

*Nuggets and Gems from the Bible*

LIFE'S  
REGENERATING —  
THE NEED  
OF  
THE MORAL

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***Living Stream Ministry***

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## LIFE'S REGENERATING— THE NEED OF THE MORAL

In [chapter two](#) of the Gospel of John, we see the principle of life and the purpose of life set forth. The principle of life is to change death into life, and the purpose of life is to build the house of God. From [chapter three through chapter eleven](#) the writer then relates nine cases to prove the principle of life set forth in the first sign in [chapter two](#). He uses these cases to signify some spiritual and meaningful points. These cases first expose the condition and need of man, and then they reveal how the Lord can deal with all the conditions and meet all the needs of man. Life meets the need of man's every case. We must realize that life here means the Lord Himself, the Word which was God and which became flesh. Although the Lord might have dealt with thousands of human cases, John selected only nine of them to illustrate how the Lord as life could and still can meet the need of every human case.

### MAN'S CONDITION AND NEED

Let us see, first of all, the condition of man in

each case. The first case in [chapter three](#) is about a high-class, moral person who came to the Lord. He was a superior gentleman, highly cultured, very religious, God-seeking, and God-fearing. The second case in [chapter four](#) shows forth exactly the opposite condition. The first case is about a moral man; the second case is about an immoral woman. The former is about a mild, high-class person, while the latter is about a wild, low-class person. This wicked woman had five husbands and was living with a sixth who was not her husband. The third case in [chapter four](#) is about a young man who was sick and about to die. The fourth case in [chapter five](#) is about a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. He was utterly weak and unable to move even one step. The fifth case in [chapter six](#) is about the hungry multitude who were seeking something to feed on. The sixth case in [chapter seven](#) is about the thirsty people whose thirst could not be quenched by the best religion or by anything of this life. The seventh case in [chapter eight](#) sets forth a sinful woman who committed a terrible sin and who was under the condemnation and bondage of her sin. The eighth case in [chapters nine and ten](#) concerns a blind man who was born blind. Finally, the ninth

case in [chapter eleven](#) is about Lazarus who died and was buried for four days.

The conditions of the people mentioned in these nine cases represent the conditions of all men. Some men are good like Nicodemus, while others are wicked like the Samaritan woman. Others, like the young man in Capernaum, are dying. Most are weak like the man who was sick for thirty-eight years. They desire to do good, but they do not have the strength to fulfill that desire. They know religion, but, because they are weak, they do not have the power to live out its standards or fulfill its regulations. Other people are hungry, craving for something to enjoy, while some are thirsting for something more than their human life can offer them. There are some people whose thirst is so great that nothing in this life can satisfy them. Some people continually commit sins and are under the condemnation and bondage of their sins. Some, like the blind man, are blind, not physically, but psychologically and spiritually. Finally, the last condition of all men is death, for they are in death and, at the same time, are on the road to death. They are dead already and yet they all will die later. All men are dead men who are going to die. Therefore, these nine cases portray the true conditions of all men. These conditions

speaking of man's need, which only the Lord as life can fully meet.

## **EACH INDIVIDUAL'S CONDITION AND NEED**

All the conditions of these nine cases can also be found in each individual person. One person can possess all the conditions of all men. For example, you may be a good man, or, at least you have the intention of being a good man. You may also be quite religious, fearing God and seeking Him. At the same time, however, you may also have done something mean, something which is not honorable. You may be a religious gentleman with high morals and yet have done something low. On the one hand, you are a high-class person; on the other hand, you are a low-class person.

You are also sick and about to die morally and spiritually. You may be very living physically, but you are dying morally and spiritually. Even physically you are also dying day by day. Apparently you are living; actually you are dying.

Another condition of yours is that you are a weak person. You know that you should do good and you know what is right, but you lack the strength or the power to do it. Perhaps you are not yet twenty-five years old, but you have been

sick for “thirty-eight years.” You know that you should love others, but you are weak; you want to keep all the laws of God and you desire to please God, but you are unable to do so. In other words, you have the desire to do good, but you do not have the ability to perform what you desire. You need the proper power of life.

