

## Born from Heaven

### *John 3:1-15*

Recently I have had several spiritually-minded people on different occasions ask me the exact same question. The question is, ***“What percentage of the members at Bethany do you think are truly saved? How many are part of the church who are not true believers?”***

**The question is a beneficial one.** It is helpful, because it causes us to ask about our own condition before the LORD.

**The question is also a biblical one.** Jesus taught us that His church would be a field of wheat mixed with weeds. He taught us that many who profess Him and become part of His church will not be true disciples. You remember His words in His famous sermon,

**“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”** (Matthew 7:21-23 [ESV](#))

The question is beneficial; it is biblical.

**The question is also an impossible one.** Only God possesses this knowledge. Because of our inability to see into hearts, Jesus **tells us to wait for the future day when He will separate the wheat from the weeds.**

One of those who questioned me pressed me a bit more, *“But if you would guess . . . not about individual people . . . but just as a whole, what percentage do you think will enjoy the blessing of heaven?”* He was part of another Gospel church and he wondered very soberly out loud, *“It may be 25 % of the members in sound churches that are not going to heaven.”*

He wondered about this question because for 30 years he was a member of a church and thought he was a child of God. But he was not. He came to realize that his faith was not true . . . not the biblical kind. He came to realize that he had not given his heart to Christ and that he needed new life in Christ. **And so he wonders now, how many are the way he was.**

So what do I think it is? 25%, 10%, 5%? I do not know. But to think of even one of you separated from God forever and ever in a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth is too much for me . . . my heart breaks over the reality. Here is

my prayer, “Lord, help me to be the kind of pastor that helps the members of my church family to know the Gospel and to know whether they are saved from the wrath to come. Lord, awaken those who are sleeping . . . those who think that they have a home in heaven but do not. Help them to see that soon! And grant them life in Your Name.”

**This morning we turn in our Bibles to a story in John 3 of an upright and religious man who thinks he has done everything to make it to heaven. But Jesus upends him with a classic “Truly, truly” statement.**

**Main Idea: New life in Christ is everything. Without life from above, nothing is whole. With life from above, all that is broken will be made new.**

*Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. (John 3:1 [ESV](#))*

Here we meet a man named Nicodemus and we learn that he is a Pharisee. Now the Pharisees get kind of a bad rap from us readers of the NT. We see them as the worst of literatures caricatures. Many view the Pharisees as Ebenezer Scrooges or the Christmas Grinches. We view them as the worst of humanity when in reality we would have loved to have most of them as our neighbors and friends.

The Pharisees took their faith very seriously. They were not Sabbath-only believers, but they committed themselves to obeying God law. They believed the Old Testament is God’s Word and true in every part. They read the scripture every day. And more, they taught the scriptures to their children. They prayed at least three times a day. They fasted regularly. They loved God and loved their neighbor in ways that received praise from their whole community. **The problem is not that they were not good by human standards. The problem is that they thought they were good by God’s standards.** Whatever we think of the Pharisees, we should not think of them as unusually unrighteous men. Nicodemus is serious about the Bible and about God.

Nicodemus was also a “ruler of the Jews”. This places him as a member of the Sanhedrin. This was a group of 70 men who exercised authority over every Jew in the world. So he is a man of great prominence. And more, we find from Jesus’ description in verse 10, that Nicodemus is “The teacher of Israel”. Whatever this title means, Jesus is acknowledging him to be an expert in the Bible and a capable communicator of God’s message to God’s people. **This is a fascinating guy who would compete with Joe Rogan for the top podcast in the country. He is smart, insightful, eloquent, connecting.**

*This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." (John 3:2 [ESV](#))*

We are not told the reason for his late-night visit, but I believe that he comes because he has big questions about life and he thinks Jesus might have answers. **I believe Nicodemus KNOWS that something is missing from his experience with God and yet he does not know what it is.** We see here that he approaches Jesus with respect . . . we might even say flattery.

**Jesus' response seems most abrupt . . . perhaps even rude.** The hour being late, Jesus cuts to the chase of the matter to **make the most of what time they have.**

*"Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3 [ESV](#))*

This must have set Nicodemus back on his heels. He did not expect this. The words sink in and his mood changes from light and introductory to troubled, perplexed and somber.

