



small groups

Discussion Guide



Next Steps

John 3:1-21

Ice Breaker

(5 minutes)

Pastor Andy's mother is in failing health. Instead of discussing an ice breaker this week, spend a few minutes praying for her and her family. Her name is Dorothy.

Lesson Review

(40 minutes)

Barry said Jesus' most frequent and vehement confrontations were with people who took their faith and their scriptures seriously. He said, "Jesus continually found himself bent out of shape by uptight religious people." And the issues that he confronted often

involved hypocrisy and a failure of compassion. Nicodemus was one of those uptight religious people, but he came to Jesus with questions rather than accusations.

Read John 3:1-21

As a strict Pharisee, Nicodemus's worldview told him that religion was about trying hard and behaving well. His faith was about ascending: climbing his way to God by his religious activity. Barry said this is the difference between Christianity and every other theistic religion. Where other religions are about ascent ("How do we get up there?") Christianity is a religion of descent ("Up there came down here.")

When Jesus told Nicodemus to be born again, Nicodemus might have heard a call to start over with his religious progress and try harder. But that's not what Jesus was saying. A person isn't born of their own will. Birth doesn't happen because the baby tries hard. Birth is something that happens to us; something we receive. So is rebirth.

Barry explained some implications from the original Biblical languages.

- The word for "again" in verse 3 can also mean "from above."
- The words for "spirit" in both Greek and Hebrew can also mean "wind."
- The words for "lifted up" in verse 14 can also mean "exalted."

And Barry said that John's gospel always uses water as a symbol for the spirit.

Discuss

- What other passages can you find where John makes this connection between water and spirit?
- Read Numbers 21:4-9. What parallels can you identify between Jesus and the bronze snake?

Barry said there is a love that loves because its object is beautiful. This is the love of the pop song and the rom-com. God's love is a love that makes its object beautiful.

Application

(15 minutes)

There were undoubtedly people in the service this week whose next step is the first step: to stop practicing a religion of ascent and receive the gift of God come down. Is that you? Ask if anyone in your group has never trusted in Jesus' gift of life. Pray for them and other unbelievers whom you care about.

Barry's lesson wasn't only for the unbelieving though. There's a lesson for any of us who are trying to love like Jesus. Barry said the nature of godly love is giving and sacrifice, even for those who don't deserve it.

Discuss

- Who in your life is difficult to love? Is God calling you to sacrifice for them? What next step can you take this week to emulate God's love?

