

Are You Born Again?

or

Keep Looking at Your Friend!

Two medical students went off to school to study for medicine. One of the first things they were introduced to was the anatomy lab. In this lab there was a heavy silence. It was kind of cold, and things were really dead there! But these med students were anxious to make a good showing, so they analyzed the situation. They noticed that there was a good deal of unity there in the lab. There didn't seem to be any fights going on; no one was vying for the highest place. They were all in the same position. As the med students considered the situation, they became convinced that what these patients needed was improved health. They tried introducing the patients to a new diet, but nobody seemed to care about eating. They told the patients about the benefits of exercise, but no one seemed interested. These students determined there must be an even deeper problem.

They wondered if the problem was a lack of fellowship. But that turned out to be a dead-end street. The patients refused to be sociable. They tried to develop a statement of mission—it was ignored. They considered a lack of resources may be the problem and took up an offering—no one gave.

In the end, the med students discovered to their dismay that the people in the lab all had a common problem. They were not breathing ... they weren't even alive.

I grew up being friends with Kelly. Our parents attended school together and as the years passed, our families often enjoyed each other's company. My friendship with Kelly continued through elementary school, high school and college. We did a lot together and enjoyed talking about all kinds of things. We gave each other encouragement and advice, and I remember romances that were improved because I followed Kelly's counsel.

On more than one occasion, friends of mine suggested that I consider dating Kelly. Many of Kelly's friends suggested that she and I would make a great couple. At first, neither of us gave the matter much serious thought. Then our parents began dropping hints in that direction and I remember taking a new look at Kelly.

She was cute, bright, fun to be around, athletic, outdoorsy, and spiritual. All qualities I deemed necessary for a life companion. I'm not sure how many of those adjectives Kelly felt applied to me, but the truth is, we both decided to seriously pursue a romance together.

Then came an insurmountable problem. Neither of us seemed able to fall in love with the other. We tried! We went on official dates. We worked at it. We agreed that we were *right* for each other. We couldn't imagine having more in common with anyone else. We discussed our inability to "click." Try as we might, there was no red-hot flame, in fact, there wasn't even a spark. It was really quite discouraging to have finally found that *perfect person* and then realize that you would rather swallow gravel than kiss, snuggle or hold hands. We finally gave up trying.

A few years later, I met Marji. The chemistry was there from the start. We didn't try to *make* it happen, it just did. It was more than a spark too, it was a nuclear reaction and less than a year later we were married. We have been kissing, snuggling and holding hands ever since. The difference between those relationships was a "click" that transformed the second one into love.

Breathless cadavers and self-willed romances have something in common with a message Jesus gave to Nicodemus. They were talking one night about conversion, a "second birth" that Jesus said was necessary before anyone could see the heavenly kingdom. Nicodemus asked, "How can a person be born again?" *That's a good question!*

Daily Bites

“And I, if and when I am lifted up from the earth [on the cross], will draw and attract all men [Gentiles as well as Jews] to Myself.” John 12:32 (The Amplified Bible)

1. Based on John 3:1-2, what sort of a person was Nicodemus? What sort of upbringing do you suppose he had?
Pharisees were the religious leaders of Jesus’ day. They concentrated on external goodness and believed salvation was something they earned. (Matthew 23:1-35 contains Jesus’ response to that way of thinking)
2. Why do you think Nicodemus came to Jesus?
3. According to John 3:3, how did Jesus respond to Nicodemus’ opening words? Does His response strike you as strange?
4. What do you think Jesus means when He says (in verse 3), “No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again?”
5. Some people say that reading a dictionary or telephone book is more interesting than the Bible or stories about Jesus. Is that natural? Based on the passages below, explain why that might be?
 - Isaiah 44:18
 - Ezekiel 12:1-2
 - Matthew 13:13-15
 - 2 Corinthians 4:3-4

At the Pacific Science Center in Seattle there is a display that tests for color-blindness. It consists of 30 individual squares of multi-colored shapes and patterns with a number at the center. People with normal vision can easily see each number. However, a color-blind person cannot see some of the numbers no matter how hard they try—even if they know what to look for and where to look. It is a physical impossibility for them. In spiritual terms, we are all “color blind.” It is impossible for us to see and understand God and His ways on our own. In this world it is not natural to enjoy spending time with Jesus.

Read John 3:3-15 through a couple of times (maybe even out loud) before answering the following questions.

6. According to Jesus, what has to happen before we can “see the kingdom of God?”
7. What was Nicodemus’ response?
8. According to Jesus, Who is responsible for our “New Birth” or conversion and how can you know if He is working?

It is clear that just as you did not have much control over your first birth, you do not have much control over being “born again.” It is the supernatural result of God’s Holy Spirit working in your mind or heart (for more on this read John 1:12-13; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3). You might wonder, “Is there anything I can do?”

In John 3:14-15 Jesus referred back to a story in Israel’s history. That story is found in Numbers 21:4-9.

9. Why did the snakes come into the camp?
10. What was the solution to getting bit by a snake?
11. How does this apply to us today?

