

BIG STEPS (1)

Message Notes

Physical exercise is beneficial as long as it's appropriate to your age and physical capabilities. Taking steps in life is also valuable, as long as they are made with wisdom. Today I want to explore some of the big steps we can make with regards to our spiritual life:

Text: John 3:1-12

"Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

³ Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." ⁴ "How can someone be born when they are old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

⁹ "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. ¹⁰ "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have

spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?"

Big Step 1: Believing in God

As a Jewish leader, Nicodemus was a believer in God

One day I went into a church as an atheist and left as a believer. It was a big step and it's changed my life!

Big Step 2: Being Born Again

Nicodemus came to Jesus and said,

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus ignored Nicodemus' compliment and got to the heart of the matter: *"You must be born again."*

Q. What did Jesus mean by the term "Born again?"

A. It meant the same then as it does today (used in Australia and the USA to denote a big step that brings change in one's life)

Jesus was communicating something like, *"Nico, mate, there's a big step you haven't taken and you need to take it."*

Nicodemus understood Jesus' terminology but was confused by it. The term "*Born again*" was used by the Jews to identify the major stages, or big steps, in a person's life. There were six ways, according to the Jews, that one could be born again:

1. A Gentile converting to Judaism
2. To be crowned king
3. The Jewish coming of age (Bar Mitzva at age 13)
4. At Marriage (age 16-20)
5. To be ordained as a Rabbi (age 30)
6. To become the head of a rabbinical school (age 50) to train other Rabbis.

The first two did not apply to Nicodemus but the next four did:

- As a Jew he would have had a Bar Mitzva at age 13.
- He was married – A 'member of the Jewish ruling council' (v.1) referred to a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin who had to be married.
- As a member of the Sanhedrin he was also a Rabbi.
- Jesus referred to him as "*Israel's teacher*" (v.10) indicating that he was the head of a Rabbinical school training others to become Rabbis.

Nicodemus was an old man: "*How can someone be born when they are old?*" (v. 4). In his mind there were no more chances for him to be born again, there were no big steps left, unless he were to begin life again, "*Surely, they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!*"

Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You (plural) should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

Born of water = Natural birth (flesh) into an earthly kingdom

For Jews natural birth, being Jewish, meant they had a guaranteed right to the kingdom. Jewish law stated, *“All Israel has a share in the world to come.”* (Based on Isaiah 60:21, *“And Your people are all righteous, for ever shall they inherit the land.”*)

So, being born a Jew was enough. They depended on their heritage as do some people in Australia.

According to Jesus, none of these things are enough...

Born of the Spirit = Spiritual birth in to the kingdom of God

I.e. Nicodemus could not rely on his birth, culture, or religion to ensure him a place in God’s kingdom, and nor can we. What makes us a child of God is spiritual birth.

Q. How can I take the big step to be born again?

A. Jesus tells us in the next few verses...

John 3:14-17, *“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (Cf. Numbers 21:4-9)

Where are you at right now? Which big step will you make?

Believe in God → Be born again → Become a disciple