

3.1

EVERLASTING LIFE

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

God gave His only begotten Son so we might have everlasting life.

TRUTH FOR MY LIFE

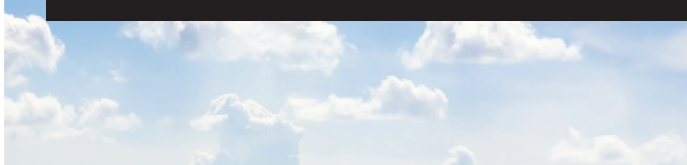
I will embrace the new life I have in Jesus.



FOCUS VERSE: John 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

LESSON TEXT: John 3:1-21



BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: John 3:1-21

Despite Jesus' contentious relationship with the Pharisees, Jesus received Nicodemus with grace, indicating Jesus could discern the sincerity of Nicodemus's intentions. The fact that Nicodemus came by night could imply that he acted alone without the knowledge of his fellow Pharisees, or the Pharisees feared the people's perception and did not want to be seen sincerely dialoguing with Jesus, whose words and presence threatened their spiritual hold on the people. Either possibility could be true, but regardless, Nicodemus approached Jesus with humility and wonder—a good model for any sincere seeker to follow.

Nicodemus admitted the Pharisees knew Jesus was a teacher. Nicodemus called Jesus by the respectful term "Rabbi," just as Jesus' disciples did in John 1:38, 49. However, Nicodemus's ignorance of Jesus' true identity was quickly belied by his lack of understanding in the rest of the conversation.

In Jesus' words to Nicodemus in John 3, we find some of the richest and most beautiful revelations of Christ and His mission in all of Scripture. Jesus employed double meaning (vv. 3, 8), meteorological analogies (v. 8), Old Testament stories that foreshadowed Christ (vv. 14-15), and even some humor, poking fun at the scholar Nicodemus (v. 10). However, Jesus used no clever wording but spoke plainly in verses 16-17, the most oft-quoted part of the entire text. Jesus wanted His message to be clear: He was on earth to save all who would come to Him.

As unique and fascinating as this dialogue appears, we do well to remember that Jesus was positioning Himself as the source of salvation for the entire world. This salvation was not theoretical or relegated to the realms of theological debate; this salvation was available even for confused Nicodemus sitting across from Jesus in the wee hours of the night.

While we do not ultimately know the condition of Nicodemus's heart as he walked away from this sacred conversation, what a tragedy it would have been if Nicodemus had walked away without being convinced or without surrendering himself to Jesus Christ. Many today come to Jesus just like Nicodemus, full of questions and wonderings. What a tragedy it would be to come to Jesus, receive the answer we are seeking, yet still walk away rejecting the salvation He offers.

IN JESUS' WORDS TO NICODEMUS IN JOHN 3, WE FIND SOME OF THE RICHEST AND MOST BEAUTIFUL REVELATIONS OF CHRIST AND HIS MISSION IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE.

DAY 1

John 3:1-4

¹ There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

² the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

³ Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

⁴ Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

Biblical Insight

The first two lines of dialogue in this passage are notable. Nicodemus affirmed Jesus' validity as a teacher imbued with God's presence, and Jesus responded with an instruction on being born again. John's structure of the discourse makes it appear that Jesus wasted no time getting to the crux of the matter.

The word translated "again" in verse 3 is the Greek word *anōthen* and can also be translated "from above." Jesus' play on words was undoubtedly intentional; the birth Jesus spoke of was both "again" and "from above." Nicodemus's response indicated he failed to understand what Jesus meant.

Daily Devotion

On October 23, 1996, a couple welcomed a baby boy, but as pediatricians, they identified complications. When their son Sam was twenty-two months old, specialists diagnosed him with Progeria, a rare, fatal genetic condition that causes children to age at an accelerated rate. Without special treatment, children with Progeria suffer the same heart disease that affects millions of normally aging adults (arteriosclerosis), but as young teenagers.

Sam lived a full and exciting life, taking interest in many hobbies and attaining the highest academic honors. Yet Sam's condition ultimately resulted in his passing in 2014.

Sam's life made a tremendous impact. His parents responded to the enormous lack of medical information and resources about Progeria. Inspired by Sam, they launched a research foundation, and Sam's legacy now inspires supporters to continue the quest for a cure with tremendous determination, passion, and love. While a cure is sought, support is available to celebrate these incredible adolescents.

Spiritually we understand that each disciple progresses at a unique pace. We celebrate our initial step of conversion, but we understand the importance of healthy, ongoing spiritual development. Today have a time of reflection in prayer, asking God to show you how you are growing since your new-birth experience.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 2

John 3:5-8

⁵ Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

⁷ Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

⁸ The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Biblical Insight

Some Bible students have argued that Jesus was talking about biological birth—with water referring to amniotic fluid—and spiritual birth. However, the greater context of John (John 1:26, 31-33; 3:8, 22-23) and Acts (Acts 1:5; 2:38; 8:12-17; 10:44-48; 11:15-17; 19:2-6) makes it clear that Jesus was referring to literal baptism in water and spiritual baptism by the infilling of the Holy Spirit. As always, Scripture must be used to interpret Scripture. We must not fall into the same trap as Nicodemus and allow personal or unbiblical sources to misguide and confuse our understanding of Jesus' words.

