

STORY ENCOUNTERS



THE CHOSEN

Lesson 11: The God Who Draws Us to Him

1. Take a moment to reflect: How has God blessed you this week?

Answer:

The journey of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to the land that was promised to Abraham featured one blessing after another. Starting with the plagues in Egypt and the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, God continued to lead His people despite their doubts and complaints.

Listen to the words of Moses:

“*He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness...*”

DEUTERONOMY 8:15-16, NIV.

2. In Numbers 21:1-3, they had been attacked by the Canaanite King Arad but after pleading to God for help, they were able to defeat him.

But in verse 4, we see their gratitude for the victory didn't last long.

“*But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There*

is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!”

NUMBERS 21:4-5, NIV.

One writer commented,

“*As the Israelites indulged the spirit of discontent, they were disposed to find fault even with their blessings.”*

— ELLEN WHITE, PATRIARCHS AND PROPHETS, P. 428.

3. I'm sure it was with much sadness that God finally withdrew His hand of protection from the grumbling people. Perhaps now they would realize how much they had taken God's protection for granted.

Soon after, venomous snakes enveloped the camp, and the Israelites realized they were powerless to survive without divine intervention. They cried out to Moses to ask God for help. After Moses prayed, God provided a strange yet simple remedy.

“*The Lord said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.”*

NUMBERS 21:8-9, NIV.

The bronze snake itself contained no healing power. But when the snake-bitten Israelite trusted God's word and simply looked at the bronze snake in faith, they were unmistakably healed by God's power and their lives were saved.

4. Fast forward several thousand years. The Pharisees were confident of God's blessings and believed they had nailed down the formula for salvation: not only were they direct descendants of Abraham, they also had a system of meticulous law keeping (with laws they had added for good measure), and kept a wide berth around anyone or anything that might get in the way of their so-called purity.

Yet one Pharisee had witnessed encounters with the power of True Holiness. He was fast realizing that his perfected outward appearance was only a sham for a powerless, hollowed-out spirituality, and He longed for something deeper, something real. Let's pick up the story in John 3.

“Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again. “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!” Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’”

JOHN 3:1-7, NIV.

5. What do you think it means to be born again?

Answer:

Scan the code on the right to watch a video.



Do you consider yourself born again? (circle one) Yes No

If no, do you think you need a new birth? (circle one) Yes No

The Jews were familiar with the concept of a new ‘birth’ for those converting from another religion to Judaism. But Nicodemus, as a leading rabbi and ‘Teacher of Teachers’, hardly felt that this applied to him. But Jesus was there to tell him that EVERYONE was in need of a new birth.

“*If you have to be born again, something must have been fundamentally flawed or wrong with your first birth... We are born without our choice, without our consent, into the world of Adam which is a world of fallenness and condemnation, but we are born again by our choice into the world of the second Adam—Jesus Christ. When Jesus says you must be born again, what He’s saying is you have to start over. You have to start afresh.*”

— ADAPTED FROM DAVID ASSCHERICK, “NICODEMUS” (DA WITH DA VIDEO SERIES). [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=v2MS9GWP7oI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2MS9GWP7oI)

“*By nature the heart is evil, and “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.” Job 14:4. No human invention can find a remedy for the sinning soul... “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” Matthew 15:19. **The fountain of the heart must be purified before the streams can become pure. He who is trying to reach heaven by his own works in keeping the law is attempting an impossibility. There is no safety for one who has merely a legal religion, a form of godliness.** The Christian’s life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is a death to self and sin, and a new life altogether. This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.*”

— ELLEN WHITE, DESIRE OF AGES, P.172.

Basically, no matter who you are and what you’ve done or haven’t done, if you’ve been born on this planet, you need to be born again.

6. Jesus continued to explain to Nicodemus the process of salvation through the working of the Holy Spirit.

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The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

JOHN 3:8, NIV.

Scan the code on the right to watch a video.



How is the Spirit part of the new birth experience?

Answer:

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By an agency as unseen as the wind, Christ is constantly working upon the heart. Little by little, perhaps unconsciously to the receiver, impressions are made that tend to draw the soul to Christ. These may be received through meditating upon Him, through reading the Scriptures, or through hearing the word from the living preacher. Suddenly, as the Spirit comes with more direct appeal, the soul gladly surrenders itself to Jesus. By many this is called sudden conversion; but it is the result of long wooing by the Spirit of God,—a patient, protracted process.

