



SESSION 1 of 4

Nicodemus

MEETING AIM

To reflect on how much God loves us.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 3:1-21

BACKGROUND

Nicodemus was one of the Pharisees, a faction of the religious leaders who clashed with Jesus again and again. However, Nicodemus is interested in what Jesus says and comes to visit him at night (presumably so none of the other Pharisees would find out). Jesus teaches Nicodemus what it is to follow him and how much God loves the world. Before the session, dig into this most famous of passages – what is God saying to you? How can that help the children in your group?

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children by name and share out any refreshments you have brought. Ask the children about their week; share in their triumphs and commiserate with them about the things that haven't gone according to plan. If appropriate, share something of what has been happening with you recently.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: pictures of different things that the children might love, such as ice cream, pets, family, school, friends, chocolate, holidays etc

Before the session, find and print out pictures of different things that the children might love. If you have a large group, print out a few sets of the same pictures.

Show the pictures to the children and ask them to rank them in order of those they love the most to those they love the least. Encourage the children to discuss and debate what they think and come to an agreement on the order of the pictures. If you have a large group, then put children in pairs or threes and give each smaller group a set of the pictures. Each smaller group must agree on an order, then come together to create a whole-group decision. Why did children choose the things they did? What does this tell them about love?

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: some materials to make a den; torches; Bible

Show the children your den-making equipment and challenge them to make a den large enough for your group to sit in. Work together to create your den and then all get inside it. (Before you do so, check that the den is safe and won't collapse with you inside!) Use torches to light the inside of the den if necessary.

As you all sit around, explain that you're going to hear about a man called Nicodemus. He was one of the religious leaders and he came to Jesus at night to ask him questions. Wonder together about why he came at night. Then go on to think about what questions Nicodemus might want to ask Jesus. What questions do the children want to ask Jesus?

Show the children where the story is in the Bible. Imagine Nicodemus sneaking through Jerusalem to meet Jesus. Read out John 3:2 and comment that, although most religious leaders didn't like Jesus, Nicodemus thought he had been sent from God. They talked together but Nicodemus didn't understand what Jesus was saying. Encourage the children to think about the questions they would like to ask Jesus. What might the answers be? Read verses 10 to 13. Do they think they would understand what Jesus might say, or would they be like Nicodemus?

Read John 3:16-17. This is a very famous verse – have the children heard it before? Explain that Nicodemus didn't know that Jesus was going to die and then come back to life, but we do! Wonder together what these two verses mean. Share from your own experience what you think of God's love in sending Jesus. What does it mean that God loves us all so much?

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to continue chatting about the Bible story and what it says about God and our relationship with him:

- Imagine you were in the room with Nicodemus and Jesus. Now you've heard the story, what would you want to ask Jesus?
- What does this story tell you about Nicodemus? And about Jesus?
- What do you think Nicodemus did next?
- Read verses 19-21. What do you think it means to live in the light?
- What do you think Jesus meant when he said the words in verses 16 and 17?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: art materials; paper; reflective music and the means to play it (optional)

Show the children the art materials you have provided. Encourage them to create a picture which reflects what they have discovered today. It might be something about talking with Jesus, about how much God loves us or about living in the light. Make sure you have enough time to do this; don't rush this activity. It's important to give the children some time to process what God is saying to them. Some children might create beautiful pictures and be able to explain what they mean, others may not. Nevertheless, both responses (and any in between) are valid; the purpose of this activity is not to create a beautiful picture but to give the children time and space to meet with God, listen to him and process what he is saying.

If any of the children would like to, give them space to tell you (and the group if they wish) about what they have drawn.

5 PRAYER

You will need: pens; paper or Post-it notes

Give the children a pen and a piece of paper or a Post-it note. In a time of quiet, encourage the group to think about what question they might like to ask Jesus after exploring today's Bible passage. If they don't want to write anything, they can draw a picture or symbol to represent what they want to say.

When everyone is ready, invite the group to talk to Jesus about what they have written or drawn. Finally, read John 3:16-17 out again and ask the children to tell Jesus what they think of these verses. If any children want to talk to you about following Jesus, then make some space at the end of the session. You may want to have some resources to help them, such as *What is Being a Christian All About?* (Scripture Union).

ALEX TAYLOR

is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.

