

Nicodemus: A Life in Process

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John 3:1-3 (NLT) There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. ² After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. “Rabbi,” he said, “we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you.” ³ Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.”

Every person’s journey to faith is different, but the God who saves is the same.

In the next few weeks, we will look at the lives of different people who encountered Christ. Each came from a different background and circumstance, yet all were taken through a unique process that led to transformation.

Through their stories, we’ll discover that the same God who worked in them is still working in us, shaping hearts, restoring hope, and making us more like Jesus, step by step.

And that’s the key: transformation is a process. It’s the Spirit’s ongoing work of shaping us from our current state into Christ’s likeness, one step, one decision, one day at a time.

However, process doesn’t mean passivity, it means partnership. God works in us, and we respond in faith.

Nicodemus is a perfect example of this. He didn’t understand everything the night he met Jesus, but he was curious, open, and willing to keep seeking. Over time, as we will see his interest turned into conviction. The man who once came to Jesus in secret later stood publicly to defend Him and even helped prepare His body for burial.

That’s what happens when we stay in the process. Staying in the process means not giving up when it’s uncomfortable, not quitting when it feels like nothing is changing. It means trusting that the same God who began a good work in us will be faithful to complete it.

It isn’t sitting back and doing nothing. It is in deciding every day to stay rooted in the Word, faithful in prayer and surrendered to the Holy Spirit that transformation happens.

The process may feel slow or difficult, but it’s through consistency and surrender that we become more like Jesus, in holiness, in character, and in life.

We don’t become like Christ overnight. But as we remain in Him, He continues to grow us, refine us, and renew us, day by day, moment by moment, until His character is reflected in every part of who we are.

Let's look together at the life of Nicodemus in the Gospel of John. His story shows us what God can do when someone refuses to give up in the middle of the process, when they keep coming to Jesus until transformation becomes reality.

His journey takes him from **watching Jesus from a distance**, to **walking near Him in secret**, and finally to **worshiping Him in full surrender**.

1. Watching from a distance

John 3:1-2 (NLT) There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. ²After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

Unlike most Pharisees who came to challenge Jesus publicly, Nicodemus came privately, under cover of night. He wasn't trying to trap Jesus; he was seeking truth.

Watching Jesus perform miracles stirred something deep within him. God had captured his attention, but He didn't yet have his heart.

Nicodemus was curious and even admitted that he and some of his peers were leaning toward believing that Jesus was from God, but they weren't ready to place their trust in Him just yet. They were curious but not captured, interested but not surrendered.

Jesus knew that Nicodemus didn't have a hidden agenda. He was a sincere seeker. How do we know this? Because of the previous verses in chapter 2.

John 2:23-25 (NLT) Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many **began** to trust in him. ²⁴But Jesus didn't trust them, because he knew all about people.²⁵ No one needed to tell him about human nature, for he knew what was in each person's heart.

Notice that the passage says *many began to trust Him*. This is where the process of transformation begins. People hear, see, and start to show interest, leaning toward God, yet not fully surrendered to Him.

It's interesting that Jesus doesn't respond to Nicodemus's statement instead Jesus brings Nicodemus face-to-face with the truth.

John 3:3 (NLT) I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God..."

When you read the entire chapter, you'll see that Jesus's words stirred deep questions in this teacher of the law:

- "What does it mean to be born of the Spirit?"
- "Could the Messiah truly come from heaven?"
- "What did Moses' bronze serpent point to?"
- "What does it mean for the Son of Man to be lifted up?"

Jesus patiently unfolds the gospel, speaking of new birth, the Spirit's work, and ultimately, His own coming sacrifice.

However, Nicodemus still doesn't fully understand. Yet, in that moment, Jesus was cultivating faith through curiosity.

Nicodemus doesn't make a public confession here. The conversation ends, but the seed has been planted, and the process continues.

I imagine that Nicodemus' first face-to-face encounter with Jesus led him to delve more deeply into the prophecies about the Messiah.

The words of Jesus awakened a deep curiosity within him. All of this was part of a process. It seems that, in the midst of his search, his eyes were gradually being opened. Why do I say this?

We need to stay curious. **Keep seeking Jesus even when we don't understand everything, faith often begins with honest questions.**

We need to stay in the Word even when we don't "feel" it. **Transformation often happens beneath the surface, like a seed taking root.**

The next time we see him in the Gospel, he has moved further along in his spiritual journey. He goes from watching Jesus from a distance to walking near, though still in secret. His curiosity is slowly giving way to conviction.

