



SESSION 1 of 4

Nicodemus

MEETING AIM

To explore what it means to be born again.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 3:1-21

BACKGROUND

Nicodemus is one of the religious leaders. Most of his colleagues are against Jesus and what he is trying to do, but Nicodemus is different. His encounter with Jesus changes him (see John 7:32-52 and John 19:38-42) and also results in one of the most famous verses in the Bible. Before the session, reflect on what being born again means. Why does Jesus speak to Nicodemus in the way he does?

How far you dig into this passage will depend on the make-up of your group. Young people who have grown up in church might be further down the road of understanding this encounter than those who are hearing this story for the first time. However, be ready for some amazing revelation from all young people as they listen to God!

5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome the young people and share out any refreshments you have brought. Chat together about what has happened this week. Rejoice in the young people's triumphs and sympathise with their difficulties. Use this time to build relationships and settle into the session. Ask the group if they have ever met anyone who has changed their life.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

Ask the group to think of something silly they have done wrong over the past week. Perhaps someone managed to drop their phone down the toilet or missed the bus to school because they spent too long on their hair. Put that person 'on trial', with others defending and prosecuting them. Ask someone to be the judge, others witnesses and the jury. Encourage the group to come up with light-hearted reasons to exonerate or condemn (don't let it get personal!). Is it fair to judge people?

10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: large sheets of paper; marker pens

Give the young people the passage to read. Get them in small groups to act out, in 15 seconds, the opening scene where Nicodemus comes to Jesus. Ask them to think through the different emotions Nicodemus could be feeling. Judging from the passage, which emotions are most likely? Get them to think how he comes to Jesus. Is he sneaking up to him like a ninja, or striding in the front door? Let them present their mini-sketches to each other. Ask why they thought Nicodemus acted in that way and encourage the group to debate which way best represents the Bible passage.

Go on to ask the young people if they think the world is a good place or a bad place. Set out two large sheets of paper and invite the group to write or draw all the things that make the world good on one sheet and bad on the other.

Give Bibles out to the young people, and get them to read John 3:1-21 as a group. Tell them you're going to look at the second half of the passage first. Ask the young people what this passage tells them about the world. What does it tell them about whether the world is a good place or a bad place? What does God think about it? Add any new ideas onto the relevant sheet of paper, perhaps in a new colour or pen.

Explain that there are two things to see in this part of the passage. The first is that God loves the world; the second is that the world is perishing and unless God does something it's going to be condemned. Jesus doesn't come to condemn it (as he has every right to) but rather to save it. Ask the young people: what's God's plan to solve this problem? How does he work out his love for a broken world?

God's love for the world looks like Jesus coming to die to bring people eternal life, to rescue people out of their darkness and bring them into the light, and to save people from condemnation.

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue your exploration of the passage by discussing these questions:

- Why do you think Nicodemus comes in the darkness?
- What do you think it is about Jesus that makes Nicodemus want to visit him?
- Why do you think Jesus replies to Nicodemus by saying: "No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again"?
- What do you think it means to be born again?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

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

Give everyone a sheet of paper and share out the art and craft materials. Give the young people time to reflect on what God has been saying to them and to create a piece of artwork that reflects that. Play the reflective music if you have it. With this kind of activity, the end result – the picture, collage or model – isn't the most important thing. Rather, this creative time allows the young person to reflect on what God has been saying to them as they have explored the passage. It helps them to process what that means for their relationship with God and how that affects how they live their life.

Be available to chat during this time; the young people should also be able to chat between themselves. Although this activity is marked as being ten minutes long, you can spend as long as you like doing this – it can be a powerful time of engaging with God.

5 PRAYER

You will need: paper and pens

Spend some time thinking about what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Give the young people some space to write down a couple of things that Jesus did for them on the cross and to pray about these things. You could do this out loud or give the group some space to engage privately. If you're the kind of group that sings this would be a good opportunity to sing a song of praise to God for what he's done on the cross.

