

Week Beginning: 12th March 2017

Worship Series: #3 in series **NO SHORTCUTS**

living sharing growing



lifegroups
live life abundantly

Theme Verse

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 3:16-17

Remember This Week

The unmistakeable truth with which Jesus confronts Nicodemus and us, is that life cannot be lived in a bubble. Real life isn't something we control. It isn't something we do. It isn't something we earn. It is ultimately a gift received by faith. Jesus calls us to look up, to look to his cross, and in him discover healing, discover salvation, discover real life. Then we will begin to really live.



Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous may enter.

I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation. Psalm 119:9-11

God of our salvation, you are good and your loving kindness lasts forever. Thank you for your unconditional love that you pour out on the world and us in your Son Jesus, whether we want it or not, whether we are ready for it or not. Help us to receive it as the gift it is, to live in it and grow deeper in our belief as we study your Word this day. We ask this in the name of Jesus who died to give us real life with you forever.



1. *Share your highs and lows for the past week.*
2. *Accountability time! How did you go with your living purposefully from last time?*
3. *If you could get an answer to one question in your life from God right now, what question would you ask?*
4. *What is the deepest spiritual conversation that you have had with a person and when did it happen?*
5. *Why do you think John 3:16 the best known and most often quoted verse in the Bible?*

We live in an age of self-reliance. Most of us don't really believe we need saving and if we did, we could do it ourselves. So go into any bookstore and you will see titles like "90 Minutes to Success" "10 Habits of Truly Optimistic People" "You Can Heal Your Life" "SNAP Strategies for Couples" (40 fast fixes for everyday relationship pitfalls). If only real life were that easy. 90 minutes? Who wouldn't jump at that? Only 10 habits? Most of us could pull that off. SNAP & my relationships are solid? Easy fix. But real life doesn't happen that way. Life in the Kingdom of God doesn't happen that way. There is no 'Recognition of prior learning' that will get you to heaven. No easy ways to wholeness. No shortcuts to salvation. That's why Jesus took the long road to the cross and the grave so that in him you could receive life - real life - now and forever.



Read John 3:1-21

First thoughts/reflections

6. *What are you hearing in this Bible reading - what verses speak most loudly to you and why?*
7. *What do light and dark represent in these verses?*
8. *Where are you in your understanding of spiritual life? Still in the dark? Moving closer to the light? Share.*
9. *What things have happened in your life that have made you think that there must be more to life than you are currently experiencing, or which have made you more curious to know who God is or how he works in this world?*



The story of Nicodemus, a Pharisee and Jewish leader, is one of several stories unique to John's Gospel. Nicodemus visits Jesus by night. In John's Gospel, light and darkness are significant themes. In general, light signifies belief and darkness signifies unbelief, or a time of ignorance and temptation. With this visit taking place at night, John sets this story in the context of a struggle between believing and not believing Jesus' identity as the Son of God and the Messiah.

10. *What's the difference between being 'religious' and being a Christian?*
11. *Re-read John 3:3-4 What do you think Jesus means when he says you must be 'born again' to see the kingdom of God? How do you react to the words 'born again'?*
12. *When Jesus asserts that no one can see the kingdom without being born from 'another', he uses a word that can have several meanings - again, anew, or from above. Nicodemus clearly takes Jesus to mean the first of these three possibilities. But Jesus seems to have the third one in mind, "born from above." How does this change your understanding of what Jesus is saying to Nicodemus?*
13. *If Nicodemus was confused about Jesus' response to him in verses 3-4, Jesus pops his bubble even further by his words in verse 8. What is Jesus telling us about God and salvation by using two of the most uncontrollable, uncontrollable phenomena in the world?*
14. *Jesus compares himself to the serpent lifted up in Numbers 21:4-9. Read this passage. Why did Jesus use Moses's serpent to illustrate himself (John 3:14-15)?*
15. *What does Numbers 21:4-9 teach you about Jesus, yourself, and the cross.*

The Jews assumed that the Son of Man would come to judge and condemn the world. That was the role of the Son of Man both in Ezekiel and Daniel. But Jesus is not like the fiery serpents, sent to judge and destroy. Jesus is like the bronze serpent. He has come into the world to love and heal all of creation. Like that bronze serpent, the Son of Man will be lifted up for healing. For John, the cross is the moment of Jesus' exultation. The Greek word translated "lifted up" can also mean "glorify" or "exult." In the mystery of the cross, what appears from an earthly perspective as an act of humiliation and defeat is, from a heavenly perspective, a moment of exultation and victory. The cross is God's sign pointing to God's love and the salvation of the world. In John the death of Jesus is never viewed as God's outpouring of punishment on Jesus on our behalf, but as a revelation of God's love for the world and the glorification of the Father and the Son (John 17:1). That's what makes God's love so incredible. The word that is used for 'world' (*kosmos* in Greek) normally signifies that entity that is hostile to God's will (see 16:33, 17:9-19), so you could translate this verse, "For God so loved the God-hating world..." How great is the love of God - greater than your hate, and a love that is willing to give his best so you can experience real life now and forever (salvation in John's Gospel is always life right here, and right now as well as forever).



Salvation is all God's work (see Ephesians 2:8-9). Likewise faith/belief in Jesus Christ is not a once-and-done action of the believer but rather is an ongoing work of the Spirit who, as Jesus says, blows where it chooses.

16. *Where have you seen the Spirit at work in your life over the last week (that is, where have you seen him leading you into opportunities for conversations, encounters with others)?*
17. *What do you do when the topic of religion comes up in a conversation? Have you ever shared your faith in Jesus with someone? What happened?*
18. *Martin Luther called John 3:16 "The heart of the Bible, the Gospel in miniature." How might you use this one verse to explain the Good News to someone who is curious about Jesus?*
19. *Who is someone in your relationship/social/friendship circle with whom you could share the Good News of Jesus? What needs to happen/change for that to occur? What will you do about it? Share with group.*



- * Praise God for his love -- surprising, all encompassing, unasked for and undeserved. Thank Jesus for offering up his life to rescue you and give you life now and forever. Ask the Holy Spirit to blow you where he needs you to live his love in the coming week.
- * Pray for each member of your LifeGroup, focussing on where they need the love and certainty of the salvation Jesus gives.
- * Pray for those you know whose minds and spirits are in darkness (unbelief) and pray that God would use you to reveal the source of real life in Jesus to them.

Turn to the person next to you and make the sign of the cross on the palm of their hand or forehead as you say:

Name, Christ fill you with the fullness of his love. Amen.

