

Isa. 6:1–8

Ps. 29

Rom. 8:12–17

John 3:1–17

Life in the Spirit

Goal for the Session

Tweens will consider Jesus' response to Nicodemus's questions and wonder about the difference God's gift of the Spirit makes in their lives.

■ 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

Focus on Your Teaching

Most tweens have experienced the joy of being given a fresh start. The hope of new beginnings is real for them. While the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus can be confusing, it is also a strong statement of the new life that Christ offers. Capitalize on tweens' growing ability to think about ideas and symbols to help them ponder how God's Spirit might be imagined as wind, as God's power at work in the world and in their lives. Like Nicodemus, this gift is theirs whether or not they understand it. The Spirit provides them with many new and life-giving opportunities to follow Christ.

Gracious God, thank you for the new life that is mine in your Spirit. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- white cloth
- Christ candle, matches
- hymnal or songbook your church uses
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- Color Pack 26, 27

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pens or pencils
- option 2: drinking glasses, club soda, white grape juice, red food coloring
- option 3: Color Pack 27, newspapers, drawing paper, watercolor paints, paintbrushes, drinking straws, water dishes, paper towels; *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*; CD player (optional)

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, arrange the white cloth in the center of your learning space and place the Christ candle on it. Choose a hymn for Trinity Sunday—such as “Holy, Holy, Holy”—from the hymnal or songbook your church uses. Cut apart the pictures on Color Pack 27.

Make the learning area as dark as possible. Greet learners in a low, quiet voice. Gather around the Christ candle and explain that today is Trinity Sunday, the day when Christians celebrate how God comes to us in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ask a volunteer to light the candle. Sing or read aloud a hymn for Trinity Sunday from the hymnal or songbook your church uses. Pray aloud:

Holy God, Three-in One, help us to know the joy of your presence as Creator, Savior, and Sustainer. Amen.

Extinguish the flame and turn up the lights.

Sit with learners in a circle and play a quick game of Telephone. Whisper: “Is it possible to control God's Spirit?” to the person on your right, who then whispers it to the person on his or her right, and so on. Announce what the message is when it gets back to you and if it is different from the message you started. Ask:

- ✂ When have you been confused during a conversation with someone, when you did not understand what was being said? (You may need to tell a story of your own experience to begin the discussion.)

Say that today's Bible story is about a confusing conversation.

The Trinity is sometimes described as: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

EXPLORING

Show Color Pack 26 and say it is one artist's idea of today's Bible story of Jesus and Nicodemus. Invite learners to tell any part of this story that they remember.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Nicodemus Visits Jesus). Ask for volunteers to read the parts of Narrator, Nicodemus, and Jesus. Have these three stand on one side of your space. Tell the other learners they will read the Chorus part, and have them stand on the other side.

Discuss the story:

- ✪ We are told that Nicodemus was a Pharisee, so what do we know about him? (Pharisees were well-educated Jewish religious leaders who believed people could serve God best by closely following the Law of Moses.)
- ✪ What opinion does Nicodemus have of Jesus?
- ✪ Why do you think Nicodemus came to talk to Jesus at night?
- ✪ What is confusing to you about Jesus' words? What gives you hope?
- ✪ What does Jesus have to say about God's gift of life?
- ✪ What answer would you give to the question asked by the Chorus?
- ✪ What do you think Nicodemus did after this conversation?

Option: Explain that Nicodemus is mentioned again in John 7:50–51 and John 19:39. Read these verses and ponder any connection between Nicodemus's conversation with Jesus and what he does later.

Hand around the pictures cut from Color Pack 27. Ask learners to make observations about what the wind is doing in these photos. Wonder together how these photos may help them understand Jesus' words in John 3:8: "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Ask:

- ✪ What do you find helpful about the image of the Spirit as wind? What is confusing?

Affirm that the gift of the Spirit and the Spirit's work in our lives is God's gift to us. Thankfully, it does not depend on our understanding.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Spirit Living** As they solve a puzzle, learners will consider the difference that the fruit of God's Spirit can make in their lives. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Spirit Living) and pens or pencils. Read the directions aloud and allow time for learners to complete the puzzle, working individually or in pairs. After all have finished, ask volunteers to tell which fruit they notice most in their lives. Invite them to give examples of how they have seen these things at work in their lives and the lives of others. Wonder together how the fruit of the Spirit make it possible to enjoy new life and second chances.

EASY
PREP

2. **Substantial Change** Learners will wrestle with what it means to know the Spirit's presence in their lives. Comment that being given new life in the Spirit doesn't always make a person look different on the outside—sometimes the difference is felt only on the inside. Give each learner a drinking glass. Being mindful of allergies, set out club soda, red food coloring, and white grape juice. Have learners fill their cups half full with club soda. Invite learners to take a sip and ask how they like the drink. Add one drop of red food coloring to each cup and invite learners to take another sip. Ask: Has the flavor changed? Finally, have learners finish filling their glasses with white grape juice and take another sip. Ask: What made the difference in the taste? Comment that Jesus used the wind to try to help Nicodemus understand the work of the Spirit. Ask: How might you use this experiment to help someone understand the work of the Spirit? Form pairs to practice telling each other about the difference that the Spirit can make in one's life.
3. **Spirit Art** Learners will interpret the movement of the Spirit in their lives through painting. Spend a moment looking at the pictures cut from Color Pack 27. Jesus said God's Spirit blows in our lives like the wind—we can't see the wind, but we can see its effects. Invite tweens to ponder how these different types of winds might remind us of the different ways God's Spirit can work in our lives. Cover the workspace with newspapers. Set out watercolor paints, paintbrushes, drinking straws, paper towels, and water dishes. Invite learners to paint, blow, and spatter watercolor paints to create a image of God's Spirit at work in their lives. Make a display of these paintings in your learning space. Option: Play "Music for Meditation" (track 23 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*) as learners paint.

