

CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS
MARCH 22 2025

born again

Scripture Story: John 3:1-17.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 17.
Key Text: John 3:12-15.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Nicodemus, although enmeshed in the hierarchy of Israel's elite religious leaders, had a soft spot for the voice of God. Ellen White comments about how he was sensitive to the harsh reactions toward Jesus because that is what previous generations of leaders did to the prophets. With a teachable spirit and a careful approach he came to Jesus at night and engaged the Savior in an unforgettable evening of instruction.

This week's lesson can feature the "conversion experience" process and students may learn that conversion is a lifelong journey, as it was for Nicodemus. This lesson can also foster discussion about the nature of knowing—theoretical knowledge versus the kind of transformation that Ellen White describes as "regeneration." Throughout this incident Jesus offers several metaphors or illustrations that are pivotal to the transformation of Nicodemus: (1) birth and being born again; (2) the work of the Spirit like blowing wind; (3) the duality of flesh and spirit; (4) the image of Calvary portrayed by the Old Testament story of the way Israel was saved by fixing their eyes on the snake of brass. And, of course, in addition to the metaphors and images the essence of the mission of Christ on earth, then is summarized through John 3:16.

Many young people don't feel converted because they don't have the Damascus road experience. This is a perfect opportunity to remind them that Saul was already a believer in God before his "conversion"—he was just wrong about a few important things. Nicodemus was a slow burn instead of an explosion. Affirm your students as they share their conversion experiences and remind them of their role as disciples of Christ.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand the ongoing nature of conversion. *(Know)*
- Feel confident that God is transforming them, as they allow Him to. *(Feel)*
- Choose to live boldly for the kingdom of God. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Experience of Salvation, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 10: "In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, Substitute and Example. . . . (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 33:11; 36:25-27; Hab. 2:4; Mark 9:23, 24; John 3:3-8, 16; 16:8; Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6-10; 8:1-4, 14-17; 10:17; 12:2; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13, 14, 26; 4:4-7; Eph. 2:4-10; Col. 1:13, 14; Titus 3:3-7; Heb. 8:7-12; 1 Peter 1:23; 2:21, 22; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; Rev. 13:8.)"

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

Invite the students to share their responses to the memorable conversion experiences and the metaphors they used to describe those significant moments in the *What Do You Think?* section. How would you describe your conversion experience? Why do you think people resonate with dramatic conversion stories? What metaphor describes your walk with God?

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

Have you ever heard the story of Ignaz Phillip Semmelweis? When he was born (1818), it was common for women to die during childbirth. It had been reported that one out of every six mothers would die as a result of what was called "childbed fever."

The daily routine for doctors would often start by performing autopsies and dealing with emergency scenarios. As the day wore on, the doctor would attend to the mothers who were in labor—without washing their hands! Dr. Semmelweis was the first to implement washing his hands regularly—between each examination—with a chlorine solution. After practicing this simple method for 11 years, instead of losing one in six mothers at childbirth he had lost one in 50.

He spent years on the lecture circuit railing other doctors, "For God's sake, please wash your hands!" During the Industrial Revolution, technology was on the onset, so many medical professionals were curious about new techniques and significant medical breakthroughs—very few people listened to the simple message of Semmelweis. Dr. Semmelweis was unable to convince his colleagues to wash their hands. After his death, his discovery was validated and met widespread acceptance.

King David cried out, "Wash me!" John the Baptist called the entire nation of Israel to "repent" and wash away the old by baptism and bring in the new birth of the Spirit. Even Jesus said to Peter, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (John 13:8). The new birth experience throughout Scripture has always been connected with water and washing. The message conveyed to Nicodemus was meant for all. Repent. Wash. By faith, start your new life this new day and be born from above.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

As you read and respond to the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus, notice the openness of Nicodemus to the teaching of Christ. He doesn't get it entirely, but unlike the medical world during the 1800s, Nicodemus did not resist the message of Christ. The teaching and work of Christ burned slowly and steadily in Nicodemus. And it all started with a one-on-one encounter.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- Read each word in this narrative carefully and patiently and see if you notice something you had not seen before.
- *Highlight* or *underline* every question that Jesus asks. What are the questions you think are the most difficult to answer?
- What can you tell about the character qualities of Nicodemus by looking at this story?
- What are the key verses in this storied encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus?
- As Jesus seeks to communicate the essence of kingdom life to Nicodemus, what metaphors or illustrations does He use to teach this lesson? (Read also John 7:40-53 and John 19:38, 39.)
- What do you think is the central message that God has for you in this passage?
- In what way do you resonate with the story of Nicodemus? In what way is his experience different from yours?

