

Isa. 6:1–8

Ps. 29

Rom. 8:12–17

John 3:1–17

Knowing God by Heart

Goal for the Session

Children will learn about Jesus' love through questions, just like Nicodemus, and discover the best answers are known "by heart."

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on John 3:1–17

WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," Paul L. Hammer

In the other three Gospels, love language is rather sparse. In the Gospel of John, love language occurs more than forty times. Its use in our text probably is the most familiar of all NT texts. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." God's intention is never to condemn but to save, that is, to make life whole. Salvation language is health language, God's health for all the world in all of life's relationships. That love is ever constant, but never coercive. It is invitational and hopes for a response, to complete the circle of love and share in the interconnectedness of the creating, liberating, healing Holy Trinity.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," Randall C. Zachman

Jesus goes on to teach Nicodemus more fully about the birth from above, which is based entirely on what God is doing in him. Even as Jesus comes from God and speaks what he knows of God, so Jesus is returning to God, but only by being lifted up on the cross. The birth from above will take place by faith in the death of the Son of Man, which is even more paradoxical than birth by the freely given wind of the Spirit. Faith receives eternal life from the death of the Son of Man, because in it is found the self-giving love of God for the world.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Emmanuel Y. Lartey

God's desire in sending God's Son is not condemnatory. Rather, it is redemptive. The whole mission and purpose of God in Christ is to rescue and recover humanity, from being deeply embedded in self-defeating pursuits in a physically absorbed life. God in Christ wishes to reclaim, rename, and reauthor the stories of our lives with a new life empowered by the grace of God and made manifest in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. All of this is accomplished by the creative love of God, the redemptive offering of Christ, and the empowering presence of the life-giving Spirit. And these Three are One.

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Judith M. McDaniel

God searches for us to complete the revelation of God's being. God searches for us to participate in God's life. God's seeking is not brought about by our circumstance, our worthiness, our sufficient understanding. Rather, that seeking derives from the anguish of God, God's longing for the work of God's hands. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world God created might be saved. So how might we live in that kingdom where life is reborn?

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

John 3:1–17

YOU WILL NEED

- red tablecloth (from May 16)
 - permanent markers
 - Color Pack 19, 26, 27, 33
 - scissors, tape
 - craft sticks
 - jar or vase
 - Bible
 - copies of Resource Sheet 1
 - crayons or colored pencils
 - Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*; CD player
- For Responding
- option 2: *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*; CD player; Color Pack 30
 - option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2, scissors, colored pencils, glue sticks, construction or scrapbook paper, tape
 - option 3: heart cookie cutters, sliced bread, cheese slices, plates, napkins, carrots, Internet-connected device

Focus on Your Teaching

Children this age are like sponges, asking questions and soaking up answers. They store what they learn and add to it as they grow. Since they are beginning readers, there are many things that they've learned by heart. The story of Nicodemus's late-night visit to Jesus is a perfect story for these learners. It gives children an opportunity to see that it's okay to ask questions; that answers may be confusing, for now; and that adults have questions too. And it's a great time to learn "by heart" one of the best-loved Bible verses.

Lord of love, help me to teach the truth of your love in Christ, so it goes deeply into the hearts of my learners. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, arrange the red tablecloth (from May 16) in the center of your learning space. Cut apart Color Pack 26 and tape each piece to the end of a craft stick; place these in a jar or vase. Cut apart Color Pack 27 along the lines. If you are using option 1 in Responding, cut one rectangle from Resource Sheet 2 (John 3:16) and one 12" square of construction or scrapbook paper for each child. If you are using option 3, make heart-shaped carrot slices by following the instructions at: snapguide.com/guides/cut-heart-shaped-carrots.

Greet children as they arrive. If any have not yet signed the tablecloth, have them do so with permanent marker. Pray aloud, asking learners to repeat each phrase:

God of love, / be with us today. / When we have questions, / help us search for answers. / And as we search, / surround us with your love. / Amen.

Set out the jar or vase with the questions from Color Pack 26. Begin by drawing a question and answering it yourself. Have learners take turns drawing a question and answering it. Afterward, ask learners what they learned by listening to one another's answers. Say that today's Bible story is about questions and answers.

EXPLORING

Open your Bible to John 3 and say this is where today's Bible story is found. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Nicodemus Comes to See Jesus) and colored pencils or crayons. Explain that you will give them directions about adding to this picture as you tell the story from the version below:

Once there was a man named Nicodemus. He was a leader of the Jewish people. Nicodemus knew that Jesus did amazing things. He knew Jesus was from God. Nicodemus wanted to talk to Jesus, and one night he went to see Jesus. Draw some stars and the moon in the window opening. Draw a flame on the lamp.

Nicodemus called Jesus *rabbi*, which means “teacher.” In Jesus’ day, teachers sat as they taught. Draw a bench for Jesus to sit on.

Nicodemus asked Jesus many questions. Draw a question mark above Nicodemus’s hat.

Nicodemus has his hand to his chin, looking puzzled. He had trouble understanding Jesus’ answers. Pose your bodies to look puzzled, like Nicodemus.

