LESSON OVERVIEW
It's easy to think of Jesus as one who is disappointed in us because we never measure up to his perfect lifestyle. Or of Jesus as a cartoonish figure who looks good as an action hero doll but has no idea of the day-to-day trials we currently face. Sadly, we fix our eyes on those incorrect images of Christ rather than what's true. Jesus is an action hero, but not one made of plastic. Rather, he was flesh and blood who came to the earth on the world's greatest rescue mission—freeing us from the prison of sin. When we truly understand what Jesus did, we will live a life of thankfulness and be more inclined to view others in the same way Jesus does.

LESSON OBJECTIVES
1. WHAT: Jesus came to earth on a rescue mission motivated by love.
2. WHY: Students will see Jesus as a friend who loves them rather than someone who condemns them.
3. HOW: Students will be encouraged to evaluate their lives to see if there are any “dark” places they’re living that need to be exposed to the "light."

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE
John 3:1-21

SECONDARY SCRIPTURE
Romans 5:6-8 and Numbers 21:9

TEACHING PREP
The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your teenagers, you'll definitely want to refer to it in your own preparation for the lesson.

Jesus teaches Nicodemus a life lesson we all need to know and believe: God’s only motive is love. Jesus came to offer light to a dark world in order to show the love of God. Even though we are naturally drawn to the darkness of the world, Jesus wants us to embrace his light.


John 3:3 born again: Or born from above; also in 3:7. John’s expression “from above” (3:31; 19:11) means “from God.” To experience spiritual rebirth, a person must be completely renewed through God’s power. Nicodemus interpreted Jesus’ words physically; he demonstrated that those in darkness, who do not have spiritual rebirth, cannot
understand Jesus or other "heavenly things" (3:12). Jesus sometimes used ironic misunderstanding as a teaching strategy.¹

**John 3:16** The truth that God *loved the world* is basic to Christian understanding (1 John 4:9–10). God’s love extends beyond the limits of race and nation, even to those who oppose him (see John 17:5–26). The Son came to save—not condemn (3:17)—men and women who habitually embrace the darkness (3:19–21).²

**John 3:17** At his first coming, God sent Jesus the first time to *save the world through him*. When Jesus comes again, he will come in judgment upon those who refused his offer of salvation.³

**THE BEFORE & AFTER [optional]**

**Text Message Questions**

We’ve provided a couple of different text message questions to send out to your students prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one, some, or all of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Do you prefer darkness or light? Let’s talk about it tonight at small group.
- Is God an angry judge or a loving parent? Come to small group tonight to discuss it.

If you came up with a good question that worked for you and your child, please send it to me! If it worked well for you, I’m sure it will work well for another parent as well.

Thanks for your love for your teenager! Have a God-blessed week!

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¹ New Living Translation Study Bible. 2008 (John 3:3). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
GETTING THINGS STARTED [optional]
Welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and jump right into teaching the lesson.

If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you’d like to share it with other youth workers, please email us at products@simplyyouthministry.com.

TEACHING POINTS
The goal of the Teaching Points is to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The three main points we have chosen here are (1) Begin again, (2) Watch me, (3) Remember what’s true, and (4) Share the light.

Remember: All throughout these lessons, it’s up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read John 3:1-21 together as a group. Consider allowing one or more of the teenagers to read the text.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Let’s take a look at some of Jesus’ advice from the Bible on how we can live in the “light.”

1. Begin again (Reference John 3:1-8)

ASK:
• What does the phrase “born again” mean? How might you explain it to someone using other terms?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Jesus’ life mission focused on saving people from a life of despair and an eternity separated from God. But people needed a new perspective—and that perspective required so much change that it was like being born again. Only this time, people are born from God.

2. Watch me (Reference John 3:9-15)

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: When Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (see Numbers 21:9), the people who followed his instructions (to look at it) lived. The same is true with Jesus: we gain life when we “look” at Jesus—meaning, when we closely follow him. Want to know how to live today? Study Jesus. Want to know how to live forever? Study Jesus.
ASK:
- What people are role models in your life? Why do you admire those individuals so much?
- Jesus never sat in the classroom of a high school or turned on a TV or played a video game or walked through a mall. How does this affect the ways Jesus can be a role model for you in the 21st century?

3. Remember what’s true (Reference John 3:16-17)

ASK:
- John 3:16 is one of the most well-known verses in the Bible. Why do you think verse 17 is so much lesser known and memorized?
- Rephrase verses 16 and 17 in your own words. What is most meaningful to you about these verses?
- Read Romans 5:6-8. Why do you think God was willing to send Jesus as our source of salvation, even if for sinners who didn’t really deserve forgiveness?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Whether or not we follow Jesus, we all have something in common: We mess up. When we do, it’s essential to remember that Jesus is not criticizing you or pointing his finger at you in a defiant way. Instead, he is helping you up and cheering you on.

4. Share the light (Reference John 3:18-21)

ASK:
- Spiritually speaking, what is the darkest place you visit on a regular basis? Is it your school or your job or your neighborhood or some other place? Why is it so dark spiritually?
- How might you be a light in this place? How might you pray for God to work through you?

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Most of you regularly interact with peers who are choosing to live in darkness. Once you’ve seen the light of Jesus, you can help point others to the light—or even bring some light to them. You can be a light through your words, your actions, and your attitudes. The goal is to help people realize who Jesus is and how much he loves them.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [optional]

ASK:
- How do you respond to people who say Jesus was judgmental?
- Do you think most people view God as an angry judge or a loving parent? Explain.
- How do your choices create either darkness or light for yourself and those around you?
- How would you describe God to friends who know very little about him?
APPLICATION

ASK:
- Think of someone you know who has a negative view of God. What could you say to that person to engage him or her in a conversation to share what you’ve learned today?
- Pair up with another person in the group. Are there any places of “darkness” in your life? If so, what can you do to focus on the “light”? Take a couple of minutes to pray for each other, asking for God’s help in revealing areas of darkness in your lives and asking for God’s light to shine in all areas of your life. Also pray that people would see God’s light through the way you live, talk, and act.

SUMMARY

End your small group lesson here. Provide your teenagers with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the verse below.

God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:17).