**Nicodemus knows that Jesus is not merely making a statement about people in general.** They are alone together. **Jesus is making a statement about him!!!**

And Nicodemus receives it. He is humbly concerned by the implication that he might not have the qualifications to enter the kingdom of heaven. He knows something is missing from his life with the LORD. **BUT he is also a bit uncomfortable by the personal direction of the conversation.** So he asks,

*"How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (John 3:4 [ESV](#))*

Remember the reason that Jesus uses the two words, "Truly, truly" at the beginning of a sentence on 25 occasions in the Gospel of John. **He always does so to slow the reader down** so that we will be ready to PERSONALLY receive a truth from Him that is so profound and consequential that it will be hard to accept. **He says "Truly, truly" so we will pause and take time to roll His words through our hearts thoughtfully in order to gain the profit from them.**

Well, Nicodemus is a Master Bible Teacher. He is used to giving the answers to biblical questions very quickly. **When he listens to other teachers, he thinks, "I**

**already know that.” Nicodemus has not had to slow down when hearing spiritual truth for a long, long, long time.** So I think in discomfort, he answers quickly without giving himself time to process the amazing truth Jesus has given him.

*“‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’” (John 3:4 [ESV](#))*

**Principle: God often speaks profound life-giving truth to our soul, but we miss profiting from it because we are impatient and prayerless.**

We demand the LORD give us the short TEDtalk or the video clip so we can get moving on to other important matters in our life. But the LORD often presents His truth wrapped in wire. **We cannot tear the package open, but we must wait on Him in prayer to help us unwind His truth from His Word by His Spirit.** The gift of His communication is for those who are willing to wait upon Him in faith.

Nicodemus is in jeopardy of missing Jesus’ truth. But Jesus loves him and lingers more with him in his hurried state.

*“Jesus answered, “Truly, truly,” (John 3:5 [ESV](#))*

*Jesus is saying, “Nicodemus, did you not hear me say “Truly, truly” the first time? Let me say it again! Truly, truly. You need to slow down in your heart. Get rid of the idea that you already know the answer to your question. **Stop believing that your mind is so sharp that you can quickly grasp spiritual truth through it.** You need to listen with your soul. You need to listen with faith. Sit quietly before Me and patiently learn from Me.”*

*Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 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.”” (John 3:5-8 [ESV](#))*

As we reflect on this story together, let us pray that the LORD will open our hearts to receive all the would profit our soul this morning. I plan to trace four key Gospel truths with you.

The first is Man's Self-confident Assumption. The second is God's Supernatural Requirement. The third is Jesus' Sacrificial Payment. And finally, the Believer's Surprising Benefits.

### **Man's Self-confident Assumption**

**Our Self-Confident Blunder: Man naturally assumes that there is a path we can blaze for ourselves that will lead us to heaven.**

We think that if we follow some formula that seems good to us, then God will accept us into His eternal home. Not once, but twice Proverbs says . . .

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25 [ESV](#))

The way that seems right is a bit different from person to person . . . the way that seems right to us might be the way of being kind to your neighbor, or living a moral life, or being true to yourself, or having emotional feelings toward God, or confessing our sin to others, or being baptized, or feeding the poor, or caring for orphans.

**Whatever way we choose for ourselves, our path always pleases us and passes our requirements.** Whatever way SEEMS right to us gives us confidence that when we die, our way will bring us safely onto those golden streets.

But this assumption is nothing more than self-flattery. We do not realize how deeply our sin offends the holy God who created us. We do not realize the judicial debt our disobedience has incurred. It is the kind of debt that is not simply wished away . . . not even by God.

**Illustration:** Both Kimberly and I were very sick this past week. The kind of sickness that you laid down on the couch and did not move. For two whole days, we did nothing but cook some Campbell's soup, eat a bit of it, sleep and to pass time we watched Christmas Hallmark movies. I would often be in and out of consciousness as I reclined on our sofa. But I did not a pattern emerging from every one of these movies! The problem addressed in nearly every movie was that the spirit of Christmas is choked by the drive to be successful in business. And this is a big problem because if you are the guy who gets consumed with the drive

to make more money you will lose your awesome girlfriend to the relaxed, handsome cool guy who understands that life is about enjoying the little things! The message is clear in these movies: ***“Christmas is about love! Christmas is about giving. Christmas is about joy! So if you lean in to love and you open your heart to be generous and jolly YOU WILL EXPERIENCE THE MIRACLE OF CHRISTMAS TOO!”***

**Christmas IS an opportunity to experience a miracle, but the miracle we need will not be found the Hallmark way.** The world’s Christmas message does not lead anyone nearer to the kingdom of heaven. And that is tragic.