Nicodemus listened to Jesus and learned about the Spirit who guides God’s people and about the great love that God gives through Jesus, God’s Son. Jesus told Nicodemus something to remember in his heart. Read the verse at the bottom of your picture aloud with me: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won’t perish but will have eternal life” (John 3:16, CEB).

Eternal life means being able to live with God forever, even after our bodies die. This is God’s Easter promise to us.

Option: Children can finish coloring Resource Sheet 1 (Nicodemus Comes to See Jesus) while you read the story a second time.

Discuss the story:

- ✂ Do you think Nicodemus is glad he asked Jesus his questions? Why or why not?
- ✂ What do you think Nicodemus will do if he has more questions someday?

Say that knowing something by heart means you know it so well your head doesn’t have to think about it. We can remember God’s love by knowing John 3:16 by heart. Divide the pieces cut from Color Pack 27 among learners or pairs of learners. Have them assemble the heart on the red tablecloth. Read the verse in unison several times. Remove one piece and have learners say the verse again. Continue in this way until you have picked up all the pieces and learners know the verse by heart. Have learners put the heart together again.

Invite learners to tell about times they were glad to have a question answered. Comment on the peace of mind and joy that can come from knowing. Invite them to imagine Nicodemus singing along as the group sings “I’ve Got Peace Like a River” (Color Pack 33; track 11 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021).

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

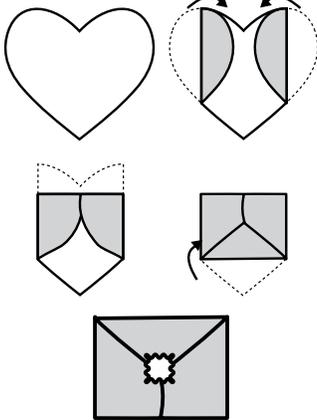
- 1. Singing by Heart** Learners will appreciate how music can help them know important things by heart. Invite them to recall songs they’ve learned in Sunday school this year that help them to remember something important about God’s love. Sing each one. For example, “Give Me Joy in My Heart” (track 5 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021); “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy” (Color Pack 30; track 12); “The Whole World Is in God’s Hands” (track 19); “Behold, I Am with You” (track 2). Option: Work as a group to choose the three songs learners think are most important to remember.

I’ve Got Peace Like a River

*I’ve got peace like a river,
I’ve got peace like a river,
I’ve got peace like a river in
my soul.
I’ve got peace like a river,
I’ve got peace like a river,
I’ve got peace like a river in
my soul.*

*I’ve got joy like
a fountain . . .*

*I’ve got love like
an ocean . . .*



2. **Loving Letters** Children will send a message of good news to someone they love. Distribute 12" squares of construction or scrapbook paper, pencils, and scissors. Have learners fold the paper in half, draw a large half heart beginning and ending at the fold, and cut out the heart. Distribute verse cards cut from Resource Sheet 2 (John 3:16). Invite learners to read the verse to themselves as they trace the dotted words. Lead learners in the following steps: Think of someone to give the card to and write his or her name on the line. Sign your name at the bottom. Glue the note in the center of the heart. Fold in the two sides of the heart. Fold the top section down. Fold point of the heart up and seal the heart envelope with a piece of tape. Decorate the outside of the envelope. Ask learners to tell their plans for delivering these messages about God's love.

3. **Triple Treats** Children will enjoy a treat of three heart snacks to learn about God's love, shown to us through the Trinity. Have children wash their hands. Being mindful of allergies, have each one cut a heart-shaped piece of bread and a heart-shaped piece of cheese. Add a heart-shaped carrot slice to each one's plate. Explain that today is Trinity Sunday, the day the church celebrates how God comes to us in three different ways: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Affirm that God's love comes to us in the many different ways that we need. Say a prayer of thanks for the many kinds of good food God gives and enjoy the snack.

CLOSING

Gather with learners around the red tablecloth. Invite them to tell what they want to remember from Sunday school in their hearts.

Ask a volunteer to hold up Color Pack 19. Tell learners to say the names of the pictures when you point to them during the prayer. When you point to the balloons, they can say names of people who are church teachers. Pray aloud:

*God of surprises,
 When you lead us to meet people, guide our (feet).
 When you ask us to help others, guide our (hands).
 When you show us your creation, guide our (eyes).
 When you ask us to tell others about you, guide our (mouths).
 When you send us preachers and teachers like Peter, guide our (ears).
 Help us surprise these people with your love: (balloons).
 Amen!*

Say good-bye to each learner by name.

Nicodemus Comes to See Jesus



God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life.

—John 3:16, CEB

John 3:16

Dear _____,

I have some good news for you:

God so loved the world
that he gave his only Son, so
that everyone who believes
in him won't perish but will
have eternal life.

—John 3:16, CEB

Your friend in Christ,

Dear _____,

I have some good news for you:

God so loved the world
that he gave his only Son, so
that everyone who believes
in him won't perish but will
have eternal life.

—John 3:16, CEB

Your friend in Christ,

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