To understand that through the atoning work of Jesus new life is freely available to all who believe in His name.

New life is a gift to all those who trust in and follow Jesus in spirit and truth. Jesus cares deeply about individuals.

That students would understand the precious miracle of conversion and see that Jesus is no respecter of persons. Jesus came to save both the righteous and the unrighteous, and graciously meets all who seek Him where they are.

**BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

* JOHN 3:1-21

**SCRIPTURE PASSAGE:**

* JOHN 3:3-8

**MEMORY VERSES:**

* JOHN 3:16-17

- Knowing Jesus
- Born again
- Dead in sin
- Transformation
- All things new

“For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”
PREPARING TO TEACH

Pray by name for each adult in your small group, lifting up any needs they have. Ask the Lord to open the hearts of any in the class who are not believers. As you prepare, consider how best to help unbelievers understand salvation is a miracle of God's love and grace, why they need salvation, and how to receive this gift of new life. Prepare to provide guidance to believers in using these verses to share the good news of the gospel of Christ with others.

Consider ways to present this familiar Focal Passage and Memory Verses in a way that challenges group members to dig into the verses for new insights.

Before looking at the Background and Focal Passages, read carefully the Teaching Aim, Why Study This Passage, and Desired Outcome/Practice from the teaching plan. After studying the Focal Passage in the context of the Background Passage, read the Venture Up Travelogue and respond to the questions. Review the teaching plan and adapt it to make a tentative outline of your personalized teaching plan.

Use a study Bible (such as the Holman Christian Standard Bible Study Bible), Bible dictionary (such as the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary available on mywsb.com), or commentary to study about Nicodemus, the Pharisee who came to see Jesus under cover of darkness in John 3.

Gather a collection of home repair or home project books or how-to articles as well as an assortment of general tools likely to be needed for such projects. Display these in a focal area of your study space, or be prepared to hold them up for display at the appropriate time.

If you plan to use the quote from Max Lucado (see in “Born Again” section of the teaching plan), make copies to distribute to the class.

In advance enlist four volunteers, each to read one of the following passages: (1) Romans 3:23; (2) 1 John 1:9-10; (3) James 1:14-15; and (4) Psalm 119:11.

Ask God to speak through you as you prepare and teach this lesson. Keep the names of the group members in front of you as you prepare.
TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

KNOWING JESUS

Draw attention to your home project display or show the tools and how-to guides you collected. Ask what the difference is between knowing about a home project and knowing how to do the same project. Follow up that discussion by displaying on the marker board or a tear sheet the following question: What are the differences between knowing about someone and having a relationship with that person? Call on as many different group members as possible during the discussion. Ask: How can someone know about Jesus? How is that experience different from having a personal relationship with Him?

Teaching Tip
Many groups have one or two members who tend to dominate discussion opportunities. As teacher, you are in a position to gently limit dominance so other members can join in. Be aware of adults who look like they might have something to contribute but are holding back. An approach like, “John, it looks like you have something you’d like to add” provides an opening for such an individual while also allowing the person to graciously decline if you have misread the situation.

You can also wait a bit longer after inviting responses before calling on a member to answer. This provides those who don’t formulate their responses quite as quickly a second or two longer to organize their thoughts without the free speaker already answering. Take caution not to put learners on the spot, nor to “shut down” the free speaker—some people process and learn best by talking through issues. Strive to allow all who wish to verbally engage to do so.

Direct attention to this statement from the Travelogue (p. 30): Knowing Jesus means transformation. Draw from the Travelogue to identify the varied responses to Jesus’ teaching and healing.
ministry. Comment that among the crowds that came to see Jesus, many settled for knowing about Him while a smaller number chose a relationship and its accompanying transformation of their lives. Point out that spiritual transformation will be explored in greater depth later in the session.

Because of the familiarity of the Focal Passage and Memory Verses, challenge adults to avoid the temptation to assume they know all they need to know and instead to commit themselves to digging into this content for new insights.

**BORN AGAIN**

Draw from a study Bible, Bible dictionary, or commentary to lecture briefly on Nicodemus, a Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin. He came to visit Jesus one night seeking to know Him better. In addition to this encounter with Jesus, point out that Nicodemus appeared again in John 7:50-52 when he defended Jesus to his fellow Pharisees, and in John 19:39-42 when he and Joseph of Arimathea brought spices and other items to prepare Jesus’ body and hurriedly bury Him before the Sabbath.

Call on a volunteer to read aloud John 3:1-2 and identify what Nicodemus knew about Jesus in advance of their encounter that night.

Ask adults to read silently John 3:3-4. Point out that Jesus’ response to Nicodemus in verse 3 moved the conversation from knowing about Jesus to the realm of having a personal relationship with Him.