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 how Jesus includes those outside social boundaries and consider what that means for us.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 4:1-44

BACKGROUND

The woman Jesus meets at the well is outside his traditional sphere for a number of reasons: she's a woman, she's a Samaritan and she has been married many times (and at the moment is living with someone she is not married to). However, this is not a barrier for Jesus to talk to her, nor do these things stop her being part of the kingdom of God.

Think about some of the young people in your group – would they be considered to be outside? How can you help them to meet Jesus in the same powerful way that this woman does? How can you help them see that Jesus wants to get to know them, regardless of what they think they have done or who they think they are?

5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome the young people and share out any refreshments you have brought. Chat together about what has happened this week. Rejoice in the young people's triumphs and sympathise with their difficulties. Use this time to build relationships and settle into the session. Ask the group if they have ever felt on the outside of things – a social group, an event or their family. (Be sensitive with this discussion.)

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: small pieces of card; marker pen

Before the session, write the names of different celebrities on the pieces of card, one name per piece. These should be people the group knows, but try to have a wide variety: the Queen, Danny Dyer, Harry Kane, Ariana Grande.

Give out the cards randomly to the young people and challenge them to think how their celebrity might interact with others. Ask the group to walk around, then at the signal to stop, they should greet the

person nearest to them as if they were the celebrity on their card. How would they treat the other 'celebrity' when they find out who it is? How would Chris Hemsworth talk with Saffron Barker?

After a minute or so, ask the young people to move around and 'meet' someone else.

10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

Using the Ignatius way of reflecting (using your imagination), read John 4:1-26. Get the young people to find themselves a space where they won't be distracted, but can still hear you. Ask them to close their eyes and explain to them that they will be using their imagination to reflect upon this story before you read the passage out loud. Emphasise the point that Jesus encounters us through his Word and our imagination. Before you begin, ask the Holy Spirit to inspire and be present during the reading.

Read the passage once, asking the young people to simply listen and become familiar with the story. Read it again, this time encouraging the young people to reconstruct the scene in their mind and find a place within it, asking themselves these questions as they do so:

- Who are you in the story? A central figure or bystander?
- What are the sounds and smells that surround you?
- Listen to what is said and look around you, look at the expressions on people's faces and listen to the emotions that fill their words.
- What else can you hear, see or feel?

Read the story for a third time. Ask the young people to reconstruct the scene with themselves as the person at the well, still using the same imaginative techniques as before. After this exercise, ask:

- How did you find the exercise?
- Which character did you take on in the second reading?
- How did it feel to be the person at the well during the third reading?
- What stood out for you? How did God speak to you?
- What did you learn about Jesus from this?

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue your exploration of the passage by discussing these questions:

- Who are those in society that we might pass judgemental glances towards?
- What should our response be to those who feel left out?

- Have you ever felt like the woman at the well? When? Why?
- What do Jesus' actions here tell you about him? What new things have you learnt about Jesus?
- As Jesus enters the scene, he breaks cleanliness laws and social norms in spending time with this woman. Where can we do the same?

5 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: paper and pens

Give out paper and pens. Ask them to write or draw the activities that they do in an average week. This could include school, sleep, eating, sports, time on their phones etc.

After they have done this, ask the young people to get into pairs and think about how they might worship and encounter God through these seemingly mundane activities. How can they meet with Jesus in a radical way, as the woman does here? Do all our encounters have to be big and impressive (like at a summer festival or big worship event)?

Go on to ask the group how they can do what Jesus did and reach out beyond their social norms? It might mean speaking to those not in their 'tribe' or to those outside society's boundaries as a whole. These could be people who are homeless or those new to your town or country. What needs to change about their regular week to make space for this?

5 PRAYER

Set up three different spaces for prayer, then get the young people to choose what they would like to pray for. The first space is prayer for those who are excluded because of who they are. The second space is prayer for passion to encounter Jesus through the Bible. The third space is prayer to help worship God.

After they have prayed, bless the group with the following blessing / commissioning:

"Go and be of good courage, seeking all who are lost, and lonely. And may you encounter Jesus there and receive all that you need for the coming week. And the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who come to meet us in our home, our street, our school and church bless you now, and forever more. Amen."

