

ENGAGE

Like Jesus

GROWTH GROUPS WEEK 1

WEEK OF SEPTEMBER 16TH

GROWTH GROUP FALL 2018

WEEK 1 – SEPTEMBER 16, 2018 - JOHN 3:1-21

GETTING TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER

- 1) Go around the circle and introduce yourself if there are new people in your group, or share a highlight from your summer.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

This fall we are considering the theme of “engagement.” We will be looking at the life of Jesus and considering how he engaged the people around him and what that can teach us. This week we will be in John 3 and will consider the question of, “why did Jesus engage a broken and misguided world.”

Nicodemus was a Pharisee (teacher of the Law) and also a part of the Sanhedrin, which basically served as the Supreme Court of Israel. He had obviously heard the teaching of Jesus and was very intrigued by what Jesus was saying and how he was saying it. He comes at night to engage with Jesus about the things that Jesus was teaching.

There are three different times we read about Nicodemus in the gospel of John. This is the first encounter when he comes with questions. In John 7:45-52, Nicodemus sticks up for Jesus when the religious leaders are speaking against him and seeking to arrest him. Finally, in John 19:39-40, Nicodemus joins Joseph of Arimathea to properly prepare Jesus’ body for burial.

We are not sure why Nicodemus showed up at night, but he obviously wanted to talk with Jesus. Jesus’ statement about being born from above would have confused Nicodemus. For a faithful Jew what mattered was being born into the right family, which would have been the family of Abraham. Jesus’ words about being born from above, or being born again, would have confused Nicodemus.

Jesus is conveying the important message that God’s kingdom is open to anyone, regardless of what family you were born into. And then, Jesus goes on to talk about a new knowledge that comes from above. Nicodemus was a well-known teacher with a lot of knowledge and Jesus now says there is something new he needs to learn.



In Numbers 21, a bronze serpent is lifted up on a pole after Israel had sinned against God and poisonous snakes had invaded their camp. Anyone from Israel who looked up at the serpent lived. Jesus says that he will be lifted up, and that all of the evil and sin of the world will be placed on him, and anyone who looks to him will be saved.

To believe in Jesus is to believe in the light of God's new creation. If someone chooses not to believe in Jesus, they remain in darkness, but Jesus makes it clear he came not to condemn the world, but to save the world.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

Read John 3:1-21

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.

- 2) Nicodemus asks, "how can a man be born again?" Is there a question you would like to ask Jesus?
- 3) Share a time you went to a friend or family member with a question about God or your faith. What sort of question did you ask? How did your friend or family member respond? Who would you go to today to ask your "spiritual questions?"
- 4) Do you think there is any significance in Nicodemus approaching Jesus at night? Is it related to what Jesus says in John 3:19-21?
- 5) Often times in the church world people will use the language of needing to be "born again." Can you remember the first time you heard those words? What does it mean to you to be "born again" in light of what Jesus says?

- 6) Jesus goes back to Numbers 21 as he talks about how the Son of Man will be lifted up. How do you think people responded to that image? Why would he use that image?
- 7) John 3:16 is one of the most well known verses in all of Scripture. Why do you think this is the case?
- 8) What image in John 3:1-21 resonates with you the most? Being Born Again? Light and Darkness? Salvation and not Condemnation? The Son of Man Being Lifted Up? Something else? Why does it resonate with you?

BRINGING IT HOME

- 9) Jesus said the only way you really get to see the kingdom of God is by being “born again”. What do you think he meant by that? What does the kingdom of God look like? How can you help reveal the kingdom of God to people this week?