

## Nick's Prayer

Hello Lord, it's me, Nick. And today I come to you ashamed again. Yes, it happened one more time. There I was with Bob, my co-worker, and he began to tell me about some of his struggles at home with his kids. He was really opening up to me and was interested in the advice I had to give. He was looking for help. After all, being a single dad is no picnic.

It was the perfect opportunity to invite him to find strength from You. I know his kids would benefit from getting involved in church and Sunday School. I know he would find real support from some of the other dad at our church. But I also know that one other time when I said something to him, he seemed a little funny about it. So, I gave him a whopping dose of Sigmund Freud without saying a single word about you. I told him how Cindy and I dealt with a similar problem by setting boundaries. I told him how he should get out more and not let himself get handcuffed by feeling like he has to spend 100% of his time with his kids. Dr. Phil would've been proud. Maybe I could get my own TV show.

It's just like last Thursday on the airplane. One more time you opened up an opportunity for me to share about your love. What kind of coincidence was it that the guy sitting next to me on the plane lives two blocks from our church and just moved into the area? And

then he started telling me about his kids and school, and I gave a great testimony for the schools. I went on and on about Mr. Johnson and all he does with the kids. I told him all about sports clubs and recreation activities. I spent ten whole minutes just on how to get a pool pass. But did I mention that I was a Christian and that I love my church? Not once. I guess cause his last name was Goldenstein, I figured that he must be of another faith and that it might be offensive to him if I said something about being a Christian. But that's just ridiculous. It wouldn't have bothered me if he talked to me about his synagogue, assuming he was Jewish – and besides, wasn't your Son Jesus also the Savior for the Jews? So, the end result. Public schools 1 – Jesus 0. Soccer league 1 – Salvation by Grace 0.

Why am I like this Lord? Why do I feel so afraid to mention the name of your Son? Why do I feel so hesitant to tell anyone that I pray or read the bible or go to church every Sunday?

I remind myself of the Nick from the Bible. Nicodemus. There he was, an influential man in Jewish society – part of the Sanhedrin. And He was interested in Jesus. But he also, it seems, wanted to maintain his status as a religious leader. And so, he comes to see Jesus at night, under cover of darkness.

That's like me. To my kids I give the big lecture, "You should tell other people about Jesus." And I'm sure they're convinced I do this all the time. I tell them about all those times, years ago, when I was an elder and made all these evangelism calls, going door to door to invite people to our church. But the reality is, those were the good old days. And I haven't done anything like that in years.

It's so easy, on Sunday morning, to sing "Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus." Or "I am Trusting, You, Lord Jesus." And then to go home and do just the opposite. Fact is, truthfully, I want everyone to like me, to feel comfortable around me, to not think that I am some religious fanatic or bible-thumping holy-roller. But I wonder, in fact, how many people I come in contact with, would even know I am a Christian at all. I don't know. I don't say much about it when I'm with people outside of my church.

Lord, forgive me for putting my pride in front of my faith. Forgive me for my cowardice, my fear, my hesitation, my ego. I know I should be on fire for you, but tonight, I don't feel so fired up. I haven't been a good disciple but have been so focused on myself and my personal needs that I have ignored the deep spiritual needs of others. Give me courage and build in me a passion for the lost, the hurting, the searching, that I might boldly share your love.

Dear Nick,

You do indeed remind me of my servant Nicodemus from the Bible -- and not just because of your name. Like him, you are also hesitant to put yourself out on a limb and take chances with your reputation. I get it.

It certainly seemed more expedient for Nicodemus to come visit me at night, when no one else could see or judge him for spending time with me. As a member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus certainly could have been an influential force among the Israelites. I would have been glad to have him at my side along with Peter, James and John – in the day as well as the night. Occasionally he would speak a word of faith, or stand up for me – but sometimes the other Pharisees and leaders seemed too powerful and influential, and he would shrink back.

You said you feel ashamed that you didn't bear testimony to me? Imagine how he felt when his group of Jewish leaders led me to the cross. Imagine being a member of the very assembly that crucified the man whom Nicodemus had come to believe was the Messiah, the Christ! He didn't want his name appended to that ruling, but somehow the annals of history don't specify who voted yea and who voted nay – if he even had a vote at all.

But here's the thing, Nick. I know you feel like a failure since I keep giving you opportunities and you just can't seem to muster up the courage to step in and share your faith. I know you're frustrated with yourself. Nevertheless, I want you to know that I didn't come to be Lord of the Perfect. I came for sinners. Remember those words I spoke to Nicodemus when he came to visit me at night? *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not come to **condemn** the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”*

You see. I didn't come for the purpose of pointing fingers, squashing the imperfect, snuffing out those who fall short of my perfection. I came so that I could take struggling sinners, like you, and wash them clean, make them new. I taught Nicodemus about being born again, and you, Nick, have been born again through water and the Spirit when you were baptized into my name. Your sins are forgiven, they really are. And I have given you the gift of my Holy Spirit, who now lives within you to give you courage and faith.

So Nick, rather than wallowing around in your failure and looking backward at how you've disappointed me --- or

being doubtful and projecting how you might fall again in the future, look straight.

<<<<*NICK replies: (Straight?)*>>>>

Yes, straight. Look **straight** over there at that cross and remember that you are forgiven. And I am not basing my forgiveness (or your salvation) upon your track record of evangelism or your boldness of faith. The price is paid, pure and simple, by my blood shed on Calvary's cross. You trust in me alone for salvation and you have the free gift of eternal life. Period.

It was the same for Nicodemus. Though he could not put a halt to the raging leaders with strong words of faith, though he chose to visit me by night and listen to me under cover of darkness, I was pleased to have his hands be the ones that brought my body from the cross to the tomb. For, you see, that meant Nicodemus was still holding on to the truth, and even, on that day, was so moved by the Spirit that he stepped forward with courage to assist in the burying of my body.

And then look **straight** again – straight over at that baptismal font. Look there, and remember that you were made my own child through Holy Baptism. Look there and remember that you are not alone – that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Look there and recognize that you are something more than just Nick.

Imagine yourself going into a wrestling ring and having the strength and stature of a Sumo wrestler. Would you be afraid? Well that's the way it is as you go out into the world. The superhuman strength of the Holy Spirit is with you and calls you to courage, faith, and joy.

And finally, then, look straight one more time. Look straight at those folks out there in the world who do not know my love -- or look straight at those who are feeling weak, tired, or struggling in their spiritual lives. And say to yourself, "Nick, think of what you have. It's a treasure chest filled with blessings bigger than a pot of gold – a treasure that can only be a benefit to those who receive."

And remember, Nick, that I do not let my word return to me void, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

So take heart, Nick. Stop flogging yourself. Look straight ahead and remember the words of Hebrews, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross." I'm here for you, Nick.