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SESSION 2 of 4

The woman at the well

MEETING AIM

To explore the fact that anyone can be Jesus' friend, even those who might be outcasts.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 4:1-42

BACKGROUND

This is a complex passage, with much to explore. In this session, we'll be focusing on the fact that Jesus makes a difference in the life of someone he would not be expected to interact with, someone who was outside his community and in social terms, beneath him. This does not matter to Jesus. The message of salvation and grace is for all, even the Samaritans, even those whose lives seem beyond his reach.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children by name and share out any refreshments you have brought. Ask the children about their week; share in their triumphs and commiserate with them about the things that haven't gone according to plan. If appropriate, share something of what has been happening with you recently.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: pens and paper

Spend some time thinking about the people in your community who might not be accepted by others. Make a list of them and try to think about some of the reasons why. How can we reach out to them and help them?

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: pictures of different wells (search online for different photos); boxes (such as shoeboxes); clean bucket; map of Israel at the time of Jesus; cups

Gather the children together and explain that your story takes place next to a well. Ask the children if they have seen a well before and know what it's for. Show the picture you have brought and chat about how, for many parts of the world, a well would be their main source of clean water.

Show the children your boxes and challenge them to help you build a well with them. Fill the bucket with water (from a tap is fine, as long as it's drinking water) and put it in the middle of your well.

Look together at the map and say that Jesus had been in Jerusalem, but now he was travelling back to his home in Galilee. Point out these two places on the map. Explain that, in between Jerusalem and Galilee was a place called Samaria. People from Samaria didn't like people from Jerusalem, and people from Jerusalem didn't like people from Samaria. Ask the group if they know any other stories about Samaritans – they may have heard the parable of the good Samaritan. However, this didn't stop Jesus from travelling through Samaria. Gather around your well and tell the rest of the story:

As Jesus and his disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Galilee, they came to a place called Sychar. The disciples went to a nearby town to get food, but Jesus was tired so he sat down by a well.

A woman came to the well to draw water and Jesus asked her to give him a drink. *Dip the cups into the bucket of water in your well and share them around the children.* The woman was shocked because she was a Samaritan and Jesus had come from Jerusalem. Jesus shouldn't have been talking to her. She was also shocked because she was a woman and Jesus was a man to whom she wasn't related. He shouldn't have been talking to her! What's more, the woman had lived a bad life and Jesus was a holy teacher. He shouldn't have been talking to her! *Ask the children who might be the equivalent of the woman in your community. Who is ignored by many people? Who is seen as a bad person or not worth talking to? Refer back to 'Intro activity' if you did it.*

But Jesus didn't care. He did talk to her! He told her that, even though there were many differences between them and many reasons that he shouldn't be talking to her, she could still be God's friend. Finally he told her that he was God's special saviour – the one that everyone was waiting for. She couldn't believe it!

Then the disciples came back. *Ask the children how they think they might have felt when they found Jesus with a Samaritan woman.* But the woman couldn't wait to tell people she had found God's special saviour! She ran back to town to tell everyone the news. Jesus stayed with the Samaritans for two days and many people believed in Jesus and became God's friend.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to continue chatting about the Bible story and what it says about God and our relationship with him:

- Why do you think Jesus was happy to talk with the woman?
- What does this tell you about Jesus?
- Have you ever felt too bad to be Jesus' friend? Why?
- What do you want to do now you've heard this story?

15 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: art materials; paper; reflective music and the means to play it (optional)

Show the children the art materials you have provided. Encourage them to create a picture which reflects what they have discovered today. Make sure you have enough time to do this; don't rush this activity. It's important to give the children some time to process what God is saying to them. Some children might create beautiful pictures and be able to explain what they mean, others may not. Nevertheless, both responses (and any in between) are valid; the purpose of this activity is not to create a beautiful picture but to give the children time and space to meet with God, listen to him and process what he is saying.

If any of the children would like to, give them space to tell you (and the group if they wish) about what they have drawn.

5 PRAYER

You will need: cups of water

Give everyone a cup of water. If your well is still up, then 'draw' water for everyone to drink. Explain that Jesus called the water he gives to people 'living water'. This means it refreshes our spirit and keeps our spiritual life healthy. Ask: "Do you need Jesus' living water?" and allow some time for the children to speak with God quietly. Then ask: "Who do you know who needs to hear about Jesus?" and give the children more time to pray. Finish by drinking your water all together.