**Question: What way SEEMS right to you to enter the kingdom of heaven?**

Nicodemus assumes what almost everyone does. . . that there is a way from where he can make his way up to God. And he assumed that he is on track to make his retirement goal!

**Truth be told, if anyone could climb the stairway to heaven, it would be someone like Nicodemus.** Nicodemus is the ideal good and even godly guy. **No one in Nicodemus’ day would have guessed that Nicodemus was deficient before the LORD.**

That is why Jesus’ words were so jarring to him.

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3 [ESV](#))*

Though wounded by the implication that Jesus is making here, Nicodemus avoids the personal direction of the conversation.

He nervously laughs as he says, *“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4 [ESV](#))*

He diverts the question away from his life. He makes light of Jesus’ statement as though it does not make any sense to him.

**Truth: It is possible to believe with all one’s heart that heaven is our future and yet be terribly wrong about that. It is possible to have everyone on earth affirm that heaven is our future and yet be very wrong about that.**

Many rabbi's in Jesus' day taught that all Jews would be admitted into God's kingdom except for those few who are guilty of deliberate apostasy or extraordinary wickedness. If you go to modern day funerals, you will hear the same mistaken message. Jesus is message is much more sober:

*"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." (Matthew 7:13-14 [ESV](#))*

So what is God's requirement? What is the path that leads to life?

### **God's Supernatural Requirement**

"Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."" (John 3:3 [ESV](#))

Jesus' words are simple. Profound, but simple. Almost every word in this sentence is one syllable long. The simple truth is that God requires that we be "born again" to enter the kingdom of God.

Jesus doubled down when Nicodemus expressed confusion:

*Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" (John 3:5-7 [ESV](#))*

The flesh can only produce flesh. No matter how energetic, no matter how committed, no matter how disciplined the flesh may be in its attempt to produce spiritual life, it is still flesh. **The flesh . . . the physical has NO ABILITY TO PRODUCE THE SPIRITUAL.**

Any attempts by the flesh to reform our ways, to improve ourselves, to do better, to advance in godliness, to be loving will always fall short. **Only the Spirit of God can bring us the spiritual life that we need.**

What is Jesus doing in His conversation with Nicodemus? **In love, Jesus is shaking Nicodemus awake to see the need for a supernatural miracle in his life.** Nic. thought he was climbing the stairway to heaven at a good pace.

**Truth: If God is to reach us, He first must awaken us to our need of a miracle.**

**If we are asleep, God may do something in your life to awaken us. That something may be painful, but it is born on the wings of His love.**

**What does it mean to be “born again”? This is the key question!**

The word translated “again” can also be translated “from above”. Either are legitimate and both help us to understand what this term means. We all understand like Nicodemus did what it means for a baby to be born into this world.

**Before I talk more about the significance of our physical birth, it is necessary to say a few words about the sanctity of life as an aside.** It is absolutely true that human life and sacred dignity begin at conception. As Christians we must repeat that truth over and over to a world that is willing to put to death little ones created in God’s image who are yet residing in the womb. Abortion is the great evil of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Believers are right to use all our powers to combat it . . . that is our powers of compassion, our powers of politics, our powers of persuasion and most of all our powers of prayer. We must not yawn when people speak about this topic just because so many have made it sound so innocent. Abortion is not an innocent procedure. It is a darkness that invades our culture and individual human hearts. May the light of the Gospel reveal it for what it is!

But our birth is nonetheless very consequential to us. In one limited sense, our life begins at our birth. This is why we mark our age not by our conception, but by the day of our birth. It is why we put candles on a cake and celebrate on our birth day. **When Jesus uses the term “born”, He is saying is that something as far-reaching, as fundamental, as life-altering, as essential as our natural birth is to our bodies SO WE NEED THAT TO HAPPEN TO OUR SOUL.**

If we translate the term “again”, we understand that Jesus is affirming the importance of our natural birth and telling us we need to have another birth experience happen a second time to us. **One preacher put this way, “If you are born once, you die twice. If you are born twice, you die once.”**

But if we translate the term “from above”, we understand that Jesus is affirming our need for spiritual life that is sent down from heaven to us and placed in us by God’s Spirit.

