I – John does not mention whether or not Nicodemus accepted Jesus as his Savior that night. In fact, his last words are “How can this be?” in verse 9. What do you think John is trying to say to the reader?

*(It would seem that the story is not about Nicodemus at all but that he represents us. We are therefore invited by Jesus personally to believe in Him and be reborn.)*

A – What can we as witnesses of Jesus learn from this scene? What themes and words did Jesus focus on? What correlations can we find to people's sentiments and questions today?

*Prayer together: Let us pray that all would look for ultimate healing in Jesus and let us pray that our faith will grow as we seek to overcome our unbelief.*

Text notes (you can access biblical texts via [www.Biblegateway.com](http://www.Biblegateway.com))

- a. **Please note that not all these questions are to be asked in a single night.** Take some time and select and reword the questions that best fit your voice and your LIFE Community group. Certain questions work better for certain groups. You are encouraged to prayerfully discern what will serve your LC the best.
- b. Complement OIA questions with “process questions” (what else? what more? what do others think?).
- c. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don't rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!
- d. Timing/pacing: allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.
- e. Application: Pace the study to conclude with “difference making” application.
- f. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into “teaching,” rather than facilitating. It can cause people to feel distracted or de-powered.