Hunger and thirst are also two items of your condition. Many times you feel that you are a hungry person; many times you are thirsty for a Ph.D. degree, for money, or for pleasure. You need the Lord as the bread of life to satisfy your hunger and you need the Lord’s living water to quench your thirst.

Another condition that can also be found in you as an individual is your sinfulness. You are sinful. You are a sinner and you commit sin. You need the forgiveness of the Lord as well as deliverance from the bondage of sin.

In another respect, you are in a state of blindness. Even though you may have perfect vision with your physical eyes, you cannot perceive the meaning of human life, and especially you cannot see spiritual things. You are blind and you need the Lord to open your eyes and to give you sight.

Your last condition is that of a dead man who eventually will die. Have you ever realized that

you are a dead person? No one is alive in spirit—everyone is dead. You need the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus.

Every person has, in his fallen condition, every aspect of these nine cases. Every person, to a certain degree at least, is in each of these conditions. Every condition is an indication of everyone's real need.

## **THE LORD'S SUFFICIENCY**

We have seen the condition and need of man in these nine cases. Now we must see how the Lord is able to come into man's fallen condition and meet his every need. In every case, the Lord presents Himself as the One who could fulfill the deficiencies of man. These nine cases fully prove the Lord's sufficiency to meet man's every need.

The first case shows that the Lord can afford us regeneration, which even a superior person such as Nicodemus needed that he might have the life of God for the entrance into the kingdom of God. The case of the Samaritan woman, a sinful and unsatisfied woman, reveals how much the Lord can satisfy such a person with His living water. For the case of the dying man, the Lord is the healing power of life. The case of the weak man who had been sick for thirty-eight years

demonstrates the enlivening power of the Lord's life. In the case of the hungry multitude which needed something to feed on, the Lord presents Himself as the bread of life. In the case of the thirsty people, the Lord assures them that He can quench their thirst by the flowing river of living water. In the case of the woman living in sin, we see that the Lord is able to deliver such a one from her sinful situation and release her from the bondage of sin. In the case of the blind man, the Lord opens his eyes and gives him sight. Finally, in the case of Lazarus, who had died, had been buried, and was even decaying in the grave, the power of the Lord's resurrection life is fully exhibited.

In all of these cases the Lord's sufficiency in meeting man's need is adequately proved. There is not one of man's conditions that He cannot solve. There is not a need that He cannot meet. He is able! He is sufficient! He can deal with all our problems and supply all our needs! Praise His name!

## **REGENERATION**

In [John chapter three](#) we find the first case, that of Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a person of the highest class, and we need to consider his virtues and attributes. Firstly, he was a teacher

with the highest attainment in education. As a teacher of the Jews, he taught the Old Testament, the Sacred Word. Secondly, Nicodemus was “a ruler of the Jews.” He had a position with a certain amount of honor and authority. Thirdly, he was an old man. As an old man, he had a good deal of experience. He was a man full of experiences. Fourthly, he was undoubtedly a moral man, a good man. If you look at the way he talked, you will realize that he was a moral man. Fifthly, Nicodemus was a man who was truly seeking after God. Although he was somewhat fearful of the Pharisees, he still came to the Lord Jesus by night. This indicated that he was seeking God. Sixthly, he was very humble. Nicodemus was an old man of perhaps sixty or seventy years of age, yet he came to see the Lord Jesus, who was only a little over thirty years of age. That such an experienced, educated, and elderly man would come to see someone much younger than he indicates his humility. Furthermore, although Nicodemus was a teacher, he addressed the Lord Jesus as Rabbi. Among the Jews, to call a person Rabbi means that you are humbling yourself. Seventhly, Nicodemus was an honest man. His speech reveals his honesty. Can you find a better person

than Nicodemus? He was a man of a superior standard, high attainment, and morality.