**Definition: To be born again simply means that God’s Holy Spirit places the life of God in our soul so that we become alive to God.**



**This new life of God brings a spiritual transformation to our whole person so we say, “I am a new creation in Christ Jesus.”**

**Protest: But that sounds impossible. Precisely!!**

*And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”” (Matthew 19:23-26 *ESV*)*

God must do a miracle in our hearts if we are to see the kingdom of God.

Christmastime is the season we celebrate the miracle birth of Jesus. In divine power, the Holy Spirit conceives a baby boy in the womb of a virgin. That is a scientific impossibility! It is not merely improbable. But the God who created science upends science to bring us His Son, our Savior.

Christmas reminds us that we need more than God’s help to become a better version of ourselves. Christmas declares that we need the miracle of new life! Praise God for sending His Son to us! **The virgin birth of Jesus makes possible the new birth of His disciples.**

Have you been born again? I do not ask if you prayed a prayer, or joined a church, or been baptized, or had an emotional experience with God. I ask you, “Have you been born again?” This is an essential question. Jesus makes it so.

**Truth: The person who does not experience being born again will fall short of God’s eternal kingdom every single time. God’s entrance requirement into His kingdom is this new spiritual birth.**

I share a story with you that I have shared before. But I love telling it. On one of the trips that Kimberly and I made to Israel, we met a German man named, Dietmar. We were at the Sea of Galilee eating dinner when Dietmar came over to talk with us because he saw we were from Peoria and he had some friends who live here. He was traveling with a group of Catholic priests. As we engaged him, we found the language barrier made our conversation slow, but we were getting

by. I engaged him on his relationship with God and he looked at me curious. He was not sure what I meant, but he was excited. He said that very few people want to talk with him about spiritual matters and that he had great interest. I asked Dietmar, ***“What do you think you must do in order to get into heaven?”*** He paused a very long time before answering. He said that he was not sure. But then his eyes brightened, ***“I know. Love!”***

I told him that he was right but not for the reason that he understood. I told him that it was not our love for others or even our love for God that made a way for us to get to heaven, but that it was God’s love for us. He looked puzzled and confused.

I asked him if he had ever read John 3:16. He said that he had not. I quoted it to him. He now appeared more confused. And he told me that our language barrier may be getting in the way of his understanding. I tried again to explain but could see that I was getting nowhere. So I asked him if he had a German Bible. He said, “Yes! In my room.” I said, ***“Dietmar, tonight go to your room and read John 3 and ask the Lord to help you to understand what you must do to have eternal life.”*** With that we left to go to bed.

Our group had to leave very early in the morning so I did not think that I would see Dietmar again. Just as we were leaving, Dietmar came rushing toward our table. ***“Ritch, Ritch! I am so glad that you have not left. You gave me the key! You gave me the key to everything!”*** I asked him what he meant. He said, ***“Last night I opened my German Bible and read John 3. It was the key to my life! I believed and became a whole new person!”*** He continued, ***“I was so excited that I felt I had to be baptized right then. It was around 3 am and I ran down the dock, tore off my clothes and baptized myself in the Sea of Galilee!”*** Well, his theology of baptism was a little off, but I rejoiced in his enthusiasm and new life.

**Here is my point, John 3 is the key to life. It tells us about God’s supernatural requirement and His supernatural provision for us.**

Which leads us now to . . .

### **Jesus’ Sacrificial Payment**

*9 Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” 10 Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? . . . 13 No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” (John 3:9-15 [ESV](#))*

**Notice that Jesus takes Nicodemus immediately to Christmas and to Easter to help him understand how the Spirit can give life to sinful people.**

**Of Christmas Jesus says,** *“No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.”* Jesus teaches us, *“My life did not begin at my conception and birth. I am eternal. I came down from heaven to earth. I am the only who has independent access to ascend up to heaven. I am the only One qualified to bring anyone into the presence of my Father and present them faultless.”*

**Of Easter Jesus says:** *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up”* He teaches, *“I am like the serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness. I will be lifted up on a cross to receive the punishment that sin requires. I will shed my blood on the cross to cover sins and grant forgiveness. I am Your ransom. My life for your life.”*

*“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24 [ESV](#))*

**How do you receive the benefit of Jesus’ healing cross? The same way the snake-poisoned people who were dying in the desert received theirs.** In desperation they looked upon the Serpent. They trusted that by looking they might receive the promise of life. When they were bitten, they knew their life was over. **No one escaped the venom of that particular viper by any human means.** But God gave them a promise, **“Look and live!”** When they looked upon the statue lifted up by Moses, they received a new lease on life. **Jesus is greater than the serpent statue that Moses lifted up in the wilderness. Jesus is the Son of Man . . . the promised one who comes from heaven to save you from your sins.** God’s message to us is the same, **“Look and live!”**

**Look upon Jesus in faith, and you will be given new life from God. You will be born again.**

I press the question against your soul. Are you born again?

