

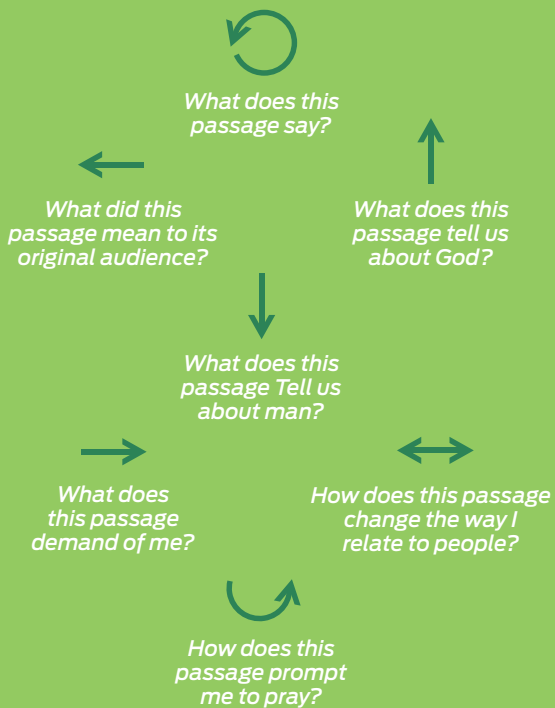
Daily Devotions



Day 1

John 3:1-2

The 7 Arrows of Bible Reading



Nicodemus was close, closer than most others, but he was not close enough. Notice what this ruler of the Jews recognized about Jesus: 1) Jesus was a rabbi; 2) Jesus came from God; 3) Jesus performed signs; 4) God was with Jesus.

Not a bad list. Nicodemus respected Jesus as a rabbi, although Jesus never was formally trained as one. And he recognized that Jesus was special—that He came from God, performed miracles, and that God was with Him. But notice that Nicodemus stopped short in his understanding of Jesus, which is what Jesus pulled out of him in the conversation that followed. Nicodemus failed to recognize that Jesus was special not because He was from God and that God was with Him, but because He is God. Nicodemus failed to reach the point of recognizing his need to turn to Jesus, the Son of God, for salvation.

When it comes to trusting in Jesus, close is not enough. Even today, many people view Jesus as a good teacher—an example of living morally pleasing lives. But that was not Jesus' mission. Rather, Jesus came so that people might come to know that He is the Son of God and have salvation through Him.

In what ways do you need to develop a deeper understanding of who Jesus is?

John 3:3-8

Nicodemus was not the only one who was confused by Jesus' response in these verses. Understanding what exactly being born again means and what Jesus meant by water has challenged theologians for centuries. Even the word translated as "again" in verse 3 is not clear. The Greek word used there could also mean "from above."

This is more than a linguistic nuance; understanding both senses of that word gives the passage its context and reminds us of its basic truth, one that is quite understandable.

Salvation involves a new birth—new life. When a person trusts in Christ, he or she is born anew spiritually. And that is why "from above" is so helpful in addition to "again." Being born "from above" reminds us that Jesus was speaking of a spiritual truth—that this birth is not the work of the flesh, but rather the work of the Holy Spirit in and through us. And just as the Spirit works to bring about this new birth, He also guides us to understand truth—all of the truth in Scripture, even the more challenging parts.

What are some doctrines or passages that you struggle to understand? Which have you grown to understand better because of the Spirit's guidance?

John 3:9-15

The new birth that Jesus explained to Nicodemus does not occur automatically—it comes by faith. To illustrate this, Jesus pointed the Jewish teacher to the Old Testament Book of Numbers, specifically the time when the Israelites were plagued by venomous snakes.

When the Israelites grumbled against God, He disciplined them by sending venomous snakes into their midst. But along with that judgment came mercy and grace—God instructed Moses to fashion a bronze serpent and lift it up on a pole. Whoever was bitten could look at that serpent and be healed.

In the same way, Jesus would be lifted up. But don't miss that the physical raising is not the strongest connection between Jesus and the serpent on the pole. Faith is. Imagine you were an Israelite in the wilderness who was just bitten by a snake. Does it make sense that looking at a bronze serpent would heal you? Would you choose to take your eyes off the ground—where other snakes still were—to look at that bronze serpent? Do you see how it took faith?

How is faith needed in your relationship with Jesus after salvation? What areas of your life do you need to trust Jesus with?

John 3:16-18

It is trendy today to see people as basically good—or at least neutral. This is why so many people balk at the biblical teaching of judgment and hell. The belief is that God is unfair to condemn people to hell because people are basically good. They deserve His grace and forgiveness. Notice the irony of believing you deserve that which is by definition a gift—something that cannot be deserved.

John 3:16 is, perhaps, the best known Bible verse. Even unbelievers are likely to know it. But notice what follows. In the next two verses, Jesus explains that He did not come into the world to condemn it. Why? Because it is already condemned. And with that, the myth of people being basically good and deserving forgiveness falls apart. If anything is not fair, it is not that people are condemned, but rather that some people are saved.

How do you tend to see salvation: as something that is deserved or as a free gift of God?

John 3:19-21

As believers, it is often difficult to understand the world—and it should be. It is difficult to understand why people do what they do—why sin is so pervasive and why hostility against God is so blatant. But none of this should surprise us. Jesus told us.

People love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil. Don't miss this: people, apart from Jesus, don't dabble in darkness. They don't tolerate darkness. They don't sort of like darkness. They love darkness. They love sin. They love to hate God. And so did we before Christ.

Be grateful when you struggle to understand the world—it is a mark of God at work in you. It is a sign that your new mind is at work—that you have been born again. But at the same time, do not allow this to lead you to become arrogant. Remember, the only reason you are now walking in the light is because of the kindness of God—His gift to you in Christ made known to you by the Holy Spirit. Rather, let this dissonance between you and the world fuel your desire to share the gospel with those around you, so that they too might come to the light.

In what ways have you seen your living and thinking change because of the gospel?