

Bible study on John 3.1-17

Begin with an opening prayer

Wonderful God,
as we gaze at the miracle of your world,
intricate and interconnected,
huge in scope, microscopic in detail,
we are amazed.
We wonder that you love each one of us,
seeing us, knowing us and filling us with the breath of life.
You hold us in being moment by moment.
Help us to learn more of you as mystery,
to hug you as friend,
and with you, to care for the whole of creation.
Amen.

Read the passage

Explore and respond to the text

Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.

Bible notes

Nicodemus, a leading Pharisee, comes to visit Jesus 'by night'. We do not know what he was hoping for, but he felt that the opportunity to talk with Jesus privately was worth risking the scorn of his fellow Pharisees (John's Gospel describes a hostile environment where those who chose to follow Jesus would be put out of the synagogue; see John 9.22). Does Nicodemus have a burning question about what it means to serve God? His comment in verse 2 seems to be his honest opinion, not an attempt at manipulation (because he reappears in John 19.39, bringing a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes with which to bury Jesus). So, we might wonder what he hopes to learn? Whatever it is, the conversation immediately goes in a direction that he does not expect. We have got so used to the phrase 'born again' that we assume that we understand it. Nicodemus, on the other hand, has no idea! The statement baffles him and he retorts: 'How can anyone be born after having grown old?' If he was hoping for some advice that would smoothly combine with what he already believes, he faces disappointment. Jesus is uncompromising and insistent – it is this process of being born of the Spirit that makes it possible to even see the kingdom of God. This release of new life, eternal life, is God's plan for the world.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

Nicodemus asks: 'How can anyone be born after having grown old?' A person can become old before their time – through pain and trauma, or disappointment and loss of hope, or through becoming rigid and fixed in their thinking and habits. Is there any way back from this ageing of the heart? What does following a path of faith bring to this? Does the way that Jesus confronted Nicodemus help us? What might it feel like to put such a high value on the absolute new beginning that being born suggests? Are we too keen to see a life of faith as characterised by maturing expertise rather than by a vulnerable new beginning?

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues of sharing.



- How might seeing an unclear reflection in a pool illustrate how we experience God?
- How comfortable are you with the idea of mystery?
- How do the words 'mystery' and 'closeness' describe your own experiences of God?

Prayer

God, we see you, we touch you, we worship you

in fleeting images –

in each tree and flower,

in each other's faces,

And yet your hugeness, your unknown-ness, your mystery goes on for ever.

You are closer to us than our breath,

but also infinite in mystery.

We praise you.

Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Wonderful God,
help us to keep adventuring with you.
May we allow ourselves to be filled
with visions of your awesomeness,
and may we know your presence
closer to us than our own breathing.
Thank you for creating us,
for being visible to us in Jesus,
and for inspiring and empowering us
with your interweaving Spirit.
Amen.