

Why Do We Say Christians Are "Born Again"?

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“Jesus replied, ‘Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again’” ([John 3:3](#)).

Christians are often called “born again” when they have made the decision to let Jesus be their Lord. But this idea can seem rather strange, because we think of being born as a physical event. But Jesus was actually referring to the [faith](#) life of a believer.

In [John 3](#), we see a man who wasn’t afraid to voice his confusion about the phrase. And Jesus responded with a teaching that explained the meaning and importance of this step, as well as the future for those who are willing to take it.

What Does It Mean to Be Born Again?

Though it is impossible for someone to be physically reborn, anyone can seek a spiritual rebirth. When we invite Jesus into our life, we begin a new way of living, and experience a realignment of our values, attitudes and even goals.

In using this term, the Lord illustrated the scope of change that can happen within a person. He was also declaring the power and grace of God to create such a transformation.

When Does Jesus Say This?

The beginning of [John 3](#) describes how a member of the Jewish elite, named Nicodemus, sought to meet with Jesus. A Pharisee, he came to the Lord in a rather secretive way, perhaps fearing the disapproval of his peers.

“Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night...” ([John 3:1-2](#)).

Nicodemus seemed to recognize and acknowledge the authority of Jesus, saying, “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” ([John 3:2](#)).

Jesus replied in verse 3 that anyone who wants to truly honor God must take a bold step – to be reborn. Nicodemus, puzzled by this instruction, wanted to know more.

“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!’” ([John 3:4](#)).

As He answered this question, Jesus gave a fuller explanation of what it means to be reborn.

“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again’” ([John 3:5-7](#)).

He added that this process is a work of God, so we won’t fully understand it. As Nicodemus again expressed confusion, Jesus gave a rebuke about how those who are religious leaders weren’t grasping spiritual matters ([John 3:9-12](#)). Then, the Lord allowed Nicodemus a glimpse of the sacrifice He would make for mankind’s salvation.

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. 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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” ([John 3:14-18](#)).

Jesus finished the teaching by reminding Nicodemus that those who choose to be reborn and follow God will “come into the light,” able to live righteously while looking forward to their eternal reward ([John 3:19-21](#)).



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How Do We Know if We Are Born Again?

Many see being reborn and being saved as very closely related. Being saved means escaping God's wrath because we have professed our faith in Jesus. At that moment, we are also reborn spiritually. Both phrases refer to our new state as children of God. They hint at the lifelong journey we've started of becoming more like Christ as well.

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel mentioned them in a beautiful passage of hope God offered the Israelites.

“For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleanness” ([Ezekiel 36:24-28](#)).

Becoming a born-again believer is a huge, and also intensely personal, decision to make. And because the first work God does is internal, it may take time for any outward changes to appear. But each of us goes through a similar journey to get there that includes:

- Accepting that we cannot make ourselves right and realizing our need for God
- Admitting that we are sinners and asking for God's forgiveness
- Stating our faith in Jesus and what He did for us, and vowing to follow Him

If we have sincerely sought to become right with God and have received Jesus as our Savior, we can rest in knowing we have been born again. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “If you declare 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](#)).

What Are the Traits of a Person Who Has Been Born Again?

When a person agrees to become reborn in the spirit, it results in some wonderful blessings right away.

A new status as a child of God.

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” ([John 1:12-13](#)).

A new strength to stand against sin.

“No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God” ([1 John 3:9](#)).

A new sense of purpose in life.

“...just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” ([Romans 6:4](#)).

A new anticipation about the future.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you...” ([1 Peter 1:3-4](#)).

Over time, God will bring out qualities that will equip that person to show His love to others and build His Kingdom. A well-known passage from the book of Galatians gives an impressive list of those kinds of traits:

“But the [fruit of the Spirit](#) is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)).

Jesus’ message to the Pharisee Nicodemus applies to every believer: if we truly desire to follow God, we must let Him radically renew our spirits. The pastor and author John F. Walvoord puts it simply and positively: “As is true of man who is born naturally and receives a human nature from his parents, so man born anew receives a new nature, a new capacity for service and devotion to God.”

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