



So what does this mean practically for how we live as people who have been born of the Spirit?

First, receive what you cannot earn. If you have never surrendered your life to Jesus Christ and asked the Spirit of God to do the work of new birth in you, today is the right day. Religion will not get you there. Trying harder will not get you there. Attending church more faithfully will not get you there. But the Spirit will. And He will do it the moment you stop trying to produce it yourself and simply open your hands and receive it. The same wind that changed the thief on the cross, that stopped Saul on the Damascus road, that turned a frightened night visitor named Nicodemus into a man who would eventually stand at the foot of the cross to claim the body of Jesus at great personal risk, that Spirit is present in this room right now.

Second, stop measuring your standing before God by your performance. One of the most persistent and damaging habits in the church is the attempt to use our behavior as the gauge of our spiritual health. We feel close to God when we are doing well and distant from Him when we are not. But the new birth is not a transaction that can be undone by a bad week. The Spirit who gives birth from above is not in the habit of un-birthing what He has created. Your standing before God rests on the finished work of Jesus and the regenerating work of the Spirit, not on the inconsistency of your daily performance.

Third, trust the Spirit to do in others what He alone can do. One of the most freeing truths in this passage for anyone who cares about the people in their lives who do not yet know Jesus is this: you cannot convert anyone. Only the Spirit can do that. Your job is not to manufacture a new birth in your neighbor or your adult child or your coworker. Your job is to speak the truth, to live the life, to be the fragrance of Christ in the room. The Spirit blows wherever He pleases.

There is a wonderful illustration of this in Acts chapter 16. Paul and his companions have traveled to the city of Philippi. On the Sabbath they go down to the river where they expect to find people gathered for prayer. Among those gathered is a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira. And Luke records this detail with beautiful precision: The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.

Paul spoke. But the Lord opened her heart. That is the pattern. The preacher plants, the witness waters, but God gives the growth. The wind blows wherever it pleases, and the Spirit opens hearts in His own sovereign timing. Pray for the people in your life with the confidence of someone who knows that the God who spoke to Nicodemus in the middle of the night is the same God who can reach anyone at any time in any circumstance.

Fourth, never lose your wonder at being born from above. The new birth is not just the beginning of your story with God. It is one of the most remarkable and costly things that has ever been done in the history of the universe. The Spirit of the living God took up residence in your mortal body and made you a child of the Most High God. You did not earn it. You did not deserve it. And you cannot lose it. That is worth sitting with for longer than we usually do.

The wind blows wherever it pleases. And the same sovereign, powerful, mysterious, undeniable Spirit who moved over the face of the waters at creation, who breathed life into the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel, who fell like a rushing wind on a room full of disciples at Pentecost, who stopped a murderous Pharisee dead in his tracks on a road to Damascus, who opened the heart of a purple cloth dealer by a river in Philippi, is the Spirit who lives inside of you.

That is not the beginning of a religious obligation. That is the beginning of a life.