ALEX TAYLOR

is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.

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SESSION 3 of 4

The man at the pool

MEETING AIM

To discover that Jesus loves us and wants the best for us.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 5:1-15

BACKGROUND

The man by the pool had been unable to walk properly for 38 years. There was a chance that he might be healed (there were beliefs implied in the text and in the now deleted verse 4 that this pool had healing properties when an angel stirred the waters), but it was never a chance he was able to take. Jesus knows this, but questions him nonetheless. "Do you want to be healed?" might seem a redundant question, but the man's reply also seems vague, given that he's talking to the Son of God! How can we help children answer positively to Jesus' love and restoration?

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children by name and share out any refreshments you have brought. Ask the children about their week; share in their triumphs and commiserate with them about the things that haven't gone according to plan. If appropriate, share something of what has been happening with you recently.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: chairs

Set out your chairs in a circle, with one fewer than the number of players. Everyone sits down, with one player standing in the middle. They must go up to a person sitting down, look deep in their eyes and ask: "If you love me, smile!" The sitting player must answer without laughing: "Darling, I love you, but I just can't smile!" If the player laughs, they switch places.

Play for as long as the group enjoy the game. Who is the best at not smiling? Who is the best at making others laugh? Explain that you're going to hear a story about Jesus today; the children should look out for the question Jesus asks and for how Jesus loves the man.

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: play people (such as Lego or Playmobil); scraps of paper or felt to act as beds or mats; yogurt or margarine tub; water; Lego bricks and base (optional)

Fill the yogurt or margarine tub with water and lie your play people down around it, each one on a paper or felt mat. Reserve three or four people to be Jesus and the disciples. If you have time, you might want to construct the scene out of Lego, creating a space in which to drop the tub of water to create the pool of Bethesda.

Before you start, wonder with the children about what might happen. Who are the people around the pool and why might they be lying there? Go on to tell the story:

One day, Jesus and his disciples came to a place called Bethesda. *Stand a play person next to the tub of water to represent Jesus, with a few others to be the disciples.* This was a special pool in Jerusalem where people who weren't well came to be healed. They believed that when the waters moved around, the first one into the pool would be made better. *Stir the water with your finger and put a play figure into the water. Take them out, straighten them and stand them by the pool.*

There was a man who had been unable to walk properly for 38 years. Jesus knew what was wrong and went up to him. *Move your Jesus figure up to one of the ones lying down.* "Do you want to be healed?" Jesus asked. Perhaps the man was surprised by the question – he couldn't walk properly after all. "Every time the waters move, I try to get into the pool, but someone always gets there before me." *Ask the children what they think of the man's answer. Then ask them what they think Jesus will do. Why do they think that?*

"Get up, pick your bed and walk," Jesus told the man. And that's just what the man did! He stood up, took up his mat and walked away! *Stand the play person up, pick up his mat and walk him away.*

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to continue chatting about the Bible story and what it says about God and our relationship with him:

- How does Jesus show love to the man?
- If you were one of the other people sitting by the pool, what would you think?
- What does this story tell you about Jesus?
- Explain that, in verses 9 to 15, the religious leaders get angry because the man is carrying his mat on God's special day, the Sabbath (read those verses to the children). What do the children think about that?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: art materials; paper; reflective music and the means to play it (optional)

Show the children the art materials you have provided. Encourage them to create a picture which reflects what they have discovered today. Make sure you have enough time to do this; don't rush this activity. It's important to give the children some time to process what God is saying to them. Some children might create beautiful pictures and be able to explain what they mean, others may not. Nevertheless, both responses (and any in between) are valid; the purpose of this activity is not to create a beautiful picture but to give the children time and space to meet with God, listen to him and process what he is saying.

If any of the children would like to, give them space to tell you (and the group if they wish) about what they have drawn.

5 PRAYER

You will need: mats (such as small rugs, throws or samples of carpet); reflective music and the means to play it

Give each child a mat to sit on and invite them to find space on the floor where they won't get distracted by anyone else. Ask them to think about something in their life that they'd like Jesus to fix or change. Play your reflective music and encourage the children to chat to Jesus about that thing. If the children struggle to think of what to pray, ask them to imagine Jesus is sitting next to them. What do they want to say to him?

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is resources editor for *Premier Youth and Children's Work*.

