

HOME  **WORD**
ENCOURAGING PARENTS, BUILDING FAMILIES
The Basics of Christianity

By Jim Burns, Ph.D.

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I. A NEW LIFE

A. In the Word

Read John 3:1-21

You've just read one of the most powerful and important conversations ever recorded in the life of Jesus. For the most part, Jesus was surrounded by the ordinary people of His day. However, in this conversation we see Him with one of the important Jewish leaders of His time.

We know Nicodemus was a rich man. When Jesus died, Nicodemus brought a "mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds" (John 19:39) for Jesus' body. Only a wealthy man could afford such a gift.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, and in many ways the Pharisees were the most important people in the whole country of Israel. There were never more than 6,000 at a time and they all were completely dedicated to observing every detail of the Old Testament Law. Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin which was composed of 70 religious leaders. The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of the Jewish people.

What is the significance of an important man like Nicodemus talking with Jesus about being born again?

Why do you suppose Nicodemus came to Jesus at night?

What is the main theme of this conversation?

This conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus is often confusing to many people. List below any questions you may have about this conversation.

B. So What?

Place a mark next to the phrase below that best describes your response to the eternal message of Jesus: "You must be born again" (John 3:7).

- I have experienced new birth in my life
- I'm not interested in experiencing new birth at this time.
- It sounds interesting but I really don't understand that concept of new birth. (If you have any questions, this message is too important for you not to talk with someone about it!)
- I'm interested in experiencing new birth at this time. (You can pray the following prayer to express this desire:)

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need your forgiveness. I believe that you died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite you to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow you as Lord and Savior.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

*You can read through "The Steps to Peace with God."

C. Steps to Peace with God

Read through this important process of new life written by the Billy Graham Association.

Step 1: God's Purpose: Peace and Life

God wants you to experience peace and life-abundant and eternal.

The Bible says...

"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

Step 2: Our Problem: Separation.

God created us in his own image to have abundant life. He did not make us robots to automatically love and obey Him, but gave us a will and freedom of choice. We choose to disobey God and go our own willful way. We still make this choice today. This results in separation from God.

The Bible says...

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

“For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

OUR ATTEMPTS:

Through the ages, individuals have tried in many ways to bridge the gap...without success...

The Bible says...

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death” (Proverbs 14:12).

“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).

Step 3: God’s remedy: the Cross.

Jesus Christ is the only answer to this problem. He died on the cross and rose from the grave, paying the penalty for our sins and bridging the gap between God and people.

The Bible says...

“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 2:5)

“For Christ died for sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Step 4: Our Response: Receive Christ

We must trust Jesus Christ and receive Him by personal invitation.

The Bible says...

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with Him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

“Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

RESPONSE:

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need your forgiveness. I believed that You died for my sins. I want to turn from my sins. I now invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow you as Lord and Savior.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

II. Discipleship

A. Warm Up

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Hitler banished all professing Christians from his government because he said their loyalty to the state was endangered by their loyalty to Christianity. If you were a government employee in Germany during the 1940's would you:

- Be first to go?
- Think about leaving?
- Leave eventually?
- Quit if it got bad?
- Have a secure job?

Why?

B. A Committed Disciple

The following is a letter from a communist student who is breaking his engagement with his fiancée. While reading this letter, think of how his commitment and dedication to communism compares to our commitment and dedication with Christ.

The communist student wrote:

“We communists have a high casualty rate. We are the ones who get shot and hung and ridiculed and fired from our jobs and in every other way made a comfortable as possible. A certain percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the party every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive. We communists do have time or the money for many movies, or concerts, or T-bone steaks, or decent homes, or new cars. We have been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one great overshadowing factor: The struggle for

world communism. We communists have a philosophy of life that no amount of money can buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty personal selves into a great movement of humanity; and if our personal lives seem hard or are egos appear to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us in his small way is contributing to something new and true and better for mankind.

There is one thing in which I am in dead earnest about, and that is the communist cause. It is my life, my business, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife, and my mistress, my breath, and my meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens as time goes on; therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating it to this force that both drives and guides my life. I evaluate people, books, ideas and actions according to how they affect the communist cause, and by their attitude toward it. I've already been in jail because of my ideals, and if necessary, I'm ready to go before a firing squad."

What are your thoughts about this letter?

Does the student's commitment relate in any way to our Christian lives? How?

Can you think of any Scriptures that might relate to this letter?

C. In the Word

TOTALLY COMMITTED

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:34-37).

What does it take to come after Jesus?

1. Deny yourself.

You belong to Christ, not yourself. You were bought for a high price. In order to follow Christ there is a sense of denial of your own needs for the sake of Christ's purposes.

a. What does Paul say in Galatians 2:20 about denying yourself?