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 see the power and compassion of Jesus.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 5:1-15

BACKGROUND

Like the previous session, Jesus meets someone on the fringes of society and puts himself at risk in order to help them. Here Jesus reaches out to a man who couldn't walk and heals him on the Sabbath day. He puts the man's suffering above the laws imposed by the religious leaders. Before the session, think about where the Church today has put its own rules above helping others. How can you inspire your group to find out what is needed in your community and acting as Jesus did?

5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome the young people and share out any refreshments you have brought. Chat together about what has happened this week. Rejoice in the young people's triumphs and sympathise with their difficulties. Use this time to build relationships and settle into the session.

5 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: access to YouTube or your music streaming service

Tell the group about something you have a bizarre attachment to, such as an old banger that you refuse to send to the scrapheap or scruffy trainers that are too comfy to replace! Even people who say they have great taste in music have a few guilty pleasures, some terrible cheesy songs that they can't help but enjoy. Play your 'guilty pleasure' and take suggestions from the group of their own.

15 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: table; chairs; pens; paper; microphones

Read John 5:1-15 and wonder together why Jesus asks the man if he wants to get well. Isn't the answer obvious? Begging can be

quite a lucrative business and being healed would mean he's out of a job, looking for work!

Challenge the group to recreate the story as a news report. One or two could be news presenters, while others could be reporters and interviewees (the man who couldn't walk, a disciple, a religious leader, a bystander). Give the group a few minutes to work out who everyone is and what they're going to say (ensure you have roles for those who don't want to act – they could be active in planning the sketch or they could direct). Perform the sketch. Once you've finished, reflect on how all the characters might have felt in the story.

Think about why the religious leaders were angry. Keeping the Sabbath was important to them – it is one of the Ten Commandments after all. Yet, they had refined and refined the rules about the Sabbath, making them more and more detailed (and so hard to keep). Play a quick true or false quiz of real Sabbath rules. Here are some true ones to get you started, add in any more that you know with some made-up ones in between.

- Thou shalt not wear only one sandal.
- Thou shalt not search your clothing for fleas.
- Thou shalt not read by lamplight.
- Thou shalt not put on eyeshadow.
- Thou shalt not use vinegar for toothache.

Religious institutions have a bad habit of inventing regulations that distract them from seeing what God is doing! God cares more about compassion, mercy and grace than petty rules created by pretentious leaders. Does your church have any additional rules and regulations that aren't found in the Bible?

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue your exploration of the passage by discussing these questions:

- What do you think of how Jesus acted?
- What do you think about how the religious leaders acted?
- What does this story tell you about Jesus?
- What does this mean for your life today?
- How can you show the same compassion that Jesus does?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: information about social action happening in your local area; people who work in these projects to talk to your group (optional); pens and paper

Before the session, do some research about some social action projects that are happening in your community. If possible, invite someone who is already involved in a project to come and talk to your group.

Show the group the information about the social action projects and if you have managed to get a visitor, let the group interview them about what they do and why.

Challenge the young people to put their faith into action and show compassion to others, as Jesus did. How can you get involved in what is happening in your community? Or, if there is a need that isn't yet being met, how can the group start to meet that need? Spend some time planning what you can do. This might be collecting for a food bank, helping with a homeless project or visiting a local old people's home. If the group want to start to meet a current need, then they might need to raise awareness first, rather than get stuck in to action. Could they contact the local council or meet their MP? Perhaps you might run a fundraising event. Brainstorm your ideas and write out a plan for what you'd like to do.

Whatever you decide to do, ensure that you follow your church's policies for safeguarding and health and safety. Also, keep parents and carers up to date about what you're planning, so that they are happy for their young people to get involved.

Seeing your faith in action can be a powerful faith building activity – faith becomes not just a thing in our minds or hearts, but also a thing that can make a difference. As you continue with your plans, check in with the young people to see how they're developing spiritually.

5 PRAYER

You will need: Post-it notes; pens

Give out Post-it notes and pens. Encourage the young people to write or draw prayers about their own lives – how can they show Jesus' compassion to others day to day, or where do they need Jesus' compassion in their lives? They should stick these on a wall in your meeting space.

Then ask the group to write or draw prayers about your social action plans. Stick these to the opposite wall. Spend a few moments reading all the prayers and joining in with them.

