

## Session 4: John 3:1–36

### **SESSION GOALS**

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

#### **Main Idea**

God shows his love to us through his Son Jesus who came so that we might have eternal life.

#### **Head Change**

To know that Jesus is the Son of God who offers us spiritual rebirth.

#### **Heart Change**

To feel the deep love of God for you when you look at Jesus.

#### **Life Change**

To put your faith in Jesus so that you might have eternal life.

### **OPEN**

#### **What makes you feel refreshed or “like a new person”?**

Things as simple as a new haircut, a vacation, or a long night’s rest can make us feel brand new. We feel rejuvenated from our former way of living, even if only for a short time. When Jesus says that he wants to make us new, he truly means it. He doesn’t just want us to feel better for a little while—he wants us to have new lives and to live forgiven and free in the light.

### **READ**

John 3:1–36

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Dr. Tony Evans's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

**What qualifies you to enter heaven?**

**What is the importance of the bronze serpent?**

**According to Dr. Evans, how is faith in Jesus different than all other world religions?**

Show Session 4: *John 3:1–36* (11 minutes).

## **DISCUSS**

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Read John 3:1–21.

We often think of the Pharisees as enemies of Jesus, but not all of the Pharisees opposed him. John 3 introduces us to Nicodemus, a Pharisee who wanted to learn from Jesus. **What does this passage tell us about Nicodemus, specifically in verses 1–3, 10?**

**Note:** To learn more about the Pharisees, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

Nicodemus is an important figure in the spiritual and political life of Israel. But he does not lord his position over Jesus. Instead, he humbles himself before Jesus and seeks to learn from him. Often, we come to Jesus in prayer because we want him to do something for us, rather than seeking to listen and learn. **What does it look like in your life to listen to and learn from Jesus?**

Nicodemus starts the conversation by praising Jesus's miracles and signs, but Jesus redirects the conversation to being born again. **When Nicodemus hears Jesus's words, what is his immediate reaction? What does he think it means to be born again?**

Jesus then clarifies what he meant in verses 5–7. **What does Jesus have in mind when he says, “born again”?**

**Note:** To learn more about being born of water and the Spirit, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.

In the wilderness, God provided a way for his people to be healed from poisonous snake bites. This healing was not earned but was freely given to anyone who looked upon God's provision, the bronze serpent, raised up in front of them. **What later event is Jesus predicting in verse 14? If you want to be healed of your sin, how must you respond to Jesus?**

**Note:** To learn more about the bronze serpent, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.

**Note:** To learn more about the Son of Man lifted up, go to **Go Deeper Section 4** at the end of this study.

**What was Jesus's mission on earth according to verses 16–18?**

This is the transfer of new birth. Jesus was raised up on the cross so that anyone who looks upon him would be forgiven of their sin, spiritually cleansed, and made new as the righteousness of God. In short, when you believe in Jesus you are born again. **Imagine that someone asks you what it means to be born again. How would you explain it to them?**

In verses 19–21, Jesus explains the different behaviors of those who trust in Jesus and those who reject him. **What is the primary difference between the two? Which group do you fall into?**

Those who know Jesus don't have to hide their faults or live in shame. They have been fully forgiven by God and are able to live in a completely open and unrepachable way. Trusting Jesus causes you to live differently in every area of your life. **If you have trusted Jesus, what can you do to live even more "in the light"?**

Read John 3:25–26.

John the Baptist's disciples come to him with a complaint about Jesus. **Why are they upset with Jesus?**

Jealousy in ministry can create division and combativeness where God intends there to be cooperation and celebration. **Have you ever been jealous over someone else's success? What caused you to be jealous of them? What did you do in reaction to your jealousy?**

John the Baptist then takes time to remind his disciples of the supremacy of Christ. When divisions arise in ministry, we must likewise remind ourselves of the one we serve. We don't have to compete for Jesus's attention. We are simply called to serve in the ministry he gives us. **When jealousy arises, what can you do to celebrate the kingdom of Christ first and foremost?**

In verse 30, John the Baptist gives his disciples a truth we can all benefit from, "He must increase, but I must decrease." **What can you do to increase Jesus's fame in your life, even when it means your personal reputation**

Verses 31–36 sum up this whole chapter by clearly stating why Jesus came, what he came to do, the source of his authority, and his effect on us. Look at verse 36. **What is the result of trusting Jesus? What is the result of rejecting Jesus?**

Again, the Gospel of John forces us to decide if we will follow or turn away from Jesus. **What have you chosen to do? If you have chosen to follow Jesus, what actions in your life can help you trust Jesus more each day?**

## **LAST WORD**

You cannot earn your way into heaven. You cannot work your way into God's good graces. But, in his grace, God has made a way for you. He has sent his Son to us so that we might be forgiven and have everlasting life.

