

## SMALL GROUP GUIDE

3/04/18 | JOHN 3:1-10, 16-17

### WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

Do the words “born again” sound like an extreme religious movement? Something that happens to emotional teenagers at summer camp? A warning proclaimed through bullhorns on the street corners?

Watch this: [youtube.com/watch?v=rJ30xWz5uVQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=rJ30xWz5uVQ)

And this: [youtube.com/watch?v=rvpCmKUo1Aw](https://youtube.com/watch?v=rvpCmKUo1Aw)

What does it mean to have a child-like faith and curiosity? What does it look like to live wide-eyed, hope-filled, and with expectant wonder? Is that what it means to be born again?



### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? \_\_\_\_\_

Nicodemus is a wealthy, respected leader. He’s a Pharisee, a religious expert with deep commitment to getting the facts straight. He’s also an accomplished scholar, invested in legalistic righteousness. But despite all his knowledge and experience, Nicodemus senses that something is missing. He visits Jesus at night to shed some light on this darkness. While there are many theories about why this story takes place at night – perhaps Nicodemus is afraid that others will disapprove of his association with Jesus, or maybe his duties occupy him all day, or maybe he can’t sleep because he needs to talk, etc. – we should also pay attention to John’s poetic and symbolic writing style. For John, darkness almost always represents disbelief.

### WHAT DO YOU THINK? \_\_\_\_\_

Nicodemus knows a lot about religion, but he doesn’t seem to know what religion is about. Do you ever feel that way? Have you ever substituted religion for God? What does that mean? Do you think we ever do that as a faith community? Is that intentional? Is it easier keep ourselves busy doing “Christian things” so we don’t have to worry about the real implications of following Jesus in this divided and tumultuous world? Why?

In his sermon, Pastor Paul tells us that “where religion ends, Jesus begins.” What does that mean? Check out this video: [sermonspice.com/product/61515/nicodemus](https://sermonspice.com/product/61515/nicodemus).

Why do you think the man in the video is so sad? Is that how we’re supposed to feel? Do you think God intends for us to spend our lives adhering to a complicated set of demands, and then walk around with a crushing weight on our shoulders if we fail? Are we supposed to live in the guilt and shame of our brokenness and mistakes? (If your answer is “no,” does that mean that anything goes, that we can do anything we’d like without consequence?) Or are we created and loved for something else entirely? If so, what?

Are we wretched, or are we beautiful? Should we engage in our lives like a game that’s either won or lost? Or a math problem that either adds up correctly, or doesn’t? Or are we invited to participate with eyes of wonder, like the little girl watching the train in the video above? When you consider the countenance of the man next to the excitement of the children in these videos, can you feel the difference between the weight of religion and the lightness of spirit-breathed living? Is that the kind of life that Jesus invites Nicodemus – and us – to participate in?

Jesus meets Nicodemus in his darkness. Will Jesus also meet you in yours? What is your darkness? Is there something you can’t shake, something you don’t understand, something you can’t reconcile, or some ache in you that needs to be addressed? What do you make of this promise that Jesus will meet you there, in that darkness, and begin creating new life?

### WHAT’S THE NEXT STEP? \_\_\_\_\_

This week, pay attention to your own sense of wonder. Try to notice God in moments of love, truth, beauty, and excitement, and write those experiences in your journal. Does anything change when you live this way?

### LOOKING FOR MORE? \_\_\_\_\_

Theologian Marcus Borg unpacks John 3:16 here: [beliefnet.com/video/preachers-and-teachers/christianity/marcus-borg/marcus-borg-the-real-meaning-of-john-316.aspx](https://beliefnet.com/video/preachers-and-teachers/christianity/marcus-borg/marcus-borg-the-real-meaning-of-john-316.aspx)

Find further discussion about John 3:16 here: [serenityhome.wordpress.com/tag/john-316/](https://serenityhome.wordpress.com/tag/john-316/)

Find a Nooma video about expansive love here: [youtube.com/watch?v=rBoNeSYTbg](https://youtube.com/watch?v=rBoNeSYTbg)