

The Year of Discipleship in 3-D

(Further Developing Devoted Followers of Christ)



Welcome! Growing into more fully-devoted followers of Christ, may this time help all: **Grow Upward** into a more mature personal relationship and commitment to Christ Jesus faithful to God's Word!

Grow Outward to neighbor and world around, learning how to love well and to lead in what matters to God - guided by God's Word, by Jesus Himself, and by the Holy Spirit!

And, **Grow Inward** to discover a more contemplative faith, enhanced by both silence and prayer!

The Scripture for Sunday, January 23, 2022

[STUDY LESSON 20]

THE GOOD NEWS READING:

John 3:1-21

{1} Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. {2} He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." {3} Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." {4} Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" {5} Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. {6} What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. {7} Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' {8} The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." {9} Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" {10} Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

{11} "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. {12} If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? {13} No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. {14} And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, {15} that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

{16} "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

{17} "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. {18} Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. {19} And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. {20} For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. {21} But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

DISCUSSION GUIDANCE AND QUESTIONS:

1. Open *(or have someone in the group open)* with a prayer inviting the work of the Holy Spirit to open up the hearts and lives of any and all to shape believers into more fully devoted following of Christ.
2. Read *(or have one or more persons read)* the passage printed above *(or from a bible)*.

3. What words or phrases caught your attention as you heard this passage read? Put another way, were you to choose to memorize a verse and cherish it from this text, what verse might that be and why? Take note within yourself, what sort of feelings arise in that word, phrase, or verse?
4. BACKGROUND NOTES: Text is part of the “Cana to Cana” cycle in John. (*John 2:1-4:54*) Chapter and verse notations (*not part of original manuscript*) separate this story from the one that follows (*Samaritan woman at the well*) yet they are distinctly related, though polar opposite. An encounter with Jesus is the “tie that binds.” By way of example, Nicodemus, a named Pharisee of prominence meets up with Jesus at night and struggles to believe (*See John 3:9*). In contrast, the woman at the well is unnamed, a Samaritan with a questionable reputation, who meets up with Jesus in broad daylight (*noon*) and comes to believe. Imbedded in the text is probably the most familiar of N.T. verses (*John 3:16*) though that context. Much of the prologue’s themes are present within this encounter. A distinctive shift in pronouns occurs in John 3:11 from the singular to the plural forms of the first and second person (“we” and “you”).
5. How does it strike you that a wise and leading Pharisee had so much difficulty understanding what Jesus seems to be talking about? Is there anything in the faith that, of late, you struggle to understand, even asking the question, “How can these things be?”
6. In contrast to the upcoming Samaritan woman who comes to a profound faith that witnesses to others after having met up with Jesus, the same is not true for Nicodemus. But this is only the rest of the story as he will reappear in John, most specifically in bringing the body of Jesus from the cross to the tomb. What insights might be drawn from these two variant conversion stories?
7. Much more will be said later in John’s account regarding the Spirit, but what might one be able to discern about the character and activity of the Holy Spirit based on John 3:5-8?
8. As John 3:11ff moves into the “plural,” the text expands beyond the singular Nicodemus to the reading/listening community (then and now). Eternal life is at stake (*John 3:15, 16*). Explore these verses to see what help to inform having eternal life? Believing, to be sure, but what is it that we are believing about Jesus?
9. Read the referenced Old Testament account Jesus alludes to in John 3:14 (*Numbers 21:4-9*). Dig deeply into that wilderness event as to what one might uncover is going on in the person/ministry of Jesus here.
10. Darkness and light, a prologue theme, is in abundance in this text from Nicodemus approaching Jesus at night, to how it is that people loved darkness rather than light (*John 3:19f*). What is some of the appeal of both darkness and light?
11. Following (or discipleship) may involve a relationship building conversation with Jesus. What is being illuminated for you about discipleship via this encounter? What’s your discipleship “takeaway?”
12. Spend some time talking or reflecting upon this narrative, if willing, share (*or personally identify within yourself*) an aspect of your life where you believe God is calling upon you to exhibit greater belief.
13. Can you identify any particular ways your Christian faith and following might be inspired to change in light of this passage from the Bible (and any discussion and/or reflection that may have taken place)?
14. (*Optional*) Read the passage once more. Then, take some time to close (or have someone close) with a prayer.