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: John 1:10-12; Romans 6:1-6; Acts 9; Numbers 21:7-9; Philippians 1:6.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Honest Affirmation

Honest affirmation will move young people to feel more inclined to respond. One of the reasons youth hold back from conversation or offering their ideas is because their insights at this stage are tightly tied to who they are. They are at the stage of development where they seek to personally own their faith. So as they share in class, give a note or a word of encouragement, citing specific things they said, thus affirming their response. One of the key attributes of an effective learning environment is a positive feeling about the place, the people, and the conversations.

on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

The setting of this exchange between Christ and Nicodemus is late in the evening, at a time and place where their conversation would be undisturbed. Some suggest that Nicodemus was being secretive because of fear or cowardice. But this is unlikely in that he speaks up on behalf of Jesus directly to the Sanhedrin later in John 7. Perhaps the teacher is being discreet because he is truly seeking to understand the mission of Jesus and he could ascertain better who Jesus is without the controversy or crowds. There is, already, plenty of controversy because, just prior to this meeting, Jesus turned the Temple upside down. The religious leaders were already planning to take action against Jesus for His overt attack on what seemed to be their jurisdiction.

One of the key talking points had to do with birth and rebirth, flesh and the Spirit, and the inward change versus the external appearance. When Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be born again in order to even see the kingdom of God, it must have shocked the honest seeker. The Jews believed that baptism was solely for non-Jews seeking to convert to the faith of Israel. Baptism, or the rite of water purification, was the only way. But they believed in the ritual so much that when a heathen or Gentile converted and was baptized, they were reborn to be a child of Abraham in the fullest sense. Jesus was not teaching Nicodemus something foreign—what was foreign was that it was being applied to Nicodemus, someone who was already considered a child of Abraham by blood. But Jesus would say, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6), meaning the only way to be truly a child of Abraham is to be reborn by faith.

Furthermore, Jesus is referring to the internal renewal that is not foreign to the Old Testament either. Jeremiah 31:33, 34 and Ezekiel 36:26 refer to the inward regeneration so prominent in the New Testament.

It is not a coincidence that Jesus also used the story in Numbers 21:4-9 as an analogy of His mission and authority. Even as people chose to fix their

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite the students to share the key text with the class if they have committed it to memory.
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Desire of Ages. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that speaks most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quotes in Further Insight *convey the point of the story in this lesson.*

eyes upon the snake on the staff as Moses lifted it up, they were saved. But the same disobedient, hostile attitude that endangered Israel existed in the ranks of Israel during the time of Christ. The meaning of this analogy is unpacked throughout verses 16-21. Clearly the overwhelming message of this event is that there is only one way to salvation—never make the mistake of thinking otherwise.

Nicodemus ultimately made the choice that everyone must make about Jesus: accepting Jesus' invitation to salvation and surrendering the heart completely to Him.

Once we have accepted Jesus, we can share His love and the invitation to salvation with others.

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Have the students divide into groups of two or three. On a piece of paper, have them write out the stages of development that a person goes through from birth to maturity. Invite them to report and discuss the commonalities of their responses. Now, to extend this activity, ask them to discuss in their groups the stages of regeneration or the new birth experience. In the same way they mapped out stages of human development, have them describe the conversion process of people and share their ideas with the class.

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

Nicodemus got what he was looking for. His heart was open, and his sensibilities were softened to the leading of God's Spirit in Christ. But he loved Israel and longed for the day when Christ would come. Perhaps he thought the religious leaders could also receive Jesus as the Messiah. But the good news is that Nicodemus became a part of the new church after Christ had risen from the dead. Consider the many people in Scripture who matured over time. There are moments that can seem monumental—baptism is one. But this story teaches us that while baptism or rebirth is essential, it is better thought of as a mile marker than a monument. If you were to scan your life and choose the key moments that caused you to grow, what would they be? "How, then, are we to be saved? 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,' so the Son of man has been lifted up, and everyone who has been deceived and bitten by the serpent may look and live. 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' John 1:29. The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour. Then the Spirit of God through faith produces a new life in the soul. The thoughts and desires are brought into obedience to the will of Christ. The heart, the mind, are created anew in the image of Him who works in us to subdue all things to Himself. Then the law of God is written in the mind and heart, and we can say with Christ, 'I delight to do Thy will, O my God.' Psalm 40:8" (Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 175). Maybe you need to take the step toward baptism because you recognize that you too need to be born again. Perhaps you have been baptized but you long for the inward transformation of the heart. Now is the time to respond.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*),* chapter 17.

*A special adaptation, *Humble Hero*, has been created by the Ellen G. White Estate and the Pacific Press® Publishing Association. Get more info about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net.

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
MARCH22 2025

STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: John 3:1-17.
Commentary: *The Desire of Ages* (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 17.

born again



© Thinkstock 2016

keytext

"If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

(John 3:12-15)

flashlight

"Nicodemus had come to the Lord thinking to enter into a discussion with Him, but Jesus laid bare the foundation principles of truth. He said to Nicodemus, It is not theoretical knowledge you need so much as spiritual regeneration. You need not to have your curiosity satisfied, but to have a new heart. You must receive a new life from above before you can appreciate heavenly things. Until this change takes place, making all things new, it will result in no saving good for you to discuss with Me My authority or My mission" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 171).

what do you think?