CLOSING

Gather with learners around the Christ candle and light it. Show Color Pack 26 and invite tweens to tell how they have grown in understanding this story.

Explain that you will pray a prayer St. Augustine, a Christian who lived from 354–430 C.E. After you speak each line, learners will respond, "Let me be born anew." Pray aloud:

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Let me be born anew.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Let me be born anew.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.

Let me be born anew.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Let me be born anew.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.

Let me be born anew. Amen.

Invite learners to exchange gestures and words of peace. Say good-bye to each one by name.

Nicodemus Visits Jesus (Based on John 3:1–17, CEB)

 **Narrator:** There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a Jewish leader. He came to Jesus at night. (vv. 1, 2)

Chorus: What is this about?

Nicodemus: Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could do these miraculous signs that you do unless God is with him. (v. 2)

Chorus: What is this about?

Jesus: I assure you, unless someone is born anew, it's not possible to see God's kingdom. (v. 3)

Chorus: What is this about?

Nicodemus: How is it possible for an adult to be born? It's impossible to enter the mother's womb for a second time and be born, isn't it? (v. 4)

Chorus: What is this about?

Jesus: I assure you, unless someone is born of water and the Spirit, it's not possible to enter God's kingdom. Whatever is born of the flesh is flesh, and whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit. Don't be surprised that I said to you, "You must be born anew." God's Spirit blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. It's the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit. (vv. 5–8)

Chorus: What is this about?

Nicodemus: How are these things possible? (v. 9)

Chorus: What is this about?

Jesus: You are a teacher of Israel and you don't know these things? . . . 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. God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him. (vv. 10, 16–17)

Chorus: What is this about?

Spirit Living

Directions: When the Spirit blows in our lives, it places fruit in our lives to make it possible for us to be Jesus' followers. Solve the math problems and use the chart to help you spell out the different varieties of the Spirit's fruit. Check your answers at Galatians 5:22–23, NRSV. Circle the ones that seem strongest in your life.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

$$\overline{13-1} \quad \overline{3 \times 5} \quad \overline{11 \times 2} \quad \overline{6-1}$$

$$\overline{2 \times 5} \quad \overline{25-10} \quad \overline{5 \times 5}$$

$$\overline{4 \times 4} \quad \overline{12+3-10} \quad \overline{26-25} \quad \overline{15 \div 5} \quad \overline{15-10}$$

$$\overline{20-9} \quad \overline{19-10} \quad \overline{7 \times 2} \quad \overline{24-20} \quad \overline{7 \times 2} \quad \overline{20-15} \quad \overline{8+11} \quad \overline{23-4}$$

$$\overline{13-6} \quad \overline{22-17} \quad \overline{2 \times 6+2} \quad \overline{2 \times 3-1} \quad \overline{3 \times 5+3} \quad \overline{15 \div 1} \quad \overline{5 \times 5-6} \quad \overline{3 \times 3} \quad \overline{3 \times 5+5} \quad \overline{5 \times 5}$$

$$\overline{20-4} \quad \overline{1 \times 1-0} \quad \overline{4 \times 5} \quad \overline{9 \div 3+6} \quad \overline{2+3} \quad \overline{7 \times 3-7} \quad \overline{19-16} \quad \overline{5 \times 4-15}$$

$$\overline{12-5-1} \quad \overline{20-19} \quad \overline{18 \div 2} \quad \overline{5 \times 5-5} \quad \overline{3 \times 3-1} \quad \overline{2+2+2} \quad \overline{7 \times 3} \quad \overline{20 \div 4+7} \quad \overline{2 \times 6+2} \quad \overline{8-3} \quad \overline{4 \times 4+3} \quad \overline{26-6-1}$$

$$\overline{15-8} \quad \overline{5 \times 2-5} \quad \overline{26-12} \quad \overline{5 \times 6-10} \quad \overline{12 \times 3-24} \quad \overline{5+0} \quad \overline{35-21} \quad \overline{35-30} \quad \overline{38 \div 2} \quad \overline{76 \div 4}$$

$$\overline{3 \times 8-5} \quad \overline{2 \times 14-23} \quad \overline{3 \times 4} \quad \overline{36 \div 6} \quad \overline{16 \div 4-1} \quad \overline{8+7} \quad \overline{6 \times 5-16} \quad \overline{5 \times 5-5} \quad \overline{3 \times 6} \quad \overline{26-11} \quad \overline{5 \times 5-13}$$