Jesus was raised up on the cross so that anyone who looks at him might be saved. When you trust in him, your sins are forgiven, and you are made new. It is a spiritual rebirth. But that's just the beginning. If you are born again, you are born into a new life and relationship with God.

## **GO DEEPER**

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

### **1. Pharisees**

One of the primary groups that opposed Jesus were the Pharisees. They tested Jesus's knowledge of the Scriptures, condemned his actions, and sought ways to shut down his following. They even looked for a way to kill Jesus (Matthew 12:14; Mark 3:6). But some Pharisees, like Nicodemus, supported Jesus. Some even believed his words and put their faith in him (John 3:1; 7:45–53; 9:13–38). So, who were they and how should we think of them?

The Pharisees were a group of about six thousand men who referred to themselves as the *chaburah*, meaning “the brotherhood.” In order to become a Pharisee, a man had to take a vow in front of three witnesses, promising to spend the rest of his life observing every detail of the Law in the Old Testament. Because of their knowledge and strict adherence to the Law, the Pharisees were seen as spiritual leaders in Israel.

The Pharisees' dark side was most easily seen in their legalism. They felt that because they knew and kept the Law better than everyone else they were better than and more pleasing to God than everyone else.

Read Matthew 23:1–10.

### **What do you learn about the Pharisees based on Jesus's words?**

It would be easy to look down on the Pharisees, but Jesus doesn't let us separate ourselves from their behavior. We can demand other people to carry loads and burdens we aren't willing to carry. We can change our behavior when people are watching so that they will think highly of us.

**In what areas of your life do you fail to practice what you preach?**

Thankfully, we can rest in the forgiveness and grace of the gospel. More than that, Jesus gives us redeemed actions to replace the pharisaical behaviors. Read Matthew 23:11–12.

**Instead of behaving like the Pharisees, what would Jesus have us do? What does it look like to be a “servant”?**

As followers of Jesus, we are called to live humbly, thinking more of others than we boast about ourselves. **What can you do bring more humility into your walk with Christ and relationships with others?**

**2. Born of Water and of Spirit**

The phrase “born of water and spirit” in John 3:5 can be confusing. Many have wondered what exactly it means. But when we look at a few cross references, Jesus’s meaning becomes clear.

Read Ezekiel 36:25–27.

This passage clearly shows God’s intention to cleanse and renew us. It may also explain why Jesus was surprised at Nicodemus’s confusion concerning what it means to be “born again.”

**What does the cleansing water give God’s people in this passage (“born of water”)?**

**What is the benefit of a new heart (“born of spirit”)?**

**What should this rebirth cause us to do?**

Read 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. This passage also couples washing and spiritual renewal.

**According to this passage, what are we to leave in our past? Why should we be done with that way of life?**

In Christ, we are cleansed of sin and given a new spiritual life. We are born again in water and in spirit.

Find a quiet place and read Colossians 3:1–17. Meditate on and pray through these verses. Think about how you have changed since you came to know Jesus and how you might continue to grow to the glory to be more like him.

### **3. The Bronze Serpent**

The story of the bronze serpent is peculiar, but it prefigures the work of Jesus. Read Numbers 21:4–9.

**Why were the snakes sent into the Hebrew camp?**

**What was required to heal a person from their snakebite?**

In the video for this session, Dr. Evans quoted 2 Corinthians 5:21 to help us understand what Jesus did for us on the cross. He called it “the great transfer.”

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21.

**What did Jesus take from us through his death and resurrection?**

**What did Jesus give us through his death and resurrection?**

Just as God used the image of a snake to heal the wounds of the snakes, he used Jesus to defeat the sting of our sin. In this strange Old Testament passage, God shows us his exact plan for destroying the venom of sin and death.

**How has looking to Jesus changed your life?**

**In what areas of your life has he provided healing and renewal?**

**In what areas of your life can you look to Jesus for healing? What current brokenness can you trust him to renew?**

### **4. Son of Man Lifted Up**

When Jesus tells Nicodemus that the Son of Man will be lifted up, he is not only predicting his crucifixion. Jesus was raised up in three ways, each with its own benefit.

The first seems most obvious: Jesus was raised up on a cross in death. Read 1 Peter 2:24–25.

**What does Jesus’s death accomplish for you, and what difference has his death made in your life?**

Second, Jesus was raised from the dead. Read Romans 6:4–8. Just as we were made like him in death, we were also raised with him.