

date: **4/23/17****Bible Passage: John 2:23–25; 3:1–21**
(Nicodemus's Question)

God Is Love

REMEMBER VERSE

The **LORD** is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.
Psalm 145:8

Inspire

Shares personal stories from fellow ministry leaders about how God has worked in their lives

My grandpa once told me a story about a friend of his who was on his deathbed, lying in his room, with his friends gathered around him. My grandpa said that at the moment of this man's death, his eyes turned sky blue, he clapped his hands in excitement, and he said, "I can see Jesus." How comforting that must have been to those who witnessed it.

A friend, whose mom died from cancer, told me that while she and others were gathered in her mom's room worshipping, her mom began to cry with tears of joy that she would soon be worshipping in the presence of Jesus.

One of the most amazing benefits of knowing Jesus and receiving eternal life is that we get to live with Him for all eternity. This knowledge is comforting and exciting. The two who died are now joyfully living with Jesus. They're seeing Him face-to-face.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." We experience God in this life through a reflection, or only in glimpses. But, someday, we will be able to see Him face-to-face—the One who loves us enough to die for us.

Tori Funkhouser
ROCKHARBOR Church

Equip

Offers perspective and context to the lesson's Bible passage

Jesus' message in John 3 is both comforting and troubling. He asserts in verse 16 that "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." Then, in verse 18, Jesus says, "Whoever does not believe stands condemned already."

This message came directly after a Passover feast, during which the people "saw the signs [Jesus] was performing and believed in his name" (John 2:23). But Scripture also says, "Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people" (v. 24). Jesus knew the people at the Passover feast only believed because they saw Him perform miracles; their faith wasn't true saving faith. Nicodemus probably fell into this category of believers.

Jesus came to save people, not to punish them. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, people can have new life, and only through God's Spirit can people truly become born-again children of God. Throughout John 3, Jesus asserts that being "born again" into a new life is required to receive eternal life, not just believing in Him. As Christians, we need to know that true faith in Jesus is so much more than just looking to get things from God or looking for signs and wonders from God, as the crowds did. True faith is about giving our whole life to God, who loves us overwhelmingly.

Jesus' Reference to Moses

In John 3:14, Jesus says, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up." This refers to Numbers 21:4–9. In these verses, the Israelites complained again about having to live in the wilderness, so God sent snakes into their midst, and many people died.

The people realized they had sinned and asked Moses to pray that God would take the snakes away. When Moses prayed, God said, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live" (Numbers 21:8). Jesus compares Himself to the bronze snake in this situation because both were sent from God to be physically lifted up so that people might be saved.

Support

Provides reflection and assessment through encouragement, prayer, and time in God's Word

God loved us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to bridge the gap between God and man caused by sin, thus restoring our relationship with Him. This is the whole point of The Big God Story! God loves the world and everyone in it, and He offers us eternal life. We just have to choose to accept His gift and follow Him wherever He may lead.

Spend some time thinking about this truth. When did you choose to follow Jesus? How has this decision changed your life? What has God brought you through since then? In your own way, praise God for how He has changed you, saved you, and brought you into relationship with Him.

Pray for the kids to know how wonderful it is to be changed and saved by Jesus. Pray that they, like Nicodemus, will be curious enough to ask questions about God and seek Him out. Pray that they will, even now, be changed forever and follow Jesus.

SMALL GROUP

SECTION

EXPLORE// 10 min.

Small Group Leaders

Children engage in fun, creative activities designed to pique their curiosity about the day's portion of The Big God Story.

Because Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, the man probably couldn't see very well because of the darkness. Lead the children in EXPLORE activities that will get them thinking about moving around without being able to see.

Option 1: Eyes Down (for younger kids)**SUPPLIES**

- None

SET UP

Clear a large space in the room.

RELATE

Trying to find someone when you can't see very well can be tricky! In today's part of The Big God Story, a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night because he didn't want people to see him. But God sees everything, and He saw what was going on in Nicodemus's heart.

Have the children pair up, and invite one volunteer pair to come forward. Choose one child to give directions, and have him move about 10 feet away. Ask the other child to look at the floor as you spin her three times. Now encourage the child looking at the floor to walk toward her partner while the partner gives her directions. She can't look up or look ahead! Once she finds her partner, the two should find each other's hands and high-five. Make sure each child gets a chance to play.