*so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” (John 3:14-15 [ESV](#))*

## The Believer's Surprising Benefits

Friends, let us dwell for a moment on all that comes to us through this new birth that Jesus offers us.

### Ten Joys That Our New Life Makes Possible:

1. **We become alive to God.** His life in us makes it possible to enjoy His love for us. We become aware of His presence and of His care in our everyday life. He talks with us and He walks with us. He is not far from us. He is no stranger any more, but He is our Father who knows us and we know Him.
2. **We delight in His Word.** His life in us makes it possible to hear Him speak personally to us. **The Life of God in us makes His Word come alive to us.** We cannot read scripture like we read every other book. We read it and we hear God speak to us personally, specifically, encouragingly, helpfully, instructively, patiently, lovingly. **The Bible is no longer a dead text, but living truth.** We love to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to Him talk to us about everything.
3. **We hate our own sin.** His life in us makes it possible to live in the light of holiness. We can no longer dismiss our sin as something inconsequential and insignificant. We feel the power of our flesh pulling us away from the new life we enjoy by the Spirit. So we rise each morning ready to do battle against the sin nature that is within us. Everyday becomes a struggle and a war to become more like Jesus.
4. **We long for Jesus' return.** His life in us makes it possible to believe His promises to us. We feel our world is broken. We feel the weight of temptations outside and inside of us. We feel the longing for peace and righteousness to abound. We yearn for the bride to return for us and for the great wedding day to begin!
5. **We love Jesus' church.** His life in us makes it possible to experience the bond of love with our brothers and sisters. We love our shared worship. We love our shared fellowship. We love each other through our failings and conflicts. We refuse to let resentments and bitterness steal the goodness of God's family from this world. We now know that we are part of something eternal and that is precious to us.
6. **We rejoice in the mission Jesus has given to us.** His life in us makes it possible to grasp the eternal purpose for our life on earth. We love the

opportunity to tell others of this new life that Jesus offers to everyone who believes in Him. Yes, we battle fears and insecurities and timidity. But there is a fire in us that does not die . . . a fire to go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere that Jesus Christ is Lord.

7. **We do not fear death.** His life in us makes it possible to look with peace to that future day when we face this last enemy. Our debt has been cancelled and there is now no condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus. We know that death still hurts our hearts. But we know that Jesus' death killed death and that His resurrection guarantees our future resurrection. So when one of us dies, we do not grieve like those who have no hope. WE know that a joyful reunion awaits us on that future day. So we do grieve . . . but we do so with hearts turned upward in hope and not downward in despair.
8. **We sing praises.** His life in us makes it possible for us to carol instead of complain. We do not sing because we love music. Some of us love music more than others. But it is not love of music that causes us to sing, it is our love for the God who gave us life. This new life must be given a voice and praise songs are that voice.
9. **We pray and pray and pray some more.** His life in us makes it possible for us to talk with God. We do not pray with vain repetition, but with vibrant relationship. When we are discouraged or troubled, we have a Friend that we know who loves to hear us unburden our hearts. When we need a miracle, we have a Savior who performs them to talk to. When we need strength for our journey, we have a Mighty God who promises to uphold us.
10. **We become alive to God.** Did I say that already? 😊 We BECOME ALIVE TO GOD! What a gift!

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,"*  
(1 Peter 1:3-4 [ESV](#))

*"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove **the heart of stone** from your flesh and give you **a heart of flesh**. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." (Ezekiel 36:25–27 ESV)*

This new heart is a gift that no one can give themselves. This is a gift that no man can give to another. God is the only who can impart to the soul of man a "heart of flesh" that is soft and receptive to God . . . that humbly submits to His Word and His will.

