



OVERVIEW SECTION

How to Read This Lesson Plan

The **Overview Section** is the foundation of this lesson plan. The questions and activities for the class that you will be teaching on Sunday morning have been based (sometimes loosely) upon what you read in this section. The **Overview Section** is composed of five components (each component is underlined in the lesson plan):

- How to Read This Lesson Plan** (defines all components of the lesson plan)
- Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation** (a reminder of why we do this)
- Scripture(s) for the Session** (a reminder that the scripture is to be read in every class)
- Key Verses & Theology** (background for teachers to ponder)
- Themes to Focus on from the Scripture** (the ideas that the session's lessons are based on)

The actual lesson is found in the second section, **The Sunday Morning Experience Section**. Think of this section as the step-by-step instruction guide to your Sunday morning teaching experience. There are four components to this section (again, each component is underlined in the actual lesson plan):

- Preparation** (including supplies needed)
- Classroom Statement** (a brief explanation of what will be taught/happening in the classroom)
- Step-by-step process of the lesson** (including the scripture to be read)
- Suggested variations for age groups** (Self-explanatory but not always applicable)

We encourage you to read the rest of this **Overview Section** before reading the **Sunday Morning Experience Section**.

Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation:

The purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation is, with God's help and in community, to hear and interact with the stories of our faith tradition, to pray, worship and play together, and to equip and support the building of relationships with God and with each other.

Scripture(s) for the Session: John 3:1-8; 16-17

Please READ this aloud in every class you teach. The actual words to the scripture can be found in **The Sunday Morning Experience Section: Step-by-Step process of the lesson**. When reading to the class, please read it from the lesson plan (not an actual Bible) as the wording of the scripture has been modified to help clarify some language issues.

Key Verses & Theology: These are provided to help the teachers think about and build a framework for understanding the story to help in answering some of the questions that the students might raise in class.

1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night. The Pharisees were the established religious and cultural leaders of Israel. The Israelites placed a great amount of prestige on the Pharisees. However, Jesus' teachings often painted the Pharisees in a bad light. Jesus often pointed out how the Pharisees cared more for their own prestige than they cared about helping the people pay attention to and experience God. Jesus, by paying attention to God, performing miracles and encouraging the people to pay attention to God, was stealing the Pharisee's thunder (not on purpose – that's just how it works. When we pay attention to and are obedient to God and God's way, we shine brighter than those walking their own path). This is why Nicodemus, a Pharisee, comes to Jesus *at night*. Nicodemus does *not* want to be seen with Jesus. If he was seen with Jesus, fellow Pharisees would reprimand him and Nicodemus would lose prestige and standing. So even though Nicodemus is curious about Jesus, he's not curious enough to risk his image with outright contact with Jesus. And so this clandestine meeting takes place.

3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus, who seems to be purposely obtuse in his response to Jesus' statement says, "You can't re-enter your mother's womb and be born again!" Jesus, though, isn't talking biologically. He's talking about perspective. As long as Nicodemus' perspective is one based on prestige, image, power and control, then he is not going to be able to see God's kingdom or be able to receive, in any large measure, the Holy Spirit. Jesus is telling Nicodemus that in order to shift one's perspective so radically, one must start over. Basically, Jesus is telling Nicodemus that if Nicodemus really wants to understand, then he has to throw the baby out with the bathwater and begin his life again. And if Nicodemus does begin again, he must submit to the ways of God's instead of to the ways of humans.

8 You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it's headed next. That's the way it is with everyone 'born from above' by the wind of God, the Spirit of God." Jesus is telling Nicodemus in this verse that when you are born again you will not know or even understand why you are to do certain things. That you will be directed by God in a fashion that is similar to the wind. For an image-obsessed person like Nicodemus, who likes to have all his ducks in a row, this is an unfathomable way of life. Which is why he'd have to completely let go of his current life and start over in order to see and live God's way. He'd have to have new priorities and not try to hold the position he now has in life. Just like the disciples gave up their way of life when Jesus called them to follow, so would Nicodemus have to give up his way of life to the wind, to the Spirit of God.

Themes to Focus on from the Scripture: Themes are provided to help teachers understand the teaching of the *session* (not necessarily the class). Sometimes an activity in one class may not match up with any of the themes.