*While the wind is itself invisible, it produces effects that are seen and felt. So the work of the Spirit upon the soul will reveal itself in every act of him who has felt its saving power. **When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life.** Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced; love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven.*

*No one sees the hand that lifts the burden, or beholds the light descend from the courts above. **The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God.** Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God.”*

— ELLEN WHITE, DESIRE OF AGES, P. 172,173.

7. We can see how the Spirit had been drawing Nicodemus to Jesus all along.

Scan the code on the right to watch a video.



How has the Spirit been working in your life to draw you to God?

Answer:

If the Spirit is the One who draws us to God, is there anything we have to do to get this new birth?

Answer:

Nicodemus wondered this too.

“*How can this be?*” Nicodemus asked. “*You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ...Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

JOHN 3:9-10,14-17, NIV.

Just like the Israelites of old just had to look at the bronze serpent and be saved, Nicodemus just had to look to Jesus in faith to accept His salvation in order to be born again.

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All who have ever lived upon the earth have felt the deadly sting of “that old serpent, called the devil, and Satan.” Revelation 12:9. The fatal effects of sin can be removed only by the provision that God has made. The Israelites saved their lives by looking upon the uplifted serpent. That look implied faith. They lived because they believed God’s word, and trusted in the means provided for their recovery. So the sinner may look to Christ, and live. He receives pardon through faith in the atoning sacrifice. Unlike the inert and lifeless symbol, Christ has power and virtue in Himself to heal the repenting sinner.

While the sinner cannot save himself, he still has something to do to secure salvation. “Him that cometh to Me,” says Christ, “I will in no wise cast out.” John 6:37. But ***we must come to Him***; and when we repent of our sins, ***we must believe that He accepts and pardons us***. Faith is the gift of God, but the power to exercise it is ours. ***Faith is the hand by which the soul takes hold upon the divine offers of grace and mercy...***

When we trust God fully, when we rely upon the merits of Jesus as a sin-pardoning Saviour, we shall receive all the help that we can desire. Let none look to self, as though they had power to save themselves. Jesus died for us because we were helpless to do this. In Him is our hope, our justification, our righteousness. When we see our sinfulness we should not despond and fear that we have no Saviour, or that He has no thoughts of mercy toward us. At this very time He is inviting us to come to Him in our helplessness and be saved.”

— ELLEN WHITE, PATRIARCHS AND PROPHETS, P.431.

8. The bronze serpent lifted up on a pole pointed forward to the time when Jesus would be lifted up on the cross. **The ultimate act of God to draw people to Him was the death of Christ in humankind's place.** A snake on a stick is a powerless snake, and when Jesus 'became sin' (see 2 Corinthians 5:21) for us on the cross and effectively put sin to death, He assured the universe of the eventual end of the Devil's reign and the glorious coming of the kingdom of God.

While the Bible does not describe whether Jesus literally invited Nicodemus to follow Him, we know that it wasn't until after Jesus was lifted up on the cross that Nicodemus boldly stepped forward and claimed his allegiance to Him (see John 19:38-39). However, the Bible does describe Jesus' direct call to Matthew to follow Him.

“*After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.*”

LUKE 5:27-28, NIV.

Scan the code on the right to watch a video.



In what ways were Nicodemus and Matthew similar? In what ways were they different?

Answer:

9. For two individuals well-established in their respective professions, both Nicodemus and Matthew had a lot to give up to follow Jesus. Matthew made the decision a lot faster; we know that Nicodemus eventually did later on.

Who do you relate more to, Nicodemus or Matthew? Why?

Answer:

10. God loved them both—He loved the WORLD which included the Nicodemus', the Matthews, the nation of Israel and even Rome. And that is why “He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever BELIEVES in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, NIV).

Through the Spirit, Jesus draws each one of us to Him, inviting us to look to Him in faith for healing from our wounds from the Serpent of old. He removes sin's sting of

death and replaces it with an eternal life in heaven. Sounds like a good exchange to me!

How will you respond today?

- ☐ I praise God that He gave Jesus and all of heaven for my salvation.
- ☐ I desire to put to death my old nature of selfishness and sin, and live by the Spirit of God.
- ☐ I want to accept Jesus' invitation to be born again and follow Him.
- ☐ I want to share with the world that I am a follower of Jesus.

“*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you...*”

1 PETER 1:3,4, NIV.