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SESSION 4 of 4

The man who couldn't see

MEETING AIM

To begin to understand what Jesus means when he calls himself the light of the world.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 9

BACKGROUND

The fourth of our series on the people Jesus met in the Gospel of John focuses on a blind man whom Jesus heals. Like the story of the man by the pool (from session three), this healing takes place on the Sabbath. However, when the Pharisees confront Jesus about work on the Sabbath this time, he uses the idea of physical and spiritual blindness. The uneducated man who was blind can see the truth about Jesus; the Pharisees (who should know better) are blind to him.

5 CIRCLE TIME

Welcome the children by name and share out any refreshments you have brought. Ask the children about their week; share in their triumphs and commiserate with them about the things that haven't gone according to plan. If appropriate, share something of what has been happening with you recently.

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: lots of different lights such as spotlights, torches, battery-operated tea lights or desk lamps

Darken your meeting space if possible and experiment with the different lights you have brought. Which light up the room the best? Which ones are the most atmospheric? Which do the children prefer?

Introduce the idea that the Bible sometimes calls Jesus 'light of the world'. Indeed, Jesus calls himself this in John 8 and 9. What do the children think this means? Make sure that the children stay safe as they experiment. Discourage them from shining their lights into people's eyes (or their own)!

10 BIBLE STORY

You will need: sunglasses with very dark lenses

Gather the children and ask for volunteers to play the different parts in the story: the man who was blind, his parents, Jesus, the disciples, the Pharisees. (If your group is small, you can miss out the parents and the disciples; if your group is larger, then have as many disciples and Pharisees as you want!) Tell this story:

One Sabbath (that's the holy day of the week when people weren't meant to do any work), Jesus and his friends met a blind man. *Give the child being the blind man a pair of sunglasses to wear.* Jesus told his friends that this man was going to show how amazing God is. "I am the light of the world," Jesus said.

Jesus spat on the ground, made some mud and rubbed it on the man's eyes. *Jesus can mime doing this.* "Go and wash your face in the Pool of Siloam," Jesus told the man. He did, and could see! *Remove the sunglasses from the blind man.*

People couldn't believe that this was the man who was blind. *The disciples should look confused.* But the man told everyone that he was! *The man who was blind should tell everyone who he is.* They took him to the Pharisees – the religious leaders – who questioned him. *Take the man to the Pharisees.* They were angry that Jesus had healed the man on God's special day, the Sabbath. They called the man's parents to confirm that he was blind, but could now see. *Bring in the parents, if you have them.* They said: "Ask him, he can speak for himself," because they were scared of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees asked the man again what had happened. *The Pharisees should look angry.* Then they got angry with him, and the man was surprised. "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing," he told them. The Pharisees were so angry, they threw the man out. They do so, gently!

Jesus went to find the man. The man was so happy that he worshiped Jesus. *The man does so.* "I have come so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." Some Pharisees heard him and were angry: "Are we blind too?" *Put sunglasses on the Pharisees to show they are 'blind'.*

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Use these questions to continue chatting about the Bible story and what it says about God and our relationship with him:

- What do you think Jesus means when he says he is the light of the world?
- If you were one of the disciples, what would you think?
- What does this story tell you about Jesus?
- What does it mean to be blind, but not physically blind? Why did Jesus call the Pharisees blind?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: art materials; paper; reflective music and the means to play it (optional)

Show the children the art materials you have provided. Encourage them to create a picture which reflects what they have discovered today. Make sure you have enough time to do this; don't rush this activity. It's important to give the children some time to process what God is saying to them. Some children might create beautiful pictures and be able to explain what they mean, others may not. Nevertheless, both responses (and any in between) are valid; the purpose of this activity is not to create a beautiful picture but to give the children time and space to meet with God, listen to him and process what he is saying.

If any of the children would like to, give them space to tell you (and the group if they wish) about what they have drawn.

5 PRAYER

You will need: battery-operated tea lights or candles

Place the candles and tea lights around the room and switch them on. Darken your space if you can and ask the children to gather around the candles in smaller groups (or have one each if your group is small). Encourage the children to use the lights as a focus as they chat with God about what he has been saying to them today. Challenge the children to tell God what they think; they should be honest!

After a moment, gather the candles and children together in one place. Thank Jesus for being the light of the world. As you all stand together, pray that God would help you understand that more this week.

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