Option 2: Blindfolded (for older kids)**SUPPLIES**

- Blindfold or bandana

SET UP

Clear a large space in the room.

RELATE

Trying to find someone when you can't see very well can be tricky! In today's part of The Big God Story, a Pharisee named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night because he didn't want people to see him. But God sees everything, and He saw what was going on in Nicodemus's heart.

Have the children pair up, and invite one volunteer pair to come forward. Blindfold one child and ask the second child to move about 15 to 20 feet away. Spin the child wearing the blindfold three times, and then tell

him to walk toward his partner. The partner giving directions should help the blindfolded child cross the room to his partner. Once the kids meet, they should find each other's hands and high-five. Make sure each child gets a chance to play.

LARGE GROUP SECTION

DISCOVER// 30 min.

Host/Worship Leader/ Storyteller

Children participate in discovering God's Word through Bible verse memorization, interactive storytelling techniques, and worship as response.

Traditions and Remember Verse

SUPPLIES

- Remember Verse image (see Resources)
- Remember Verse animation (see Resources)
- Mementos for your church Traditions (rocks, marbles, gum balls, etc.)

RELATE

Give the children mementos (such as rocks, marbles, or blocks) for accomplishments such as memorizing the Remember Verse or bringing their Bibles. Have them put the objects into a clear container or add them to a structure, and celebrate when it's complete.

This week's Remember Verse focuses on a character trait of God that's highlighted in today's portion of The Big God Story.

The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. Psalm 145:8

Connect

Question

If you could meet one famous person, who would it be and why?

The Big God Story

Bible Passage: John 2:23–25; 3:1–21

Storytelling Technique: Changing Character Clothes

God Is Love

SUPPLIES

- Timeline image (see Resources)
- Timeline animation (see Resources)

- **Images:** [Star](#), [John 3:16](#) (see Resources)
- **Audio:** [Stealthy Entrance](#) (see Resources)
- Bibles
- Pharisee clothes (Bible-times robe or graduation gown, fancy hat or headwear, shiny belt, etc.)
- Everyday clothes (jacket, baseball cap, normal belt, etc.)
- Electric fan

SET UP

Place the fan at the front of the room, and make sure it's plugged in. Put on the Pharisee clothes.

RELATE

Tech: *Cue Stealthy Entrance audio.* Enter the room from the back, moving stealthily around the room. Hide behind objects and crawl on the ground as if you're sneaking in for a secret mission. Eventually, come to the front of the storytelling area. *Tech:* *Turn off the audio.*

Dust yourself off and clear your throat as if composing yourself. **In today's part of The Big God Story we'll hear about a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee.** Arrogantly puff out your chest and adjust your clothes. **Pharisees were important Jewish leaders. They were very religious and thought perfect obedience to the Old Testament Law would cause God to send His Messiah. Who was the Messiah?** Encourage responses. **That's right—Jesus. The Pharisees expected the Messiah to be a king who would rule Israel and overthrow Israel's enemies. But this wasn't God's plan for Jesus quite yet. Before we hear more, let's pray together.** Lead children in a Prayer of Release to pause, be still, and ask the Holy Spirit to quiet their hearts and minds.

One night, Nicodemus secretly went to speak to Jesus. *Tech:* *Cue Stealthy Entrance audio, dim the lights, and cue Star image.* Move around stealthily for a moment; then return to center stage. *Tech:* *Turn off the audio and turn up the lights.* **Nicodemus had a lot of questions for Jesus.** Invite children to open Bibles to John 3:2–4 and follow along as you read these verses aloud.

Jesus talked about being born again. What does that mean? Encourage responses. **The Bible says that when we were “dead in [our] sins ... God made [us] alive with Christ” (Colossians 2:13). To be born again means God gives us a new spiritual life when we trust and obey Jesus.**

Being born again isn't something you can see; it's sort of like the wind. Invite kids to follow along in John 3:8 as you read it. **Jesus said, “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.”** Ask for a volunteer with long hair to come up front. Have her face the fan, and turn on the fan so her hair blows back. **Can you see the wind?** Pause for responses. **No! But you can see the effects of the wind. In the same way, Jesus said that we can't see God's Spirit, but we can see the effects of God's Spirit in people's lives.** Thank the volunteer and have her return to her seat.

