

**Title: “Flourish”:** Creating a Culture of Transformation  
**A New-Life Style**  
**Text: John 3:1-15**  
**3-18-18**



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**Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context...** (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

Jesus (and other NT writers) used the metaphor of “birth” as a means of holding before us the new life made available to us in relationship to God.

*“What do you think of when you hear the phrase ‘born again’? Would you agree that the terminology has had its share of negative connotations? Why do you think that is true?”*

*“Why do you think Jesus used such a phrase to describe the inner work of God in our lives? What does it suggest about its mystery? How do you think the use of metaphor connects us to deeper realities?”*

*“What do you think Nicodemus’ motivation was for approaching Jesus? Why at night? Why do you think he was a bit thrown off by Jesus’ response?”*

*“Is there an area of your life in which you are attempting to substitute a self-imposed strategy for divine intervention?”*

*“How many of you have sincerely reached the point where you are ready to say about your life, ‘You know, this just isn’t working!?’*

*“What are you looking to? What are you lifting up? To where are you looking for healing and wholeness?”*

*“Have you been baptized in water? If so, can you share with the group something meaningful about that experience for you?”*

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**Teaching Notes...**

*Woodinville Alliance Church... a community where every person discovers who they really are in Christ, experiences his goodness, and shares this life-changing encounter with their world so that others might value and choose Jesus for themselves.*

*This new life results in a movement from Self-reliance to God-reliance, Isolation to Belonging, Fear to Trust, Duty to Delight, Insignificance to Purpose, Brokenness to Wholeness.*

(4) demonstrations (*gospel-realities*) we experience:

### **IDENTITY—ENCOUNTER—TESTIMONY—NEW LIFE**

**Identity|** we only discover who we are when we know who God is. If we are not settled and secured in this identity, we will spend the rest of our lives subject to other names, other labels, each meant to devalue us and desensitize us to God's love.

**Encounter|** we were created to encounter God; to experience his goodness and good intentions toward us. Ours is not to attempt to generate such experiences, but to expect them and to ensure that we are alert and responsive.

**Testimony|** authentically transformed lives always seek to share what they have experienced of God with others.

It is our experiences of God which form the life we live and create the stories that we tell. We call that our "**testimony**".

*"Just get the rope between your skis, lean back and let the boat pull you out of the water".*

These were the counter-intuitive words that I heard some years ago on a lake in Des Moines, IA, just prior to ingesting a significant amount of brackish water and having my swim trunks re-located to my ankles.

*Lean back get up? Relax in order to experience the joy of forward movement?* In order to experience gliding across the water, I had to abandon everything I thought I knew about water-skiing. I had to trust another way of responding from one who was, themselves, a water-skier.

*Die to live? Lose to find? First will be last?* All indicators of the counterintuitive nature of the Kingdom.

Language always proves to be both useful and limiting. It is able to describe some things with incredible clarity. In other things, it proves to be woefully inadequate.

When someone violates a relational trust, we say, "*It feels like we were kicked in the gut*". When we experience some relational loss, we might say that it, "*Broke my heart*".

It seems that the true meaning always lies somewhere between what we can and cannot say. **New life** is always deeply mysterious and can never be totally satisfied intellectually.

It is in this famous conversation that we encounter the term, “born again”. A term that, in my era, was certainly rife with baggage, but utilized by Jesus to describe a quality and experience of life that could not be accessed purely by the intellect.

Nicodemus is a Pharisee. He is learned. He is devout (Torah-observant). He is a member of the Jewish Council--- the Sanhedrin (governed intertwined religious and civil affairs). He is held in high regard by his community. He sets up a covert encounter with Jesus.

(John 2) Jesus would not entrust himself to those who simply followed because he could turn a pot of water into a good cabernet. He knew that such a shallow profession could not sustain the commitment necessary to follow him into life... follow him toward death.

*“Rabbi (teacher), we all know that God has sent you to teach us...” (3:2).*

Without attempting to decipher his intentions, it would be safe to say that no one makes the types of inquiries that Nicodemus did if their current pursuits of life were proving to be sufficient to enough to satisfy their deep-heart desires.