Image: Nicodemus is worried what others will say about him. So he hides his actions from the world. He does not want to be seen talking to Jesus. And so what does Jesus talk about? He talks to Nicodemus about what you have to do in order to see the Kingdom of God. And part of what Jesus says is that Nicodemus has to stop caring about what others think of him because God will be sending him one way and then the next, like how the wind blows a leaf. And if Nicodemus cares too much about what he looks like, then he will not be able to be obedient to God's call. Being your own man/woman and being a child of God are not compatible identities.

Wind: The Hebrew word for wind, spirit and breath is the same word (*ruach*). So when Jesus says wind, he's also saying the word Spirit. Jesus is pointing out that we can't make plans based on the wind. And the same is true for the Spirit. If we have plans, the wind will mess those plans up (think of a picnic on a windy day, for example). If we don't want our plans messed up (and we probably don't since that's why we made plans in the first place), then we'll be resistant to where the wind/Spirit would be leading us. In order to get rid of all our plans and expectations, we'd have to start our living all over again, and in doing so, base our decisions on a whole new set of understandings.

Saved/Salvation: All this talk of starting life again, being reborn, letting the Spirit guide us instead of our plans can sound pretty scary as well as wacky, crazy and irresponsible. Nicodemus probably had similar thoughts. This is why Jesus tells him what has become the famous verse of "For God so loved the world that he sent his only son, not to condemn the world, but to save it." Even though being reborn (once we consider what it consists of) sounds initially destructive, Jesus is reminding Nicodemus that this whole starting over thing is the better way. And, that this better way of being reborn and then living God's Way will save everyone from the consequences of our current ways of living. This can be a hard teaching. Seeing what we need to be saved from helps us to receive this difficult lesson. We never hear if Nicodemus starts over or not, but we do see this rebirth Jesus describes happen later, with another Pharisee named Paul.



THE SUNDAY MORNING EXPERIENCE SECTION

Preparation

- Print out this lesson plan and bring it with you on the Sunday Mornings you are teaching
- Arrive at pre-arranged time to join other teachers, shepherds and staff for an opening prayer.
- Supplies Needed: DVD movie (online at www.rfour.org/media.html. Or you can contact me at support@rfour.org about receiving a DVD with all the movies on it for Season 3); TV w/DVD player; 4 to 5 scripts for puppets (see *Storytelling Supply Document S3-S4*); some sort of upright material to for the puppeteers to hide behind and put their puppets above (a large, modified cardboard box works perfectly – if you really want to get into it, get a refrigerator box from an appliance store); camcorder; popsicle puppets (see “How to make popsicle puppets” directly below)
- **How to make popsicle puppets:** Print out the pictures as provided in the *Storytelling Supply Document S3-S4*. Cut them out and either paste or tape them to large craft/popsicle sticks. I often times tape the pictures to dark-colored construction paper to help with support and contrast.

Classroom Statement

This Storytelling Class consists of reading the Nicodemus and Jesus scripture story; watching a “movie” about Nicodemus and Jesus; and acting out the story using a script and popsicle puppets that is then recorded to be turned into its own movie.

Step-by-Step Process of Lesson

Shepherd comes in with students

SHEPHERD ASKS “Question of the Day.”

INTRODUCE yourself

Hi, my name is ____ and I want you call me (tell the students how they may address you).

PRAY Short and simple is perfect. For example:

God, thank you for this day and for each other. We need your help. Help us to learn about you this day. Amen.

TELL

- The scripture story we're going to hear today is a conversation between Jesus and a man named Nicodemus.
- Jesus talks some about being "born from above" and about the Holy Spirit.
- Listen for what Jesus says the Holy Spirit acts like.

READ John 3:1-8; 16-17 (mixture of NRSV and the Message)

1 There was a man named Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee and prominent leader among the Jews. 2 Late one night he visited Jesus and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these things that you do if they are separated from the presence of God." 3 Jesus said, "You're absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it's not possible to see what I'm pointing to - to God's kingdom." 4 "How can anyone," said Nicodemus, "be born who has already been born and grown up? What are you saying with this 'born-from-above' talk?" 5 Jesus answered, "You're not listening. So I'll say it another way, 6 'No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of the Holy Spirit.' 7 Do not be shocked that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 8 If you choose to live God's way, then you must surrender to God's Holy Spirit that is like the wind. And you must let it move you where it chooses."

