

The Twelve-Inch Journey
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John 3:3-21

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." 3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" 5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 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." 9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 10 Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

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 eternal life.

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. 18 Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. (1989). (Jn 3:1–21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Theme: the longest journey any of us ever take is the journey between the head and the heart. For many "good Christians" – who like Nicodemus are pious, learned, and closely adhere to their tradition – that journey is from head to heart, moving down so that what we know about God becomes knowing God intimately. For many non-Christians, the journey may go the other way: They have had spiritual experiences but don't know about the God revealed in Scripture. This is the work of evangelism. It will be difficult for us to be good evangelists who walk alongside others in the journey from heart to head, unless we first

take the one from head to heart.

Reflection Questions

Nicodemus is struggling to make sense of how it can be that Jesus is doing some pretty extraordinary “God-stuff” but isn’t part of the spiritual power structure that Nicodemus has been loyal to all his life. Have you ever had a struggle like this. How did God meet you and move you through it?

Do you believe that there are levels to understanding God, the scriptures, discipleship, and what it means to have eternal life? Are there levels that are “higher” or “deeper” than others? Is “higher” better? Why or why not?

Jesus speaks of the Spirit moving in a way that doesn’t conform to our categories, doctrines, or other rules. What about the mystery of the Spirit’s activity comforts you. What about this idea makes you (and Nicodemus) uncomfortable?

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