*“I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God” (3:3).*

*“born again” [Gr. ‘another’, ‘from above’]*

**Birth is our violent introduction into the world. It is not the culmination of life, but simply its beginnings.** It launches us into a formation where we are constantly developing and adapting in order to sustain life and health.

**By the same token, being “born again” depicts a means of entrance into and orientation toward another way of living (in the Kingdom) which allows us to have the fullest experience of what it means to be human.**

Jesus doesn’t say to Nicodemus, *“You know, Nick, I wouldn’t mess with the current program. I think a few sessions together and some minor adjustments are all that’s necessary”.*

Instead he says to this scholarly, well-respected religious leader, *“Your whole life is ‘off-center’. It’s futile to throw more time and education at the human dilemma. You need to start over, with different desires and with a new set of resources, available to you only from God.”*

*“without being born of water and of the Spirit...” (3:5)*

Every Jew would have recognized the role of water, as it was used in all sorts of ceremonial baptisms and the Spirit was always anticipated with the coming of the Kingdom (Ezekiel 36–37 and Joel 2).

*“The wind blows wherever it pleases...” (3:8)*

Jesus is saying, in effect, *“Don’t be put off by the mystery-language. The new life you desire is the life of God in you, fueling and animating and motivating these new desires, new affections, new ways of being which signal your participation. Don’t try to control it. Don’t try to standardize it. The Spirit refuses to be subject to your self-imposed strategies. You can only surrender to it and adjust your life to catch the wind!”*

**“Being born” and being “born again” are the (2) significant life-moments for which we are able to take no credit.**

The healthy outcome of birth is not simply to attempt to figure out the birth process, but to enjoy life!

**The gospel is really only for the ‘poor’.**

Frankly, the gospel is not for people who are satisfied with the way things are. It’s not for people who are mildly curious or bored. It’s for people who *“hungry and thirsty”* (Matthew 5:6).

Those identified as “sinners” and “outsiders” had an easier time with such language. They had no claims on God. No way to leverage a favorable response. They had no illusions that life was working out for them, nor did they assume that there was even the possibility of realizing anything different. They didn’t have a lot of questions. They didn’t need a lot of explanation. They were “sick and needed a doctor”.

**Interestingly, the emphasis is not simply on the moment itself, but the life experienced as a result of the “new birth”.**

Being “born again” (from above, anew) forces us to admit that we don’t know how God produces his life in us and we’re not sure how God’s love will ever trump our insecurities and godless passions--- we can’t imagine denying ourselves and loving God more than life itself.

Because of the Spirit now taking up his residence in us, we are not simply the same old people with a few new God-hobbies. We are new creations with new desires, new impulses, new affections... motivating new choices and a new Godward trajectory.

For the first time, our hearts can be trusted because the old *“deceptive heart”* (Jeremiah 17) has been replaced by the *“new heart”* of Jeremiah 31. We are being

shaped by the life-giving Spirit of Christ; God 'tabernacles' with us, compelling and enlivening us.

*"But to all who believed and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are re-born--- not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God."* John 1:12-13

*"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit."*  
Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3

*"If I be lifted up..."*

Numbers 21 offers us the story of the rebellion and the bronze serpent. The people affected were realizing the consequences of their own defiance and disobedience. But, interestingly, in the story, the very thing that is destroying them is strangely transformed into that which can serve to instigate healing... if they will simply 'look to it', trust it, for life. It seemed absurd, but not to those who were perishing.

On the cross, Jesus would absorb upon himself the collective consequences of our own indifference and infidelity and utilize it as a surprising means of providing healing. He identifies with us so that we might be identified with him. Jesus is sharing in sickness, in death, in divorce, in child abuse, in genocide, in shame and is offering back wholeness and healing--- 'shalom'. God is saving us; God is restoring us.

More importantly, he will proceed to clarify the motivation behind this saving/rescuing effort: *"the so love"* of God.

\*Interestingly, later we will find Nicodemus with Joseph of Arimathea, now willingly and publicly risking a lifetime of reputation to be seen, to identified with Jesus (John 19:39).