Daily Bites

The condition for healing from a snake bite was to look at the snake on the pole—just look. It asked them to do something they could do—look. The story is for us as well. We cannot change our lives. We cannot force ourselves to be interested in Jesus. We cannot control our feelings. We cannot generate faith and belief. We can come to Jesus and “look” at Him. John the Baptist said, “Behold the Lamb” (John 1:29). Jesus said, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32). When we “look” at Jesus, it puts us in a place where the Holy Spirit can do the supernatural work of “New Birth.” And how do we look at Jesus? By spending time each day asking Him to make himself real to us and reading His word—like you have been doing in the “Daily Bites.” Keep looking!

There’s a saying that has been quoted for many years, especially related to romance, as though it were absolutely true: “Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” Experience has shown otherwise in many incidents. It is often more true that “absence makes the heart wander.” This is true in our relationship with Jesus. If you do not invest time in getting to know Him, you will be growing further away from Him. This is why regular [daily, non-negotiable, significant, and prime] time with Jesus is so important.

Remember, you are spending time with Jesus *to get to know Him as a friend*, not just to put in time!

- *Begin each session with prayer* - maybe something like this: “Lord, help me to come to know you better as we spend time together...”
- *Read the passage* - several times noticing as many details as you can.
- *Imagine the setting* - put yourself in the picture. Try to imagine the sounds, smells, sensations.
- *Summarize the passage* - in your own words.
- *Apply the passage* - what message is God giving you?
- *Meditate and pray* - meditate on how this passage makes Jesus more real. Talk to Him about the passage and about using the information you have learned.

Passages for This Week

- John 3:1-21
- John 3:22-36
- John 4:1-26
- John 4:27-38
- John 4:39-42
- John 4:43-54
- John 5:1-15

Priscilla

I watched quietly from the throng that lined the street as He stumbled forward beneath a burden which seemed much heavier than the cross He bore. The day was dark and grim. The mob was loud and boisterous and pressed so tightly together that you could feel the breath of the person next to you. Yet it all seemed to be happening far away, as if in a dream. As I made my way along the stone street following the bloody footprints, I kept hearing the question in my mind, *Why are you here?* I had no answer.

My father is a Roman centurion and my mother a Jewess. I had lived my life hung painfully between the two, never satisfying either, never knowing who I was. Then my mother became a believer in Jesus of Nazareth. He spoke of a new kingdom, one that would never pass away. My father lived in a kingdom built on the Roman foundation of pride and self-sufficiency; he wanted no new kingdom.

I was glad when Jesus was arrested and felt a sick satisfaction at the sentence pronounced upon Him. My eyes again fell on the bloody footprints, *Why are you here?*

I stood transfixed as the crucifixion wore on. The air grew cold. The sun became lost in a blanket of gray which seemed to encircle the cross. Though the mood was ominous and foreboding, on the face of Jesus was a look of serenity and love.

My father nailed an inscription to the top of the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." Though I saw no emotion on my father's face, I was sure he approved of this execution.

Jesus showed no indication of displeasure at the sign, only pity. He seemed more concerned for those standing beneath Him, as though we were the ones dying.

I stood there all day, watching life slowly fade from those piercing eyes. His complexion took on the color of the grey dampness around Him and I knew it was almost over. Then the cry "It is finished" ripped the stillness. It was not a cry of defeat or dejection but of victory and majesty. Every eye saw Him heave His last breath and slowly bow His head in death.

Somewhere deep inside of me I felt a gnawing pain. As I turned to leave I heard again the nagging question, *Why are you here?*

Suddenly my father's voice broke violently into my thoughts, "Surely this was the Son of God." I turned and saw my father looking up at Jesus. I ran sobbing towards him catching my mother's hand. Together we knelt united at the foot of the cross. Peace filled my heart. Looking up at the crucified form of the Son of God, I knew why I was there ... I knew.

Written by Shay Wooten, from Masterpieces, copyright © 1988 Reflections, used by permission. Reflections is the drama ministry of Champion Academy, directed by Thure Martinsen from 1982 to 1993. Masterpieces is a play written by the students about Jesus

"And the Son of Man must be lifted up, just as that metal snake was lifted up by Moses in the desert. Then everyone who has faith in the Son of Man will have eternal life. God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never die." John 3:14-16 (CEV)

Bible Texts

John 3:1-2 “There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. 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.”

Matthew 23:1-35 Summarized in lesson. Space does not permit including full reference here.

John 3:3 “Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Isaiah 44:18* “They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand.”

Ezekiel 12:1-2* “The word of the LORD came to me: ‘Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people.’”

Matthew 13:13-15* “This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them’”

2 Corinthians 4:3-4* “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

John 3:3-15 “Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

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?”

Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, 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 the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?””

Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

John 1:12-13 “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Titus 3:5 “not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,”

1 Peter 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”

John 3:14-15 See above.

Numbers 21:4-9 “And the people spoke against God and against Moses: “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread. So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.”

John 1:29 “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

John 12:32 “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”

(Unless otherwise mentioned, all quoted scripture is from the New King James Version)
** New International Version*