



1. Materials

For this session each student will need—

- the Session 3 Scripture sheet
- the student journal page for Session 3
- his or her own Bible, a pen, and a notebook

You'll also need—

- a whiteboard and markers
- a pack of colored pencils (at least two colors per student)
- optional: statements to read or project on the wall for the Open exercise
- optional: a large cake and several tubes of icing (one tube for every two or three students). You may want to write "Happy Birthlife!" in icing on the cake.
- optional: large-tip markers and a giant cake drawn on butcher paper

2. Session Intro

GOALS OF SESSION 3

As students experience this session, they will—

- gain a true understanding (as opposed to a cliché understanding) of the phrase *born again*.
- make a connection between their spiritual birth and God's eternal time clock.
- be invited to acknowledge their spiritual birth in a unique way.

PRAYER

After the group has gathered, open the session in prayer. Spend a few moments in silence. As students pray silently, suggest that they let their minds move away from the distractions of the day and move toward things of God. Prompt them to concentrate on traits of God such as grace and forgiveness.

OPEN

Who Said It?

This exercise can be done as a contest between teams or an icebreaker with the whole group. Read a statement (or project it on the wall), and ask students to guess who said it and why. Use the examples below, and include a few statements from recent popular culture.

The Eagle has landed.

—Neil Armstrong; the first lunar landing

Mr. Watson, come here, I want to see you.

—Alexander Graham Bell; the first words spoken over his invention, the telephone

We must hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately.

—Benjamin Franklin at the signing of the Declaration of Independence

Because it is there.

—George Leigh Mallory, when asked why he wanted to climb Mount Everest, the first to attempt this feat

What hath God wrought?

—Samuel Morse; the first words transmitted by telegraph, in Morse code

Transition into the study with these questions:

Do you notice a common theme surrounding these statements?

Many of them were uttered at the dawn of something completely new; that's why we remember them.

If you had to recite the most famous Bible verse of all time, what would it be?

Someone will undoubtedly mention John 3:16. Sometimes it even shows up in professional sports arenas!

Does anybody know the situation in which John 3:16 was first said? Who said it? Who heard it?

Jesus said it to a Pharisee named Nicodemus in a private meeting.

LARGE-GROUP OPTION

Ask for eight volunteers to form two teams of four to play against each other with the rest of the group serving as the studio audience. Have the teams compete by being the first team to “buzz in” with an answer. If the answer is incorrect, the other team can steal the point with the correct answer.

3. Digging In

Nic at Night

Many students will know that Jesus said John 3:16, but they may be sketchy on the details. So dive right into John 3, asking the group to read John 3:1-11 using their Scripture sheets. As they read, they should:

Notice how Jesus responded to a guy named Nicodemus by marking the words *born* and *birth* with colored pencils.

When most have finished, ask what the group learned about Nicodemus. Then ask what Jesus taught him about spiritual birth. Write their responses regarding spiritual birth on the whiteboard. As you discuss the passage, the board will begin to look something like this (but don't sweat it if it's lighter on the details):

Spiritual Birth

-You can't see God's kingdom unless you're born again (v. 3).

-You can't enter the kingdom unless you're born of water and the Spirit (v. 5).

-There's a difference between being born of the flesh and born of the Spirit (v. 6).

-You must be born again (v. 7)!

Some questions to discuss—

What was Nicodemus' attitude toward Jesus?

He was respectful and curious.

What's significant about when Nicodemus came to Jesus?

He was obviously hiding his interest in Jesus. He had a real curiosity, but he wasn't ready to go public with it.

4. Insight

Deep Background

As the discussion unfolds, you may want to give some background on this scene:

-The Pharisees were members of a religious sect who prided themselves on how strictly they kept God's laws. They were really into rules—in fact, they actually invented new rules to keep people from breaking the commands God had given. The problem was, their rules took the place of a real relationship with God. For example, you could obey all the rules and still not have a heart for God. This was the main issue for which Jesus rebuked them. Eventually, the Pharisees became the ringleaders behind Jesus' crucifixion.

