

# 6 *A Famous Conversation*

John 3:1–21

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*Purpose:* To grasp the meaning and significance of the new birth.

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You can learn a lot through listening to conversations between important/brilliant people. In John 3, John records one of the most famous conversations ever, between Jesus and one of the religious rulers of his day, Nicodemus.

The most beautiful explanation of the new birth is found here in John 3. It's a passage that children can understand and one that the greatest saints of God have never fully grasped. It's a message not so much to be analyzed and dissected as it is to be received with joy.

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### ***Starting up:***

Were there any interesting circumstances surrounding your birth? Do you know what day of the week and time of day you were born?

Or

Can you remember something significant you learned by listening in on a conversation between two or more other people?

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1. Read John 3:1–21. What is your impression of Nicodemus?

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2. Why do you think he comes to see Jesus at night?

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Most scholars believe that he met Jesus at night because this was the traditional time to study the Law, and he knew that Jesus would not be busy during the day. It also might indicate that he was not on *official* Jewish business, but was coming on his own. Additionally, this might be an irony since John frequently uses the symbolism of spiritual darkness (9:4, 11:10, 13:30)

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Why does he come to see Jesus at all?

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3. How does Nicodemus address Jesus? What does this say about his view of Him?

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4. Jesus' reply to Nicodemus (v. 3) seems to have nothing to do with Nicodemus's statement (v. 2). Why do you think Jesus brings up the subject of the new birth?

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**Question 4.** Birth is just one of many New Testament pictures of what results when a person believes in Jesus Christ, but it is a powerful tool for helping people understand the complete transformation Jesus brings. (See Titus 3:5-6; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1; 4, 18.)

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5. Why do you suppose Nicodemus responds to Jesus' explanation with such amazement (v. 9)?

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**Question 5.** Nicodemus was amazed at Jesus' insistence on a new birth because he put a great deal of trust in his first birth as a Jew. Yet the Old Testament Scriptures revealed that more was needed than physical birth into Israel. Men and women needed a new heart—a transformation before God (Jer 31:33; see also Rom 3:28–29).

As Jesus talked, Nicodemus began to recognize the importance of spiritual birth. His question, however, (v. 4) centered on how it could happen. Jesus responded by showing Nicodemus that the means of this new birth are not physical but spiritual. In order to receive this new birth, a person must be born not only of “water” or “flesh”—that is, born physically—but also of the Spirit. Only the Spirit of God can bring life to the human spirit. Water here does not refer to the water of physical birth, nor is it referring to baptism. It is most likely referring to the washing/cleansing of our sin that God talked about in Ezek. 36:25-37 and later in Titus 3:5-6.

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**6.** Why is Jesus likewise amazed at Nicodemus's ignorance (vv. 10–12)?

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Read Ezekiel 36:25-27; Deut. 30:6; and Jer. 31:33. What promises does God give Israel here? How do the promises given here picture new birth? Do you think it is possible that this is why Jesus is surprised by Nicodemus' ignorance?

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An even longer passage is Ezekiel 37 (Valley of the dry bones) which pictures a new life.

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**7.** How is Jesus' use of the phrase "born again" similar and different from the way it is used today?

How would you define what it means to a person who had never heard the phrase?

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**8.** How does the story of Moses lifting up the snake in the desert (vv. 14–15; see Num 21:4–9) illustrate our need and Christ's offer?

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**9.** What impresses you about God's supreme act of love (vv. 16–17)?

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**10.** How and why does our response to God's Son determine our destiny (v. 18)?

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**11.** Read vv. 19-21. What is he trying to teach us about light and darkness?

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Can you think of a time when you wanted to stay in the "darkness" so no one would see you?

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**12.** This passage emphasizes the importance of our personal response to Jesus Christ. How would you describe your response?

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**Question 12.** You may want to have each person in the group share his or her answer to this question rather than to single out the suspected or known non-Christians. At some point during your study of John, you may want to talk privately with those who are unclear about the gospel or their commitment to Christ.

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