

Born Again Study Guide!

Relationship 1.4

Jesus talks about a spiritual experience called being born again. He says if we don't have that experience, we'll never enter His kingdom. Just what is being born again? How do we experience being born again? Is it like child birth? How does it bring us into relationship with God?

The term, "Born Again," is common in our culture. Some use "Born Again" as a distinction between Christians. Like some people are "Born Again" Christians and other people are just regular Christians. Often people think being a "Born Again" Christian means your more fundamental and fanatical about your religion. So just where did the idea of being "Born Again" come from?

The idea of being "Born Again", comes from a conversation recorded in John's 3rd chapter. Jesus tells Nicodemus – a very religious ruler - that he must be born again if he wants to enter heaven.

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

Now this is very confusing and upsetting to Nicodemus. After all, Nicodemus is trying hard to earn God's favor by living a good life and keeping the rules of his religion. He's a well-respected religious ruler who has climbed the ladder of Judaism. He's at the top. As far as most of the people are concerned, Nicodemus is THE teacher when it comes to godly instruction.

Jesus basically tells Nicodemus that none of his credentials, none of his teaching ability or good works, none his well respected, admired, prestigious status counts for anything when it comes to entering the kingdom of heaven. The only way into the kingdom of God, is to be born again. If you've experienced the transformation of being born again, you're in the kingdom of God. If you haven't been born again, you're out.

As you might imagine, Nicodemus is confused. He thought he was ok with God. So he asks Jesus:

John 3:4 Nicodemus said to 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?"

That's short for, Jesus I don't know what you're talking about. How about you, do you know what Jesus is talking about when He says we must be born again?

It's fascinating that Jesus uses the illustration of birth to tell Nicodemus his religious accomplishments won't get him into heaven. Let me ask you a question: What role did you play in your birth? You say, well I was there. I participated – after all it was me being born. So I must have played some kind of role. But I didn't have anything to do with my conception. I didn't pick my mother or my father. I didn't pick my gender or my color. I wasn't conscious of my development as I grew in my mother's womb. I didn't pick the place or time of my birth. I was just born on a certain day at a certain time to certain parents none of which I actively chose.

Ok ... so how does all that help us understand what Jesus is teaching us about being spiritually born again? Jesus is telling us that just like God engineered our physical conception, God also engineers our spiritual conception. Just like God is the author of our physical life, so God is the author of our spiritual life. In other words, we can't exist physically without God's direct creative power being applied to our conception, development, and birth. And, likewise, we can't come into relationship with God – be made alive spiritually – without God's direct intervention. That's the point of the birth analogy – you and I are completely dependent on God to regenerate our souls and make us spiritually alive before we can have relationship with Him.

Because we've all sinned against God, everyone of us starts from a condition of being spiritually dead.

Ephesians 2:1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins

If you were to walk up to that open casket at the next funeral you attend and speak with the body in the casket, that body would not answer you. Why? Because that body is dead. It cannot respond.

In the same way dead people can't respond physically, you and I have no capacity to respond to God spiritually. We have sinned against God, we are separated from Him, we are spiritually dead. We don't have any power or capacity to bring ourselves to spiritual life.

So, if in our natural state we are spiritually dead, how does God bring us to this born again experience where our soul is regenerated by His power and we come to spiritual life?

First, God chooses to bring us to spiritual life:

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, **4** even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love **5** he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

Not only does God choose to bring us to spiritual life, Jesus goes so far as to say that unless the Father draws us, we can't come to Him.

John 6:44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.

So before we move on, be sure you get the point. God is the only One who can give us this born again experience. He's the only One who can make us spiritually alive. And that means, as Jesus made clear to Nicodemus in that conversation in John 3, entering the kingdom of God is not about all the good, moral, religious, nice things we might do. Even at our very best, our works can never satisfy or please God.

Rather, being born again is about God's choice and His action on our behalf. We don't contribute anything to our spiritual birth just like we didn't contribute anything to our physical birth. We're there. It happens to us. In that sense we participate. But God alone is the only One who can give us spiritual life or make us born again.

Colossians 2:13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

Ephesians 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

Do you see in these passages how we are spiritually dead before God regenerates our souls and brings us to life in Him? Being born again is an act of God that lays the foundation required for you and I to have a relationship with God. If you are born again, it means God has regenerated your dead soul. If you are not born again, it means that your soul is still dead. That's why the Bible calls us new creations after we've experienced God's transforming work in our hearts, after we're born again:

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Here's one of the most concise explanations of the process I know of in Scripture:

Titus 3:3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. **4** But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, **5** 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, **6** whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, **7** so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

So, by now you may be asking, “If I haven’t been born again, and if that’s the only way to have relationship with God, and if God is the only One who can transform my soul and make bring my spirit to life, what do I do?”

Simple – ask God for the experience of being born again. Look what he says:

Isaiah 55:6 “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;

Amos 5:4 For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel: “Seek me and live;

Matthew 7:7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **8** For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.

The Lord will give you the experience of being born again if you seek Him with your whole heart and sincerely ask Him.

And what happened to Nicodemus? After his discussion with Jesus in John 3, was Nicodemus born again? In John 3, no. But we are given a clue in John 19 – Nicodemus loves Jesus so much that he is willing to risk all of his reputation to make sure Jesus has a proper burial.

John 19:38 After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. **39** Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight.

40 So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews.

The point today? If you’re not born again, you’ll never enter the kingdom of heaven. And only God can make that transformation in your soul. Ask him for it today.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

- 1) What do we as humans contribute to becoming “born again”?
- 2) What is the spiritual condition of those who have not experienced God’s transformation of their soul by being born again?
- 3) Why are we new creations after we are born again?
- 4) Considering Titus 3:5-8, what does God do to our souls to make us born again?
- 5) If being born again is an act of God, how do we acquire it?