**Lenten Series Week 1**

**John 3:1-21**  
*The Pharisee, the Wind, and Jesus*  
“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

**Introduction:**
Welcome to our Lenten K-Group Study. During this season, as we make our way to Good Friday and ultimately to Easter, we will be walking through the Gospel of John. Each week, we will look at a conversation Jesus has with a traveler along the journey. Our invitation is to consider how Jesus is also speaking to us in these encounters, and how we might respond in faith as we seek to stay close to the Master.

**Overview:**
Our first traveling companion is a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews named Nicodemus. Now, Nicodemus is a scholar. We might think of him as an academic or as the ancient world equivalent of a Professor of Theology. Jesus actually refers to him as “the teacher of Israel.” In other words, he is a big deal, and he knows his stuff. He knows the scriptures of the Old Testament. He knows the Torah or the first five books of the Old Testament inside and out. He knows the rabbinical writings of the day. And being a Pharisee, he is not simply a learned man; he is a man trying to keep the law to the best of his ability. And being a leader of the Jews, he encourages others to do the same.

Yet here he finds himself, drawn out in the darkness of night to see Jesus. He begins the conversation with what seems, at first glance, to be a very respectful greeting, especially considering it comes from an esteemed theologian to a young, itinerant Rabbi. However, before he gets very far, Jesus steps in and changes the conversation. Because Nicodemus is missing something big—something that all of his learning and logic and reason has not shown him. What he is missing is that this Jesus who is sitting before him is not just another Rabbi. He is not just another teacher sent from God. He is something different. In fact, He is the Son of Man who has descended from heaven and has come to bring people, by faith, into the Kingdom of God.

Jesus is not here just to teach people good ideas. He is here to upend their lives. He does not just want theological conversations. He is looking to transform lives. He is not here to share opinions about God. He is here to reveal the truth of God.

Jesus tells Nicodemus that what he needs, and what all of us need, is not simply more knowledge. We need rebirth. We need a spiritual renewal that shakes us from our head to our foot. This rebirth is brought about by the power of the Spirit. It is an act of God, as mysterious as the movements of the wind, that transforms us by grace as we fix our eyes upon Jesus, the one who has “descended from Heaven” and is about to be lifted up on the cross.
The conversation ends with what is probably the most famous passage of scripture, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son...” In this final word from Jesus, we see both the love of God manifested in the weightiness of the gift given, but also the stark reminder of why this rebirth is necessary. The sad truth is that without Christ, we are perishing. Or put another way, we are living in darkness. This is not a word of condemnation as much as a statement of fact. It’s like telling someone they have a clogged artery and that, without surgery, they are going to die. It’s simply the reality of life apart from Christ. This is why He has come. This is the goal of the gift: to redeem the world and bring us out of the Kingdom of Darkness and into the Kingdom of Light.

**Prayer:** Most gracious Heavenly Father, we worship and adore You. We stand in awe of who You are and what You have done. We cannot comprehend the magnitude of what it cost You to send Your only Son into the world for us and for our Salvation. We cannot fathom the depth of Your love. But our desire is to respond with faith and thanksgiving. Our prayer is that by the power of Your Spirit, You would shine Your light into the darkness of our lives and grant us the gift of rebirth. Open now our hearts to Your word and speak to us that we might live ever more for Your glory. In Jesus name we pray, amen.

**Biblical Text:**
Read John 3:1-21

**Discussion:**
1) Go around the room and make sure you know everyone’s name. What is a gift that you have received that has particular value or meaning in your life? What made it valuable to you?
2) Why do you think that Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night?
3) How does Nicodemus address Jesus? What do you think this says about who Nicodemus believed Jesus to be?
4) What do you make of Jesus’ response to Nicodemus in verses 3 & 5? What does it mean to be “born again?” (Consider Ezekiel 36:25-28)
5) What does being born again have to do with the Kingdom of God? As you look through the passage, what are some attributes or identifiers of the Kingdom of God? Is there an alternative kingdom imagined by Jesus in this passage?
6) Wind in this passage is referenced as something that is unseen and somewhat chaotic, yet also has a visible, tangible impact. In what ways might the wind tell us about being born again?
7) Read Numbers 21:4-9. Why do you think Jesus mentions this particular story from the Old Testament? In what ways does this story point us to Jesus?
8) Why did God send His son into the world? What does this tell us about God? What does it tell us about ourselves?
9) John 3:16 is perhaps the most famous verse in the bible, and yet verse 18 is rarely mentioned. Why do you think this is? How does verse 18 (and following) impact our understanding of verse 16 and this passage as a whole?
10) What is the allure of darkness (v. 19-20)? Where do we see the darkness in our lives?
11) Share a time in your life when you wanted to (or did!) hide something you had done. Why did you want to hide? If you eventually brought that thing into the light, how did that happen? What was the result? As followers of Christ, what does it mean to walk in the light?

12) What response(s) are we called to in this passage?

**Application:**
Jesus invites Nicodemus and us to believe in Him. This is about more than a one-time affirmation of faith, though claiming Jesus as Lord is an important place to start! But it is also about a life that is focused on Jesus, trusting in Jesus, and seeking after Jesus. As you go through this week, consider the ways in which you are focusing on Jesus. Where are you trusting in Him and claiming Him as Lord, and where might you be drifting into darkness?

**Pray:** Lord God Almighty, You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in You. Renew us by the power of Your Spirit that we might live in the light of Your love all the days of our lives. Amen.