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have life forever. 17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

ASK (answers in parentheses)

- Did you hear what Jesus said God's Holy Spirit is like? (the wind)
- At the very beginning of the story, we're told that Nicodemus was a Pharisee. Do you know what a Pharisee is? (a religious leader)

TELL

- We're now going to watch a short movie that retells the story you just heard, but the story will be told in "first person." That means the person talking will be pretending to be Nicodemus himself.
- In the movie, Nicodemus will talk some about what it means to be a Pharisee.
- He'll also talk briefly about Sadducees – who are also religious leaders.
- Listen for what might keep Nicodemus from doing what Jesus says about being "born again."

WATCH Video on DVD

ASK

- So why was Nicodemus having a hard time with what Jesus was saying? (because to be born again would change his whole life – and he'd worked really hard and had really wanted to be a Pharisee)

TELL

- Now we're going to make our own movie.
- We have two characters that talk a lot, Jesus and Nicodemus.
- Then there are other parts that are not speaking parts.
- So what we're going to do is go behind the screen, here.
- And then we'll assign parts.
- (If need be, you can assign an "audience" part to the less than enthusiastic students. Our shepherd here will record our play (or maybe have a student help out here, too).
- We'll do a practice run through, where I'll be the director, helping y'all know what to do and when to do it.
- Once we got through the practice run, then we film it.

DO & RECORD Popsicle Puppet Play

Puppet Play Script

Popsicle "people" and props needed:

- Paper that says "Night time"
- Jesus
- Nicodemus
- People of Israel
- The End sign

Speaking Characters:

- Jesus
- Nicodemus

Non-speaking or one-line parts:

- Night time
- People of Israel

Screen Play

Nicodemus: I love to have people pay attention to me!

People of Israel: [pop up] We can SEEEEE you! [pop back down]

Nicodemus: Hello there, people! Thank you! Thank you! See you tomorrow morning. [walk/bounce over and "stand" in front of sheet that says "Night time."]

Jesus: [pops up in front of sheet that says "night time"]

Nicodemus: [*whispers*] Hello, Jesus.

Jesus: What? I can't hear you...Why are you whispering?

Nicodemus: *[clears throat – talks in normal voice]* Oh, right. Sorry. Just didn't want people to see me actually talk to you. But I forgot: It's night time. The people can't see me!

People of Israel: *[pop up]* We can SEEEEEEE you! *[pop back down]*

Nicodemus: Oops! *[looks at where the people were. Looks back at Jesus]* Jesus, I just want to say that I know you're paying attention to God because no one can do what you're doing and say what you're saying without God's help. I'm very impressed. I was wondering if you could help me do what you're doing.

Jesus: To do what I'm doing, you need to be born again.

Nicodemus: What? Don't be silly – no one can do that!

Jesus: You can't see what God is doing until you start your life over and live God's way.

Nicodemus: What? How do I do that?

Jesus: To start your life over again, let God's spirit guide you like the wind moves a leaf. Don't try to control yourself or the wind. Instead, surrender to where God's spirit is sending you.

Nicodemus: But I'm not a leaf! I'm Nicodemus! The people love me!

People of Israel: *[pop up]* We can SEEEEEEE you! *[pop back down]*

Nicodemus: *[looks at the people; looks back to Jesus]*

Jesus: You let the people's attention drive what you do and why you do it. You, of all people, should know better. You should know that it is not the people's attention that saves you, but God's attention that saves you.

Nicodemus: But I've built my whole life around getting the people's attention. And look how good I am at it? The people even find me during the night time! To do what you're saying would destroy my life!

Jesus: God loves the world. God loves you. And the way God wants you to live will not destroy the world, instead, the way that God wants you to live, if you do it, will SAVE the world.

Jesus: *[drops back down]*

Nicodemus: What would I do without the people? Could I really start my life over and make God the most important thing in my life – even more important than the attention of the people? Could I really do that?

People of Israel: [pop up] We can SEEEEEEE you! [pop back down]

Nicodemus: [shakes “head” back and forth and drops down too]

[Hold up sign that says, “The End”]

CLEAN UP

DISMISS FOR SINGING

Suggested Variations for age groups

For the youngest class, you and the shepherd will have to read the Jesus and Nicodemus parts.