-Mention that Nicodemus shows up two more times in John. The students may be interested in looking at these scenes (John 7:43-53 and 19:38-42) on their own this week. John is the only Bible book that mentions Nicodemus.

-The word for again (as in "born again") can also be translated "from above." In fact, you may want to encourage your students to think "born from above" when they see "born again." This can help them break away from the cliché meaning that often surrounds the phrase "born again."

5. Digging Deeper

Belief Benefits

Now probe a little deeper into Jesus' response to Nicodemus' question about what it means to be *born again*. Ask the group to read John 3:10-21 using their Scripture sheets. As they read, have them circle with a colored pencil every benefit to those who believe.

When most have finished, ask your students what differences they see between people who believe and those who don't. As they tell you the facts of the passage, list info about those who believe on the whiteboard. Have the students write this info on their journal pages.

Those Who Believe

-They have eternal life (v. 15).

-They won't perish (v. 16).

-They are not condemned (v. 18).

-They live by the truth, come into the light (v. 21).

Now ask this question—and there *is* a right answer:

What was Jesus asking Nicodemus to believe?

That he could be reborn from above. Eternal life was possible for Nicodemus if he believed in Jesus Christ and was born from above.

But what does it really mean to be "born again" or "born from above"? God's Word has more to say on the subject—and that's what the group will look at next.

6. Cross-Checking



Do Over

Explain to your students that they'll spend the next few minutes in solitude, experiencing more of what the Bible says about spiritual birth.

1. I'd like you to find places where you can get alone with God (it may mean moving to a corner of the room, a hallway, or an empty room nearby).
2. You'll need your Bibles, journal pages, and pens.
3. You'll be doing the Cross-Checking exercise on your journal pages.

Students will read the following passages and list what they learn about spiritual birth. Their observations may look something like this:

John 1:10-13

We are children born of God, not of natural descent, human decision, or a person's will.

1 Peter 1:22-25

We're born again of imperishable (not destructible) seed through the enduring word of God.

7. Taking It Inward

A New Kind of Birthday

After a few minutes of solitude, call for your students' attention and ask them to share how they responded to the question below.

Going by these verses, what are the differences between physical birth and spiritual birth?

Students should see that our physical birth is corruptible and perishable. But our spiritual birth is imperishable, incorruptible, and of God (not of man). Once we're saved, our lives are now governed by God's eternal clock—not the earthly one.

This is exactly what Jesus was teaching Nicodemus in John 3—and what he wants to teach your group now. Have the group look back at John 3. Ask:

What connection do you see between Nicodemus' background and how Jesus answered his question?

Nicodemus was a Pharisee. He relied on rules and rituals—religious activities—in order to have a relationship with God; Jesus was telling him that spiritual birth, not rule-keeping or church attendance, enables you to have a relationship with God.

In what ways are we sometimes like Nicodemus, obeying all the rules and still not having a heart for God? What do you think Jesus would say about this?

Responses may include: the number of "quiet times" we've had in a week, how many Bible books we've read, or how often we come to church.

LARGE-GROUP OPTION

Project this question and the ones that follow on a screen, and have students discuss it in smaller groups of six to eight people.

8. Wrapping It Up

It's Party Time!

If our spiritual lives—and spiritual birthdays—are so important, we should be aware of them. We should even celebrate them. Ask your group members to think about their own spiritual birthdays. See if each can come up with a date that can serve as a spiritual birthday. Some may know the exact date; for others, it may be less precise. If so, ask them to simply pick a year and a day that can represent their spiritual birthday.

Finally, some students may not yet believe. Without singling them out, acknowledge this possibility and ask if anyone would like to use today's date, signifying that he or she wants to be born from above *today!* Be sure to follow up with any students who want to do this.

Once everyone has a date in mind, close the session with one of the following options:

1. Ahead of time, bake and ice a large cake (or two). You may want to write "Happy Birthlife!" in icing on the cake. Make icing tubes available, and let the students write their names and spiritual birthdays on the cake. Then celebrate!
2. Draw a giant cake on a sheet of newsprint or butcher paper, and hang it on the wall. Hand out large-tip markers, and ask the students to "decorate" the cake with their names and spiritual birthdays.