ALEX TAYLOR

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

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SESSION 4 of 4

The woman in adultery

MEETING AIM

To discover something of the scope and depth of the salvation, grace and forgiveness offered by Jesus.

BIBLE PASSAGE

John 8:1-12

BACKGROUND

This story doesn't appear in the earliest versions of John's Gospel that we have, so it is always placed in a kind of parentheses. However, it is consistent with John's portrayal of Jesus and can still teach us much about salvation, grace and how Jesus' actions can inform our own. Who is without sin? Who among us can judge others? Try not to get hung up on the sexual side of the woman's sin – that isn't the most important thing here. What is important is Jesus' radical grace and forgiveness.

5 GATHERING TIME

Welcome the young people and share out any refreshments you have brought. Chat together about what has happened this week. Rejoice in the young people's triumphs and sympathise with their difficulties. Use this time to build relationships and settle into the session. Has anyone in the group ever thought they were in real trouble, only to get out of it scot-free?

10 INTRO ACTIVITY

You will need: sand in a large tray; list of items, people, events and actions

Before the session, make a list of various household items (such as whisk, games console or car), people (the Queen, the Pope), events (Christmas, summer holiday) and actions (dancing, playing football).

Challenge your group to a game of sand Pictionary. Ask for a volunteer and tell them one of the things on your list. They then have to draw that in the sand tray for everyone else to guess. The person who guesses correctly then takes a turn to draw. How easy is it to see what is happening?

10 BIBLE EXPLORATION

You will need: Bibles

Read the passage as a whole group, stopping after small sections. Read the first five verses and then ask: "What would it have felt like to be that woman?" Give chance for the group to give their feedback. It might be worth explaining that stoning was a death sentence. She was in danger of being killed by having rocks thrown at her as punishment. Read verse 6 and ask the group what they make of Jesus' response. No one knows what he actually wrote on the ground. Discuss in small groups what he might have written, then share your thoughts all together.

Read verses 7 and 8. Give some context by saying that, according to the law, those who discover and prove a sin such as adultery were allowed to throw the first stone. And yet Jesus says that no one who has sinned is allowed to take part in the punishment. Only Jesus is without sin, and he is not rushing to condemn the woman. Ask the group: "If you were in the crowd, what would you have thought?"

Read verses 9 to 11. What does the group think of Jesus' response? It might be worth reflecting on the idea that Jesus seems more interested in the woman's future than the woman's past. What does that say to the young people in the group?

5 CHATTING TOGETHER

Continue your exploration of the passage by discussing these questions:

- What do you think of how Jesus acted?
- What do you think about how the religious leaders acted?
- What does this story tell you about Jesus?
- What does this mean for your life today?
- Who would be today's equivalent of the woman and the religious leaders? Do you know of stories where society has condemned people?

10 CREATIVE RESPONSE

You will need: large sheets of paper; marker pens; Post-it notes

Get the group to create a mind map on a big piece of paper of the types of people that are usually judged by the Church. (If you have a large group, do this in smaller groups.) Once you have a list of people, discuss why these people are often judged. Go on to think about how you can show love and forgiveness to them, rather than judgement. How can we convict them in the kind of way Jesus did? And then help them to go forward in God's way?

Encourage the group as individuals to choose one person they know who is usually judged by others for their behaviour. Invite them to write that name down on a Post-it note to remind them to pray that God would help them to show his love and give them the strength to live differently around them – shining like the light. Read verse 12 out loud all together to finish. Repeat a few times to allow it to sink in. This is our challenge for the week – to live like Christ as light in the world.

5 PRAYER

You will need: paper and pens or mobiles

Encourage the group to get into a comfortable position so they can spend some time in reflection. Once everyone is ready, ask God to reveal things to the young people that they need Jesus' grace and forgiveness for. Spend some time thinking and writing on paper or your phone. Remember, Jesus doesn't judge us – he just reminds us that we need to stop it. As a sign that you want to stop doing that, that you're forgiven and moving on from it, screw the Post-it note up or delete it from your phone. There is no judgement: only conviction and forgiveness.

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