Jesus went on to tell Nicodemus what He would do to offer salvation to the world. He reminded Nicodemus of something that happened to the people of Israel in the Old Testament. The people of Israel disobeyed God, so God allowed poisonous snakes to bite the people, and many died. But when the people repented of their sin and prayed, God told Moses to make a bronze snake and “put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live' ... Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived” (Numbers 21:8–9).

Jesus explained that He was like that bronze snake! Invite the children to turn to John 3:14. **Jesus said,**

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him” (vv. 14–15). Jesus knew He would be lifted up on a cross and die for the sins of the world so people can live forever with Him and be in relationship with Him. Jesus knew His life was a sacrifice, and He generously gave it away.

The Pharisees didn’t think the Messiah should do that! They expected Him to be a ruling, reigning king. But Jesus knew His job was to be a servant to all. So Jesus laid it all out for Nicodemus with what He said next. *Tech: Cue John 3:16 image.* Invite kids to open Bibles to John 3:16 and follow along. Jesus said, “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” (v. 16). Have you heard this verse before? If so, raise your hands. Pause for kids to respond. This is what The Big God Story is all about: God is love, and He sent His Son to save us from our sins.

Remove Pharisee clothes and accessories, fold them, and lay them aside. The Bible never specifically tells us that Nicodemus decided to follow Jesus, but we can see that Nicodemus’s encounter with Jesus changed his life. Later in the book of John, Nicodemus spoke up for Jesus before all the other Pharisees. Then, after Jesus died, Nicodemus helped take Jesus’ body and prepare it to be buried. Nicodemus risked his reputation and humbled himself to serve the Messiah he had come to love. He did this because He knew that God is love.

Tell the story of when you came to know Jesus. We can’t be born again on our own; we must believe that Jesus died for our sins on the cross to save us. When we’re born again, God gives us His Spirit. Begin to put on everyday clothes. The Bible describes having the Holy Spirit as being “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Continue putting on everyday clothes. The Holy Spirit gives us new life so we can become God’s children. This is such good news—and it’s what The Big God Story is all about! Because God loved the world, He sent His Son, Jesus, to save us.

SMALL GROUP SECTION

RESPOND// 15 min.

Small Group Leaders

Children reflect on what the Holy Spirit is teaching them and respond through creative activities and games.

Reflect: God Is Love

Encourage the kids to open their Bibles and read the suggested passages.

Questions for Younger Kids

- What was the name of the man who spoke with Jesus? John 3:1
- What was that man’s job? John 3:1
- Why did God send His Son, Jesus, to earth? John 3:16–17
- Can we become children of God all on our own? Why or why not? John 3:5
- How do we become born again? Romans 10:9

Questions for Older Kids

- **Who was Nicodemus, and why did He want to speak with Jesus?** John 3:1
- **What does it mean to be born again?** John 3:6, 16b
- **Why did God send His Son, Jesus, to earth?** John 3:16–17
- **Why did Jesus say that wind was like God's Spirit?** John 3:5–8
- **In what way did Jesus say He was like the bronze snake Moses set up?** Numbers 21:8; John 3:14–15
- **Can we become children of God all on our own?** John 3:5
- **Why do you believe in God?**

BLESS// 5 min.

Small Group Leaders

Children receive a blessing from their leaders and sometimes one another. A blessing may be prayer of commission, a portion of Scripture, or words to encourage and guide.

SUPPLIES

- Remember Verse cards (see Resources)
- Bible

RELATE

Encourage the kids to hold their hands in front of them, palms up. This posture is meant to symbolize a willingness of heart to respond to God's Holy Spirit and receive what God has for them. Invite them to remain in this posture as you bless them. Encourage parents to come early in order to read the blessing over their child.

Open a Bible and read 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17:

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Ask the children to take out their index cards from the previous activity and hold the cards in front of themselves as you offer this final blessing over the group.

May you help others come to know God's Son, Jesus, the Savior of the world.