If you were to describe your conversion to Christ, what memorable moment would come to mind that helped you decide to give your heart to Jesus? What metaphor would you use to describe your conversion experience? Explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

did you know?

John 3:16, the most popular verse in the Bible, came from Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, a spiritual leader who took three years to fully turn His life over to Christ.

"Baptism is one of the most important subjects in the New Testament. It is mentioned over eighty times. Before His ascension to heaven, Jesus commissioned His disciples to 'go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' (Matthew 28:19). The book of Acts records that the disciples followed their Lord's instructions, and tens of thousands of people were baptized." "The New Testament church baptized adult believers who committed their lives to Christ, repented of their sins, and obeyed His Word" (Mark Finley, *What the Bible Says About*, p. 311).

INTO THE STORY

"There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.'

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'

"Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?'

"Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.'

"Nicodemus answered and said to Him, 'How can these things be?'

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

" 'He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.' "

(John 3:1-18)

OUT OF THE STORY

Read each word in this narrative carefully and patiently and see if you notice something you had not seen before.

Highlight or *underline* every question that Jesus asks. What are the questions you think are the most difficult to answer?

_____
_____
_____
_____

What can you tell about the character qualities of Nicodemus by looking at this story?

_____
_____
_____

What are the key verses in this storied encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus?

_____
_____
_____

As Jesus seeks to communicate the essence of kingdom life to Nicodemus, what metaphors or illustrations does He use to teach this lesson? (Read also John 7:40-53 and John 19:38, 39.)

_____
_____
_____

What do you think is the central message that God has for you in this passage?

_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" **(John 1:10-12).**

"Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" **(James 1:18).**

"Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as His counselor has taught Him? With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, and taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, and showed Him the way of understanding?" **(Isaiah 40:13, 14).**

"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him" **(1 John 5:1).**

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" **(1 Peter 1:3).**

further insight

"When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 173

"The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. His love is drawing us to Himself."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 175

Sabbath

Read Philippians 1:6.

In order to experience the gift of salvation, each of us need to be born again.

"Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Saviour and Lord, Substitute and Example" (The Experience of Salvation, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, no. 10). Read and respond to the activity in the *What Do You Think?* section of this week's lesson. Metaphors can capture our experiences and convey them in creative ways. Young people who grow up in a community of faith often feel like they have no conversion story because their journey seems spread out over the years. But Nicodemus was in fact a teacher/leader in the Jewish faith before he discovered the kingdom as Christ taught him. Read Philippians 1:6 and reflect on the seasons of spiritual awakening in your life. What "good work" are you confident of Jesus completing in your life?

Sunday

Read John 3:3-8.

As you read the Scripture story of Nicodemus, use the questions in the *Out of the Story* section to guide your study. What parts of the story are new to you? Why do you think this story is included in the Gospel of John?

Nicodemus is an example of someone who was religious, and his heart was open to Jesus, but it took time for his devotion to become resolute. Who do you know that has been close to the faith but over time became genuinely passionate for Christ? In what way is their story an inspiration to you?

Monday

Read John 3:12-15.

The *Key Text* connects with the Old Testament event that was a forecast of Calvary. Read Numbers 21:6-9 and compare that story with the *Key Text* for this week. How can you keep your eyes focused on Christ throughout the course of a normal week?

Tuesday

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

Read the quote from *The Desire of Ages* in the *Flashlight* section of this lesson. What are some examples of "spiritual regeneration"? Whom do you know well who has experienced real spiritual regeneration? How is their life different because of their experience?

Wednesday

Read 1 Peter 1:23.

As you read the passages listed in the *Punch Lines* section of this week's lesson, which verse speaks to your life today? In what way do you resonate with Nicodemus and his experience with Christ?

Thursday

Read Ephesians 2:4-10.

Make a list of five spiritual moments in your life that were key turning points in your relationship with Christ. Briefly describe how you were impacted each time. Take time to pray and thank God for each specific event as it drew you closer and closer to God.

Friday

Read Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36, 37; and Matthew 28:19, 20.

Based on these passages, what conditions does God want us to meet before baptism?

The words of Christ to Nicodemus touched on being "born of water and spirit." Jesus knew Nicodemus would understand this because every religious teacher knew of the significance of baptism and "the new birth." Have you considered becoming born again through baptism? How can you apply the principles described in the Bible verses above as you prepare for baptism?

this week's reading*

The Desire of Ages (or *Humble Hero*), chapter 17.

**Humble Hero* is a special adaptation of *The Desire of Ages*, created by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press®. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companionbooks#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages series each year.