*He blows the trumpet in the ear of our slumbering faculties, and sends us forth to walk the world as if we were new beings. J. C. Ryle*

*"It is **the Spirit** who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (John 6:63 ESV)*

*"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies **through his Spirit** who dwells in you." (Romans 8:11 ESV)*

*"Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, **but the Spirit gives life.**" (2 Corinthians 3:5–6 ESV)*

**Whatever we enjoy as the result of being children of God, we owe to the working of the Holy Spirit.** Without the Holy Spirit we would not have a future inheritance reserved for us in heaven. Without Him we would not possess assurance that we are loved by God. Without the Holy Spirit we would not have power to overcome sin and temptation. Without Him we would not have confidence to pray to God and call Him "Daddy, Father". Without Him we would not have peace that overcomes our fears. Without Him we would not be members of Jesus church. Without Him we would not be have fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ. Without Him we would not be gifted to serve God fruitfully. Without the Holy Spirit we could not persevere through hardship and trials. Without the Holy Spirit we could not face death with hope. Without the Holy Spirit we could not be conformed to the likeness of Christ. **Whatever we enjoy as the result of being children of God, we owe to the working of the Holy Spirit.**

**Ten Vital Changes that the Holy Spirit produces when He gives us life.**

1. Life in the Spirit produces practical holiness. We are not merely reformed in our external actions, but made new in our internal heart attitudes. We find ourselves and our community being conformed to the image of Jesus in our relationships, our values,

our behaviors, our speech and our commitments. We are convicted of sin and we are constantly being reformed by God. **A church filled with the Spirit is a church where members are becoming more like Jesus in every way.**

2. Life in the Spirit produces an expectancy in hearing God's Word. We receive it as life giving. **A church filled with the Spirit is a church that opens the Bible with eagerness to listen to God.** The Spirit causes us to anticipate that God has something specific and important to say to us.
3. Life in the Spirit produces ethnic harmony. We do not need the world's strategies to overcome the division that ethnicity places upon society. The Holy Spirit removes the dividing walls between us. **A church filled with the Spirit is a church of racial harmony . . . where no one feels isolated, dishonored, disconnected or rejected as the result of their human differences.**
4. Life in the Spirit creates a strong connection/fellowship between us and other believers. We experience a love for our brothers and sisters in Christ that is supernatural. **A church full of the Spirit is a church where people are connected in community with each other.** The members are not alone, but joined together on the basis of their Spirit-driven commitment to Jesus and to each other.
5. Life in the Spirit creates a joy in our singing and praising of God. We feel an inward energy to express our thanksgiving upward to God. **A church filled with the Spirit is a church that sings vibrantly and joyfully whenever we gather.** We are helped by talented musicians, but it is the Spirit, not the band who drives energy in our praise.
6. Life in the Spirit creates a culture of edification in the church. The world knows only how to deconstruct what is. The Spirit fuels a fellowship that builds up one another. **A church filled with the Spirit is a church that encourages and edifies rather than complains and criticizes.**
7. Life in the Spirit produces a rich generosity. We gladly yield our time and our treasures over to advance the Name of Christ. We see the poor around us and we desire to supply their needs. **A church filled with the Spirit is a church that gives beyond its capacity and out of its need for the glory of Christ.**
8. Life in the Spirit moves us to pray with passion and with urgency. We KNOW that God hears us when we pray and we KNOW that what must happen can only happen through prayer. **A church filled with the Spirit is a church that prays together.**
9. Life in the Spirit brings an abiding love for Jesus church . . . both the individuals in the church and for the church as a whole. We long for the church that the Spirit created to be strong in faith, in hope and in love. Our new life drives a commitment to use the gifts that the Spirit has given us to advance the church's mission. It motivates us to persevere through discouragement and not break fellowship with our brothers and sisters when they disappoint us. **A church filled with the Spirit is a church that loves being the church . . . a church filled with people who marvel that they can be part of something God created for His glory!**
10. Life in the Spirit produces a zeal to share the Gospel with the world. We are willing to suffer rejection for the sake of Christ. We take risks in order to bring the message of life to others. **A church filled with the Spirit is a church that proclaims Jesus broadly and boldly.**

That is a powerful expression: to “delight” in the law of the Lord. But it is also somewhat puzzling, at least at first glance. The British scholar and Christian apologist C. S. Lewis found it to be so. In *Reflections on the Psalms* he describes how at first he found the psalmist’s delight in God’s law “utterly bewildering” and “mysterious.” Lewis said he could understand how one could delight in God’s mercies, visitations, and attributes, but not how one could delight in God’s law. You do not delight in law, not really. Rather law is something you respect and (one hopes) obey.

