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LESSON 1

# BEING BORN, AND BEING BORN AGAIN

## PHYSICAL BIRTH

*You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.... Your eyes saw my unformed body.*

— Psalm 139:13, 16

## REFLECTING...

With seven children to provide for, my parents received the dreaded news: Mama was pregnant.

“Neither you nor the baby can survive,” her doctor warned. “I know two places where you can go – one in the mountains, the other at the seashore. Which do you prefer?”

“I prefer to go home,” Mama said. “God will see me through.”

My birth was long and difficult. Born at home, I entered the world blue, with the umbilical cord wrapped around my neck ... *but I lived, and so did Mama!*

“It's a miracle I saved her,” the doctor said.

My parents knew a more powerful Hand had been at work, and gave thanks.

## WRITE YOUR STORY

Write a paragraph titled “My Birth.” If necessary, seek information from your parents or relatives concerning the circumstances and time of your birth. Name key people and places connected with your birth: parents, siblings, doctor, hospital, and the address of your first home. For interest, add some of your birth year's outstanding events.

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## SPIRITUAL BIRTH

Write John 3:3 \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

For years, I failed to understand the meaning of being “born again,” that mystery that occurs the moment one receives salvation from sin and its consequences. Since Jesus compared spiritual birth to natural birth, it's good to consider what being *born again* does and does not include.

## WHAT NEW BIRTH IS *NOT*

### 1. “Going Forward” During Worship

New Christians will certainly profess Christ publicly (Romans 10:9), but a profession of faith is only a “birth announcement,” not the spiritual birth itself.

Jesus addressed the importance of publicly professing your faith. **Write Matthew 10:32–33.** Underline His promise once, and His warning twice.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

While serving as counselor at two major evangelistic crusades, I was impressed by the number of people who “went forward” at the end of the service, but then left without Christ. They had been “seekers” only.

**Matthew 19:16–22** describes a seeker who “went forward” publicly to the right Person and with the right question: “Teacher, \_\_\_\_\_.”

#### **On what was this man depending in order to achieve eternal life?**

- Good works       Moral upbringing       Riches  
 Fine reputation       Faith in Christ's atoning death on the Cross

Do you believe the man was born again during his encounter with Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

What determined his decision to receive or reject Christ? \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Check one way his decision could be regarded as wise.**

- He was free to live without boundaries or guidelines.  
 He was young, with time to follow Christ later.  
 He was not hypocritical.
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Check one way his decision was unwise.

- He passed up being a famous disciple of Jesus.
- His decision cost him eternal life.
- His name was omitted from the gospel record.

## 2. Church Membership

Born-again individuals should join a church, of course. Having experienced salvation, we desire to “*grow up into him*,” as Paul stated in Ephesians 4:15, since spiritual growth should follow spiritual birth as certainly as physical growth follows physical birth. Simply being in church, however, doesn't make people Christians. There is a difference between *professing* Christ and *possessing* Christ. Joining a church is a perfect first step for a new Christian, but church membership should be the *result* of salvation, not an effort to achieve it.

Parents notify friends and relatives of their child's physical birth by sending out birth announcements. Christians announce spiritual birth by being baptized and uniting with a church.

**Choose one.** Describe your reason for announcing, or not announcing, your spiritual birth.

I have announced my spiritual birth by baptism and membership in \_\_\_\_\_ Church.

I haven't announced my spiritual birth, but I plan to do so on (Date) \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ Church.

I've been born again, but I don't plan to announce my spiritual birth because \_\_\_\_\_.

## 3. Assent to a Creed

Christians should choose churches whose teachings and governing practices are scriptural. However, giving intellectual assent to creeds and answering theological questions correctly isn't a guarantee that rebirth has taken place. Words like *grace*, *repentance*, and *faith* might be defined accurately, but head knowledge doesn't constitute regeneration.

As someone once said, “The distance between heaven and hell is eighteen inches – from head to heart.”

**Write James 2:19** \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. Emotional Experience

When sharing my faith, I resist mentioning feelings that I experienced while accepting Christ. Describing my feelings could cause a person to reason that they should wait for that feeling in order to be saved. Emotions are valid, and do often accompany new birth, but God's Word, alone, is trustworthy.

The rich young man expressed dramatic emotion by running to Jesus when others weren't running, and falling on his knees when others weren't kneeling. Underline the emotion he showed even as he departed from Jesus.

**Matthew 19:22** tells us, *when the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.*

**List emotions and their results expressed in the following Scriptures.**

SCRIPTURE	EMOTION	RESULT
<b>Psalms 112:1-2</b>	Praise and fear of God	He and his children are blessed.
<b>Philippians 4:11-12</b>	_____	(v. 13) _____
<b>Proverbs 15:30</b>	_____	_____
<b>Proverbs 15:13</b>	_____	_____
<b>Luke 10:33</b>	_____	(v. 34) _____

**Can any of these emotions produce salvation?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Write Ephesians 2:4-5** \_\_\_\_\_

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- ▶ Who alone provides salvation? \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ What great emotion has God expressed? \_\_\_\_\_
- ▶ What alone makes salvation possible? \_\_\_\_\_

#### 5. Baptism

Christian baptism is an outward expression of the inner change that has already occurred in the born-again individual. In baptism, the spiritual newborn identifies with Christ and His Church. We are baptized, not in order to *be* saved, but because we *are* saved.

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus approached John the Baptist for baptism.

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**Matthew 3:14** tells us John hesitated, saying: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Jesus responded (in verse 15):** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Theologians have pondered Jesus' baptism, because John baptized for repentance of sin, and Jesus was sinless. Because the Jews believed and taught that descending from Abraham assured their salvation, Jesus grasped an opportunity to identify with the sinners He came to save. In the hour of people's new awareness of sin and search for God, Jesus, through baptism, became the model for all born-again believers. <sup>1</sup>

**What did God say from heaven? (Matthew 3:17)**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

God's affirmation was a composite of two earlier statements. *[This is] my Son* was from Psalm 2:7, which all Jews accepted as a description of their coming Messiah. *With him I am well pleased* is from Isaiah 42:1, which defines the Messiah as a Suffering Servant. To Jews who were receptive to Jesus, the Lord's baptism presented two certainties: (1) He was their promised Messiah, and (2) the way before Him was suffering on the Cross. At Jesus' baptism, God set before Him both His task on earth and the way He would fulfill it. <sup>2</sup>

While the practice of baptism varies with denominations, baptism symbolizes the believer's identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. Churches that baptize by immersion do so to fulfill the literal meaning of the Greek word *baptizo*, "total immersion in water." They interpret Romans 6:3-4 as a description of baptism by immersion. Candidates "buried" beneath the water exemplify death to their old way of life. Rising from the water, they "live a new life." Additionally, by exemplifying the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, they show through association with Christ that they, too, will rise.

**Write Romans 6:4** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Write Matthew 3:16** \_\_\_\_\_