



CORNERSTONE CONNECTIONS

MARCH 2021

born again

Scripture Story: John 3:1-17.

Commentary: *The Desire of Ages*, 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 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 Savior and Lord, Substitute and Example." (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 45:22; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Eze. 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 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



Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

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.

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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 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

Teaching From . . .

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**

Invite 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 spoke 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.

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.

Today is Global Youth Day and you can be part of the global initiative to BE THE SERMON by taking an active part in sharing Jesus with the people in your community. Are you ready?

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.

Close the activity by finalizing the plans for the Global Youth Day project you have chosen. Today, March 20, is Global Youth Day. Plan to record and photograph the student's involvement in this community service project and post their participation on the Global Youth Day facebook page.

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 Savior. 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.