2. Walking near Him in secret

John 7:45–52 (NLT) When the Temple guards returned without having arrested Jesus, the leading priests and Pharisees demanded, "Why didn't you bring him in?" ⁴⁶ "We have never heard anyone speak like this!" the guards responded.

⁴⁷ "Have you been led astray, too?" the Pharisees mocked. ⁴⁸ "Is there a single one of us rulers or Pharisees who believes in him? ⁴⁹ This foolish crowd follows him, but they are ignorant of the law. God's curse is on them!"

⁵⁰ Then Nicodemus, the leader who had met with Jesus earlier, spoke up. ⁵¹ "Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?" he asked. ⁵² They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Search the Scriptures and see for yourself, no prophet ever comes from Galilee!"

When the Pharisees sought to arrest and convict Jesus, Nicodemus spoke up. He wasn't yet ready for full commitment, but he could no longer remain silent. Nicodemus defended Jesus's right to fairness. His heart was stirring; he had moved watching from a distance to walking near him in secret, but he wasn't ready to surrender and become a true follower.

Perhaps he hesitated because he wasn't ready to let go of his religious status. Maybe he didn't want to lose the admiration of those who viewed him as a respected leader. Or perhaps he simply feared for his own life.

John 12:42–43 (NLT) Many people did believe in him, including some of the Jewish leaders. But they wouldn't admit it for fear that the Pharisees would expel them from the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than the praise of God.

Whatever the reason, one thing is clear: Nicodemus was in process, caught between belief and fear, between curiosity and conviction. God was still at work, patiently drawing him closer to **worshiping Him in full surrender**. This is where we find Nicodemus, at the foot of the cross.

3. Worshiping Him in full surrender

John 19:38–40 (NLT) Afterward Joseph of Arimathea, who had been a secret disciple of Jesus (because he feared the Jewish leaders), asked Pilate for permission to take down Jesus' body. When Pilate gave permission, Joseph came and took the body away.³⁹ With him came Nicodemus, the man who had come to Jesus at night. He brought about seventy-five pounds of perfumed ointment made from myrrh and aloes.⁴⁰ Following Jewish burial custom, they wrapped Jesus' body with the spices in long sheets of linen cloth.

Finally, at the cross, Nicodemus had seen enough. He had watched from a distance and walked near in secret, but after witnessing the false accusations, the injustice, the condemnation, and the cries for the crucifixion of an innocent man, whom he now knew was the promised Messiah, his heart was changed.

When Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of His tormentors, something must have broken within Nicodemus. He could no longer remain in the shadows, intimidated by fear of his peers. This time, he stepped fully into the light of God's saving grace.

The myrrh and aloes, along with the linen cloths, were customary elements of Jewish burial practices. Yet the number of spices, about seventy-five pounds, was extraordinary, perhaps revealing the depth of their love and reverence for Jesus.

It's interesting that the men who had openly followed Jesus for three and a half years ran away in the end, while the ones who had followed Him in secret did the exact opposite. They had nothing to gain by publicly identifying with Jesus, only risk, but they came out of the shadows and into the light of day.

Nicodemus wasn't the same. The process that led to his transformation began in a quiet garden under the cover of night, when Jesus shared with him the message of new birth. It culminated at the foot of the cross, where he finally understood the cost of that new life, the price paid for the sins of the world.

I could imagine Nicodemus remembering the words of Jesus in that garden.

John 3:16 (NLT) For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Conclusion: Nicodemus's story reminds us that God's grace meets us where we are, but it doesn't leave us there.

It's a story of movement: from watching from a distance, to walking near in secret, to worshiping in full surrender. And through every step, God was patiently at work.

Even after the moment of new birth, He continues to walk with us through the process of sanctification, bringing us into a deeper relationship with Himself and shaping us into greater Christlikeness.

We may not be where we want to be yet, but God is still writing our story, still drawing, shaping, and transforming us by His grace.

The question isn't is God working because he always does but are we responding to His work in our lives and seeking Him with all our heart.

Remember, process doesn't mean passivity; it means partnership. God does His part, He convicts, guides, and shapes us through His Spirit, but He also calls us to respond. Our role is to trust Him, to obey even when we don't understand, and to keep showing up with open hearts.