

17. Spiritual rebirth is a work of the Holy Spirit, but what are we called to do? (v15 also v16ff) What happens if we don't do this?

Nicodemus

18. If you have time take a look at John 7.44-52 and 19.38-40 where we meet Nicodemus again. Do you think these actions show someone who had come to believe or someone who was still interested but uncommitted?

Later tradition about Nicodemus is not strong but one account says that he was later baptised by Peter and John. Because of this he was stripped of his office, beaten and driven out of Jerusalem. But Gamaliel (as in Acts 5.34 & 22.3), a friend, sheltered him until he died a few years later of old age.

Pray

Pray for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of individuals and bring them to new birth.

Pray for our outreach as a church and as individuals and in particular that in conversation we would now how get people to focus on what really matters.

Pray for those who are interested in the Christian faith, but perhaps because of peer pressure, or families, or fear of reprisals are reluctant to find out more. Pray particularly for outreach to those of other religions.

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Meeting Jesus

Week 1

John wrote his gospel to help us to believe. In this short series how people of different backgrounds encountered Jesus and how this affected their lives.

Read John 3.1-15

The Curious Incident of the Man in the Night-Time

1. From what little we are told about Nicodemus in this passage, and what you know from elsewhere about the Pharisees, what sort of man do you think he was?

2. Why do you think he went to see Jesus, and why at night?

3. Jesus calls Nicodemus a "teacher of Israel", is it significant that Nicodemus starts with a statement rather than a question?

4. What does Nicodemus think about Jesus, and how does this compare with what John the Baptist and the disciples said about Jesus? (see Jn 1.29, 34, 41, 45, 49)

5. Given Nicodemus' background do you think there were particular things that might prove a barrier in him believing in Jesus?

6. Are there things in Nicodemus that you recognise about yourself either at the present or in the past?

7. Were there particular barriers that held you back, or perhaps are still holding you back, from believing and trusting in Jesus?

Jesus' Tactics

We will come back to what Jesus says, but think first about how Jesus deals with Nicodemus.

8. How does Jesus move Nicodemus from being a teacher to an enquirer? Do you think Jesus really responded to what Nicodemus said? Was he acting like a modern day politician (saying what he wanted regardless of the question) or something else?

9. Do you know people who are interested in Jesus but seem unwilling to go any further than just interest?

10. Are there times when people say things about Jesus, religion, church and so on when you simply react to what they say and get nowhere? Can we learn anything from Jesus here about how to shift the ground to what really matters? Or perhaps you can think of instances when you have been able to do something similar.

11. If you answered yes to the first part of question 7 were there particular things that helped you overcome the barriers?

Jesus' Teaching

12. How does Jesus say we can enter the Kingdom of God?

13. Nicodemus was a religious man and seen by many as very pious. Why would what Jesus said have shocked him, particularly regarding how we enter God's kingdom?

14. Despite the fact that the expression 'born again' comes from Jesus many people seem to find the idea difficult, why do you think this is?

(The theological term for being born again is regeneration and the same idea comes in several other places such as 1 Peter 1.3, Galatians 6.15 and James 1.18.)

15. How is the Holy Spirit involved in re-birth?

16. Jesus is describing here the hidden work of the Holy Spirit, how can we know about such spiritual things (v10-15)? What does this suggest about the importance of the Bible?