III. Building a Strong Foundation

A. Team Effort

In 1923 a very important meeting was held at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago. Attending this meeting were nine of the world's most successful financiers: Charles Schwab, steel magnate; Samuel Insull, president of the largest utility company; Howard Hopson, president of the largest gas company; Arthur Cotton, the greatest wheat speculator; Richard Whitney, president of the New York Stock Exchange; Albert Fall, a member of the president's cabinet; Leon Fraser, president of the Bank of International Settlements; Jesse Livermore, a great "bear" on Wall Street; and Ivar Krueger, head of the most powerful monopoly.

Twenty-five years later, Charles Schwab had died in bankruptcy, having lived on borrowed money for five years before his death; Samuel Insull had died a fugitive from justice and penniless in a foreign land; Howard Hopson was insane; Arthur Cotton had died abroad, insolvent; Richard Whitney had spent time in Sing Sing Prison; Albert Fall had been pardoned so that he could die at home; Jesse Livermore, Ivar Krueger and Leon Fraser had all died by suicide. All these men had learned well the art of making a living, but none of them had learned HOW TO LIVE!

1. What was the basis of these men's lives?
2. What was missing in all of these men's lives? Why is it so easy to slide into the same kinds of goals as these men?
3. What does Matthew 6:21,24 mean for you today?
4. How do these Scriptures relate to setting a firm spiritual foundation?

B. In the Word

PRINCIPLES FOR SETTING A STRONG FOUNDATION

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, and the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash (Matthew 7:24-27).

Notice that the same thing happened to each house. The rain came, the streams rose and the wind blew and beat against the house. Problems come to everyone regardless of spiritual maturity or lifestyle. The major difference is that when problems come, the person with a strong base will be able to withstand the attack.

Christians are not free from problems. We must prepare for difficulties by developing a solid foundation. What's great is that you don't need to develop it on your own—God will help.

1. You need a cornerstone. A cornerstone set at the bottom of a structure. Read 1 Peter 2:4-8.
 - a. Who is clearly the Cornerstone in this Scripture?
 - b. Is this Cornerstone a part of your life?

Without the Cornerstone you can never have a strong foundation.

2. You must follow the instructions to set a strong foundation properly. Read John 14:15,21.
 - a. What do these verses tell us to do if we love God!
 - b. What is the result of obedience in verse 21?
 - c. How do Jesus' statements in these verses relate to Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:2,3
3. 3. Set your foundation slowly. Growth is slow; growth takes time. Setting a strong foundation is a lifelong process. Slow, consistent growth is a sure way to spiritual maturity. Read Philippians 3:12-14. How do you think these wise words of Paul deal with setting a strong foundation slowly?
4. 4. Build on your foundation daily. Read Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:2,3.
 - a. What is the result of spending time with God each day?
 - b. What example does Jesus give us in Mark 1:35?

C. So What?

Here are three points to consider:

1. Is your foundation based on Jesus?
2. What do you need to do to set your foundation on Jesus?

3. Write a prayer or draw a picture expressing your need to set your foundation on Jesus or expressing your thanks to Jesus for being your foundation.

IV. Jesus

A. Warm Up

THE INFLUENCE OF JESUS CHRIST

Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was 30, and then for three years He traveled the country preaching. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never owned a home. He never had a family of His own. He never went to college. He never traveled more than two hundred miles from the place where He was born. He never did one of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but Himself.

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed upon a cross between two thieves. His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had on earth while He was dying. When he was dead He was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress.

I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that were ever built, and all the Parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth as has that one solitary life.

How do you feel when you read about the effect of Jesus' life on our world? Mark the appropriate box and tell why.

- Overwhelmed
- Glad to be on His side
- Excited
- Not sure
- Other

B. Team Effort

JESUS: NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES

What image of Christ do you find in each Scripture?

1. Philippians 2:5-11
2. Matthew 25:34-40
3. Isaiah 42:1-9
4. John 10:11-16
5. John 6:44-51
6. Luke 4:38-44
7. Matthew 16:13-16

C. In the Word

WHO IS THIS MAN?

Let's take a look at the actual words Jesus used to describe Himself and see how we can better understand who He is by what He claimed about Himself. Determine what important truth Jesus says about himself in each verse.

1. Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. Read John 14:6
2. Jesus is one with God. Read John 10:30.
3. Jesus' preexistence. Read John 8:58 and Revelation 1:8.
4. Jesus as Savior. Read Matthew 9:6 and John 3:17.
5. Jesus as judge of the world. Read John 5:22,23.
6. Jesus as the Messiah. Read John 4:25,26.
7. Jesus is the God in the flesh. Read John 1:1,14.

D. So What?

Jesus was fully God and fully men. Jesus knows what you are going through because he lived on this earth and completely identified with humankind. Jesus has the power to meet your needs because he is God. What important message is found in Hebrews 2:17,18 and Hebrew 4:15?