Daily Devotion

As a young boy, James K. Polk, the future president of the United States, was taken to church to be baptized. Unexpectedly, the minister refused to baptize young James. Throughout his adult life, Polk attended church regularly and married a devout Christian woman, yet he was never baptized.

In his inaugural address on March 4, 1846, Polk spoke about relying on the wisdom of the "Almighty Ruler of the Universe." While in office, the Polks prohibited playing cards and drinking alcohol. The White House's entertainment during the Polk administration were considered sober affairs and sedate because of the strict Christian stance of the Polks. Yet President Polk was never baptized.

James Polk waited until three months after he left office and was lying on his deathbed until he was finally baptized. Though he kept strict Christian standards, Polk nearly failed to obey Jesus' command to be "born of the water."

It is wonderful, but not enough, for us just to hold deep convictions about holiness and our lifestyle. We are also called to heed Jesus' words and be born again of the water and of the Spirit.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 3

John 3:9–13

⁹ Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

¹¹ Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

¹² If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?

¹³ And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.

Biblical Insight

Although Nicodemus began his dialogue with Jesus by asserting “we know,” the remainder of his conversation bore out the reality that he did not know. Nicodemus asked multiple questions, and Jesus—perhaps jokingly—questioned Nicodemus’s status as a scholar: “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” (John 3:10, ESV). Despite having intimate access to the teachings of the Hebrew Bible, Nicodemus did not recognize God incarnate standing in front of him. Jesus resorted to using the story of the brazen serpent from the Torah to help Nicodemus better understand.

Daily Devotion

At the young age of seventeen, a young man wrote to his longtime friend: “I believe in no religion. There is no proof for any of them.” Fifteen years later, the man wrote to the same friend: “Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call ‘real things.’” This man was the famous Christian author and apologist C. S. Lewis.

In boarding school, Lewis began questioning the efficacy of prayers. As he grew older, he was drawn to the philosophical perspective of the meaninglessness of life. Things shifted in his atheistic perspective when he encountered the reality of demonic possession. If demons were real, Lewis began hoping that the “beaten path” of Christianity was also real.

As he began to read, study, and search for God, he began to believe in God. Soon Lewis realized that intellectually finding God would not be enough. While on a bus, he realized God had been knocking on the door of his heart, and C. S. Lewis surrendered himself to Christ.

Intellectual belief in God and the reality of Scripture is not enough to live a transformed life. Transformation only occurs through surrendering ourselves to Christ.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 4

John 3:16-17

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

¹⁷ For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

Biblical Insight

These verses of Scripture are perhaps the most quoted in the entire Bible. God's supreme love for humanity was manifested in His incarnation as the man Christ Jesus. Jesus clarified that His mission was not to condemn, but to save. Obviously, love cannot mix with condemnation, a sentiment echoed by Paul in Romans 8:1.

The significant phrase "through him" in John 3:17 places Jesus as the focal point and source of salvation. Salvation is not possible outside of Christ. Peter confirmed this fact in Acts 4:12, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

Daily Devotion

On August 11, 1934, the United States' most dangerous prisoners arrived at a new high-security federal penitentiary on Alcatraz Island in the chilly waters of the San Francisco Bay. Throughout the years of its operation, Alcatraz housed some of America's most dangerous felons, such as Al "Scarface" Capone.

Even though dozens of prisoners tried to escape, no inmate ever successfully made it to the mainland. The cold, treacherous waters of the San Francisco Bay cut their escape attempts short. Beginning in 1981, an Escape from Alcatraz Triathlon was created. Athletes have proven it is possible to swim from Alcatraz and survive. However, this survival is based on training and having the proper gear, which no prisoner ever had.

Sin, like Alcatraz, is impossible to escape without the right training. We can try in our own power to break free from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, but we will fail. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ will set us free from the prison of sin. Let's respond to the gospel and ask God to fill us with His Holy Spirit so we may live a life devoted to becoming more like Jesus.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*

DAY 5

John 3:18–21

¹⁸ He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

²⁰ For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

²¹ But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

Biblical Insight

Although Jesus did not come to condemn, those who do not believe in Christ receive condemnation. However, the source of this condemnation is not Christ but their own lack of belief. People who have access to light, yet choose to live in darkness, condemn themselves because there is no rational reason to continue to live in darkness. This theme of light is seen throughout John's writings, starting in the Prologue (John 1:4–9), continuing in other teachings of Jesus (John 8:12; 9:5; 12:35–36, 46), and appearing even in John's epistles (1 John 1:5–7; 2:8–10).

Daily Devotion

Astronomers have noted that things tend to happen so slowly on a cosmic scale that they appear unchanging. Supernovas (the death of giant stars) are among the few cosmic events that happen fast enough we can see them happen in real time.

On October 9, 2022, telescopes around the world captured one of the largest and brightest celestial events recorded by astrophysicists. Within the Sagitta constellation, one of the closest ever observed, a giant star began its destructive collapse and sent jets of gamma rays toward Earth. The brightness of the giant star's death shone brighter than the moon, and astronomers dubbed this event as the "BOAT"—brightest of all time.

In John 8:12, Jesus declared that He is the "light of the world." In other words, He alone is the brightest of all time. Just as stars shine the brightest on the darkest nights, Jesus shines even brighter as the world gets darker. If you are feeling overwhelmed by the spiritual darkness in our world, do not lose hope. Pursue Jesus, the light of the world.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this principle to your life today?*