Comment that Nicodemus’s next question in verse 4 indicated a desire to understand Jesus but an inability to comprehend the term born again. Call on volunteers to state their understanding of this term and point out it still polarizes people today. For example, while campaigning for President in 1976, Jimmy Carter described himself as a “born-again” Christian. His words drew comments ranging from ridicule from those who didn’t understand the term to support from those who did.

Read aloud Jesus’ response to Nicodemus in John 3:5-8 (Trav­elope, p. 32). Point out that Jesus made it clear here that He was
talking about something new and different from physical birth, a transformation of the heart to deal with our sinful nature.

Distribute copies of the following definition of new birth by pastor and author, Max Lucado: In many ways your new birth is like your first. In your new birth God provides what you need; someone else feels the pain, and someone else does the work. And just as parents are patient with their newborn, so God is patient with you. But there's one difference. The first time you had no choice about being born. This time you do. The power is God's. The effort is God's. The pain is God's. But the choice is yours.1

Ask adults to read the statement, focusing on Lucado's comments on the difference between physical birth and spiritual birth. If your group includes those who are not believers, use the statement about choice as an invitation to trust Christ as Savior and Lord.

**Teaching Option**
If time permits, you might wish to play the comments by Max Lucado himself. You can find them at https://maxlucado.com/audio/daily-audio/a-new-birth/

**DEAD IN SIN**

Point out that the concept of all people being dead in sin is at the heart of biblical teachings about salvation. However, for many in today's culture it is a foreign concept. Ask and discuss: How is the concept of sin being diluted in today's world? How is the concept of sin being diluted in some churches? Why is it difficult for some people to acknowledge they are sinners?

Call on the four volunteers enlisted before class to read verses on sin: (1) Romans 3:23; (2) 1 John 1:9-10; (3) James 1:14-15; and (4) Psalm 119:11. As each verse is read, lead adults to identify the key truth it contains about sin. Responses may include: (1) Every person sins. (2) Those who deny being sinners don't know God. (3) Sin begins in the mind. (4) Through His Word, God helps us resist sin.

Emphasize a person's awareness of being a sinner comes when the Holy Spirit awakens the person to that fact. Call on volunteers
to testify how the Holy Spirit awakened them to this truth, even as children.

Draw from the Travelogue (pp. 34-35) and other resources to point out the importance of a humble heart to recognizing the presence of sin in our lives and that we cannot address our sin problem apart from God. Ask: How may a lack of humility be a barrier to someone professing Christ as Savior?

**TRANSFORMATION**

Ask adults to read Jeremiah 31:31-34 as printed in the Travelogue, (pp. 35-36). Comment that this prophecy foretold the coming of the Messiah and how He would transform His people. Call on volunteers to identify principles from this passage fulfilled by Jesus. Ask the question from the Travelogue, (p. 36): How do these verses foreshadow what Jesus told Nicodemus?

Call attention to verse 34 where God said that through the Messiah He would forgive sin and never remember it again. Ask: What does that promise mean to you?

**ALL THINGS NEW**

Distribute a sheet with the text of John 3:16-17 (this lesson’s Memory Verses) from six to eight different Bible translations. Call on a volunteer to read the first and go around the room until all have been read. Ask volunteers to call out words that describe what we learn about God and His desired relationship with all people as stated in these verses.

**Teacher Helps**

Multiple Bible versions can be found online at sites such as mywsb.com and biblegateway.com.
Ask: What does God make new in our lives when we trust Him as our Savior?

Call attention to the following sentence from the Travelogue (p. 37): This happens in our hearts, but we spend the rest of our lives, through the power of the Holy Spirit, having our actions catch up with our hearts. Challenge adults to identify ways their actions have somewhat caught up as they have matured in their faith. Rhetorically ask where their actions still have a long way to catch up.

Read aloud 2 Corinthians 2:15. Point out that believers are saved at the moment of receiving Christ, are being saved as we grow and become more like Christ, and will be saved as we enter heaven to live forever.

CONCLUSION
Challenge believers to live every day in a spirit of gratitude for their salvation. Remind them God delights in such gratitude as they voice it in their prayers. Invite any who are not believers but are interested in knowing more to stay after class or contact you during the week to talk further.

FOLLOW THROUGH
- Email or send a postcard to members urging believers to thank God for their salvation. Suggest that they make a list of people they know who need Christ and begin today praying for them. Reiterate your invitation to those who are not believers or have questions about salvation that you would welcome the opportunity to talk further about salvation.
- Begin preparing for next week’s lesson by reading Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7.

1 https://maxlucado.com/audio/daily-audio/a-new-birth/