Write down three specific needs you have which Jesus can understand and with which He can help you.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Which of Jesus' claims about Himself relates to your needs?

Offer a prayer of petition asking Jesus to be who he is in these areas of need.

V. Holy Spirit

A. Warm Up

A RICH RESERVOIR

A farmer and his wife, in the panhandle of Texas, had eked out a meager living in the dusty panhandle for 30 years when an impeccably dressed man, in a three-piece suit, driving a fancy car, came to their door. He told the farmer that he had good reason to believe there was a reservoir of oil underneath his property. If the farmer would allow the gentleman the right to drill, perhaps the farmer would become a wealthy man. The farmer stated emphatically that he didn't want anyone messing up his property and asked the gentleman to leave.

The next year, about the same time, the gentleman returned again with his nice clothes and another fancy car. The oilman pleaded with the farmer, and again the farmer said no. This same experience went on for the next eight years. During those eight years the farmer and his wife really struggled to make ends meet. Nine years after the first visit of the oilman, the farmer came down with a disease that put him in the hospital. When the gentleman arrived to plead his case for oil he spoke to the farmer's wife. Reluctantly she gave permission to drill.

Within a week huge oil rigs were beginning the process of drilling for oil. The first day nothing happened. The second day was filled with only disappointment and dust. But on the third day, right about noon, black bubbly liquid began to squirt up in the air. The oilman had found black gold, and the farmer and his wife were instantly millionaires.

You have a reservoir of power in your life. If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit works in your life. You can tap into His power and live your life with resurrection power. The Holy Spirit will empower you to live life on a greater level, but you've got to tap into His power source just like the farmer needed to drill for oil.

1. How does the Holy Spirit of God empower believers to live the Christian life?
2. How does this story relate to your own need to tap into God's power?

B. Team Effort

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

READ Galatians 5:16-26. Answer these questions and then complete the inventory.

1. What are the results of walking with the Spirit, according to Galatians 5:23,24?
2. What are the works of the flesh found in Galatians 5:19-21?

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT INVENTORY

Below is a list of the fruit of the spirit. Mark in the appropriate box how you feel you are doing in each area.

	Good	Average	Poor
Love			
Joy			
Peace			
Patience			
Kindness			
Goodness			
Faithfulness			
Gentleness			
Self-Control			

Share which areas you are doing well in and which areas could use work. This week ask God to help you in the areas in which you need work.

C. In the Word

THE HOLY SPIRIT

I. Who is He and Why Did He Come?

Read John 16:5-16

A. Who is the Holy Spirit?

1. Who does Jesus call the Holy Spirit in John 16:7?

2. What is significant to you about the name Jesus gives the Holy Spirit in this verse?

B. Why did the Holy Spirit come?

List reasons for the Holy Spirit's coming from this teaching of Jesus.

1. Verse 7:
2. Verse 8:
3. Verse 13:
4. Verse 14:

II. The Work of the Holy Spirit

A. The Holy Spirit empowers and guides you to live the Christian life. In order to have the power of God working in our lives, we must surrender and submit ourselves to the control of the Holy Spirit of God.

1. In John 14:16,17, what does Jesus say He will ask the Father to give to those who love and obey Him?
2. What is His promise in John 14:18?
3. According to Ephesians 5:18, what command is given to believers?
4. How can you best surrender and submit yourself to God?

B. The Holy Spirit dwells inside believers.

1. Summarize 1 Corinthians 3:16.
2. How can this verse give you great encouragement?
3. How does 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 help you understand in greater detail the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?

Take a moment to read this prayer. Then take a moment to make this prayer your own.

Spirit of the living God,
Take control of me;
Spirit of the living God,
Take control of me;
Spirit of the living God,
Take control of me;
Melt me! Mold me! Fill me! Use me!

C. The Holy Spirit gives you power to witness.

1. One of the last known sentences out of the mouth of Jesus is found in Acts 1:8. What is the promise for you in this verse?
2. List three names of people with whom you would like to share God's love in the next month.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.

D. The Holy Spirit gives you the assurance of your salvation.

1. What makes Ephesians 1:13 a very important verse for your spiritual life?
2. What is the assurance found in Romans 8:16?
3. What is the challenge found in 2 Timothy 2:19?

D. So What?

To conclude, read this last section and pray through each part of the heart preparation below and pray to receive what the Holy Spirit has to offer your life.

In order to prepare your heart for the guiding and empowering of the Holy Spirit you must:

1. Desire to live for God.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

2. Be willing to surrender and submit your will (life) to God.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of god’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God- this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:12).

3. Confess your sins.

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

4. Be filled with the spirit.

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

5. Live by the Spirit.

“So, I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature” (Galatians 5:16).