I would argue that it *is* possible to delight in a good law, one that is both well written and effective in promoting righteousness. But I think Lewis is also right when he suggests that more than this is involved. He finds the clue to the psalmist’s meaning in the idea of meditation on God’s law. This makes the law a subject of the righteous man’s study. So, for the ancient Jew, saying that he delights in the law is much like what we might mean if we said that we love history or physics or archaeology. But, of course, it is even more than that. For when we study the Bible—the word *law* is used to refer to the whole of God’s inscripturated revelation—we are really learning, not about human beings or nature primarily (which is what the other disciplines teach us), but about God. And, as Lewis says, “The Order of the Divine mind, embodied in the Divine Law, is beautiful.” The language [Ps, p. 17] of the poet is “not priggery nor even scrupulosity; it is the language of a man ravished by a moral beauty.”<sup>8</sup>



John R. W. Stott adds wisely that this delight “is an indication of the new birth, for ‘... the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so’ (Rom. 8:7). As a result of the inward, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, however, the godly find that they love the law of God simply because it conveys to them the will of their God. They do not rebel against its exacting demands; their whole being approves and endorses it. ... Delighting in it, the godly will *meditate* in it, or pore over it, constantly, day and night.”<sup>9</sup>

The contrast between the two ways may be put like this. It is the difference between those who are in love with sin and those who love God. The first class love sin’s ways and follow it. The second love God and seek him in Scripture, where he may be found.

What is our most basic need? Abraham Maslow famously asserted that our most fundamental needs are physiological: food, water, air, sleep, and shelter. He argued that other needs cannot be met until these needs are addressed. Maslow then ranked the other kinds of needs in their order of priority: safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. While Maslow’s hierarchy has some benefit, the story of Christmas rejects it.

The God who created us tells us that our most basic need is spiritual. **More than we need bread for our bodies, we need bread to nourish our souls!** Nicodemus seemed to understand his spiritual need when he approached Jesus at night to ask Jesus some spiritual questions. Nicodemus came with a hungry heart. He knew that there was a hole in his soul that he did not know how to fill.

Nicodemus began the conversation politely. Jesus responded with something other than superficial courtesy, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”

What a gift from God to be granted the very life of God in our dead soul! Through the gift of new spiritual birth, we are not only qualified to enter God’s kingdom, but we are invited into personal knowledge of God Himself. This new birth gives us access to a real relationship with the living Lord!

Let us dwell for a moment on all that comes to us through this new birth that Jesus offers us. We can enjoy the love He has for us. He can speak to our souls through His Word. It opens the door for us to receive the comfort He provides in our distress. We are liberated to love those who have hurt us and freed from the fear and shame that our

sin places on us. It brings joyful praise to a heart that grumbled and complained. And we are equipped to be able to help others receive this new life too!

Christmas declares that we need more than just a better version of ourselves. We need the miracle of new life! Praise God for His Son who came that we would possess this life and have it more abundantly! The virgin birth of Jesus precedes the new birth of His disciples and brings a new birthright to the door of our hearts!

Application Questions:

How do you evaluate the health of the new life that you received when you first came to Jesus?

What might help you to strengthen this life from God that is in you?

How might you use this new life to bring glory to Jesus?

*“he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,” (Titus 3:5–6 ESV)*

**Regeneration and renewal are two related, but separate works of God’s Spirit.**

Regeneration is the giving of the life of God into the soul of man. Renewal is the strengthening of the life of God that has been given to the soul of man.

Regeneration is a one time work of the Holy Spirit. Renewal is a daily work of the Holy Spirit.

The working of the Holy Spirit is mysterious. We cannot completely understand it for it is a supernatural work. Jesus uses the idea of physical conception and birth to help us meditate upon its mystery. We can **describe** some parts of the process of physical conception, but we cannot really **understand** it. We know something about this process, but we do not know the most important parts. **There is a limit to our knowledge.** Man still cannot produce physical life out of nothing. Only God does that. **Because God is the author of life, people who do not believe in God have a necessarily diminished and limited view of physical life.** They see it as a blob of cells. They see physical life as mechanical, without transcendent meaning. Yet everything in us shouts, “I have purpose!” Physical life can only be explained with God at the center.

Spiritually, the gift of life in the soul is a reality that can only be explained by the Holy Spirit.