When Nicodemus came to the Lord Jesus, the Lord took the opportunity to reveal the true need of mankind. In His conversation with Nicodemus, the Lord revealed that regardless of how good we are, we still need regeneration. Regeneration is the first need of man. Moral people, as well as immoral people, need regeneration. Many Christians hold the mistaken concept that people need regeneration simply because they are fallen. However, if man had never fallen, he still would have needed regeneration. Even if Adam had not fallen he still would have needed regeneration. That is why God put him in front of the tree of life. If Adam had partaken of the tree of life, he would have been regenerated.

Since we are human beings, we all have a human life. The problem is not a matter of whether or not our human life is good or bad. Regardless of the kind of human life we have, as long as we do not have the divine life, we need to be regenerated. To be regenerated simply means to have the divine life besides our human life. God's eternal purpose is that man be a vessel to contain the divine life. Our being with our human life is a vessel to contain God as life. The divine life is

God's goal. The divine life is God Himself. God's goal is that we, as people with a human life, receive the divine life into our being as our real life. This is the true meaning of regeneration. Many Christians are not clear about this fact, thinking that regeneration is necessary simply because we are fallen and sinful. According to this concept, we need to be regenerated because our life is bad and cannot be improved. This concept is wrong. I say once again that even if Adam in the garden of Eden had never fallen, he still would have needed to be regenerated, to be born again, that he might have another life, the life of God. Therefore, to be regenerated is to receive the divine life, God Himself.

What is the meaning of regeneration? Regeneration is not any kind of outward improvement or cultivation; neither is it only a mere change or conversion without life. Regeneration is a rebirth which brings in a new life. It is absolutely a matter of life, not a matter of doing. Regeneration is simply to have life other than the life we already have. We have already received the human life from our parents; now we need to receive the divine life from God. Hence, regeneration means to have the divine life of God in addition to the human life which we already possess. Therefore,

regeneration requires another birth in order to possess another life. To be regenerated, to be born again, does not mean to adjust or correct ourselves. It means to have the life of God, just as to be born of our parents means to have the life of our parents. To be regenerated is to be born of God ([John 1:13](#)), and to be born of God is to have the life of God, that is the eternal life ([John 3:15-16](#)). If we have the life of God, we are the sons of God. The life of God gives us the right to become the sons of God ([John 1:12](#)), because by this life we have the divine nature of God ([2 Pet. 1:4](#)) and have the life-relationship with God, that is the sonship ([Rom. 8:15](#); [Gal. 4:5-6](#); “adoption” in Greek is “sonship”).

## **MAN’S AND RELIGION’S FALSE CONCEPT**

Due to human culture and Jewish religion, Nicodemus thought that man needed to behave. Since man must have good conduct and worship God in a proper way, man needs much teaching. Nicodemus considered Christ to be a teacher come from God. This indicates that he might have thought that he needed better teachings to improve himself. But the Lord’s answer in the following verse unveiled to him that his need was to be born anew. To be born anew is to be regenerated

with the divine life, a life other than the human life received by natural birth. Hence, his real need was not better teachings, but the divine life. Nicodemus was seeking for teachings which belong to the tree of knowledge, but the Lord's answer turned him to the need of life, which belongs to the tree of life (cf. [Gen. 2:9-17](#)). The Lord told Nicodemus very emphatically that what he needed was to be born again. Thus, man's real need is to be regenerated with another life. All of us must realize that what we need is not religion or teaching to regulate and correct us, but another life, the life of God, to regenerate us. Man needs regeneration because he needs the divine life. Regardless of how good you are, you still do not have the life of God. You need another birth in order to receive the life of God with His divine nature. Although you may feel that you are good, yet you must admit that you do not have the life of God with His divine nature. Another birth, regeneration, is necessary that you may receive another life, the divine life of God.

### **MAN'S REAL NEED—TO BE BORN ANEW**

When Nicodemus heard that he had to be born anew, he thought that this meant that he had to go back to his mother's womb and come out

again. His answer proves that he did not know how to exercise his spirit. He misunderstood the Lord's word. Then the Lord Jesus said that which is born of the flesh is flesh. He seemed to be saying to Nicodemus, "Regardless of the number of times you go back into your mother's womb and come out again, you still will be flesh. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Nicodemus, there is no need for you to say that you can't go back to your mother's womb and be born a second time, for even if you could do it, you would still be the same. Even if you could be born anew in that way and be young again, after another sixty or seventy years you would be the same as you are now. You do not need that kind of rebirth." Nicodemus did not need another birth in time, but another birth in nature.

## **BORN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT**

"Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" ([John 3:5](#)). Since Christians throughout the centuries have exercised their mentality instead of their spirit, they have formulated many different interpretations of this verse. Fifty years ago I was taught that water in this verse denotes the Word and that

to be born of water and the Spirit means to be born of the Word and the Spirit. [First Peter 1:23](#) and [James 1:18](#) were given as references. Another interpretation, a most terrible way of expounding this passage of Scripture, is that the water refers to the mother's own birth water. According to this interpretation, to be born twice is firstly to be born of the water in the mother's womb, and secondly to be born of the Holy Spirit. This interpretation is utterly illogical, and we should forget it.

We need to have a logical and solid standing as we approach this verse. We must admit that Nicodemus and the Lord Jesus were speaking with plain words. If the Lord Jesus had spoken to Nicodemus with words that were not plain, He would have given him some sort of interpretation. Perhaps Nicodemus would have asked the Lord what He meant by water. However, the Lord Jesus did not interpret His words and Nicodemus did not request an interpretation of them, proving that the words were plain to them both. Thus, the words, "of water and the Spirit," should have been plain to Nicodemus, without any kind of explanation. Since the same words were spoken by John the Baptist in [Matthew 3:11](#) to the Pharisees, they should have been fully understood

among the Pharisees. John told them that he baptized in water, but that Another was coming who would baptize with the Spirit. After hearing this word of John's, the Pharisees probably discussed it among themselves, for, at that time, it was a new saying. Since the Pharisees were quite serious, after hearing such a word spoken by John the Baptist, they must have had a long talk about it. As Nicodemus was a Pharisee, he should have been familiar with these terms. Now Nicodemus, as one of the Pharisees, is talking with the Lord, and the Lord speaks these familiar words to him, saying that to be born anew is to be born of water and of the Spirit.

Water is the central sign of the ministry of John the Baptist, that is, to bury and terminate people of the old creation. In his ministry, John the Baptist came to baptize with water. He told people that they had to repent and realize that they were fallen and good for nothing except burial. Everyone who heard John's preaching and repented was baptized in water. This means that, as fallen men of the old creation, they were being terminated. That was John's ministry. Furthermore, John told people that his ministry was for the ministry of the Lord Jesus. As water is the central sign in the ministry of John the Baptist, Spirit is the central

significance of the ministry of Jesus, that is, to germinate people in the new creation. These two main concepts, water and Spirit, when put together, are the whole concept of the matter of regeneration. Regeneration, to be born anew, is the termination of the people of the old creation with all their deeds and their germination in the new creation with the divine life. What does it mean to be born again? It means to be terminated by John's ministry through water and to be germinated by Jesus' ministry through the Spirit.

How can we have the ministry of John the Baptist today? We have it by repentance. Whenever a person repents, confessing that he is a fallen being who is good for nothing, that is the acceptance of John's ministry. There is no need, of course, for John literally to be present, for his ministry is in the New Testament already. When we preach the gospel, we firstly preach the ministry of John. That is why we preach very much about sin and repentance. We are today's John the Baptist. I was a John the Baptist forty years ago, and many people repented as a result of that ministry. That was not my ministry; it was John's. Whoever accepts this ministry, in one sense, is terminated and, in another sense, is born of water. Following repentance, everyone must believe in

the Lord Jesus and accept His ministry of life in order to be germinated. In order to accept salvation, we need both repentance and faith. To repent is to receive John's ministry, and to believe is to accept the ministry of the Lord Jesus. This is regeneration. As believers we all have passed through this process of regeneration. Now we understand what it means to be born of water and of the Spirit.

The Lord made Nicodemus' situation very clear to him. Everyone, whether he is good or bad, needs to be terminated through water and then germinated with the divine life. This is the second birth, a birth not of the mother's womb, but of water and of the Spirit.

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