

A NEW YOU

Try and think of a time that you tried something for the very first time. Did it change you? Are you better or worse for it?

In many ways our experiences contribute to the person we are today. From something as little as trying a new food, to as massive as your first romantic relationship; once you experience something, it changes you. Sometimes the change is good change, and sometimes we look back and long for the days of old, but each new experience in some way has helped to shape the people we are today.

Huge areas of scientific study have argued how much our experiences impact the person we become versus the nature of who we are when we are born. I think it is fair to say that although we may not all agree as to how much impact each of these things have, our experiences definitely play a large part in shaping the person we become in life.

So what if I told you that God has something new that He wants to do in you? What if, regardless of your past (whether good or bad), or what has shaped you to where you are today, that there is a better future waiting for you than you are currently living. In fact, God promises that He can do so much that it is like we step into a new version of ourselves.

Read [John 3:1-21](#).

What does this passage tell you about Jesus? What does it tell you about the new life that God desires for you?

Just as a point of clarification, sometimes when people read this passage it can be easy to confuse being born of water and Spirit to mean that in order to find salvation and step into the new life we must be baptised in water and receive the Holy Spirit. That isn't the point the Bible is trying to make at all. Pharisees (religious teachers of Judaism) used the term "water" in relation to being cleansed by the Spirit. With that in mind, it is possible that a better English translation could read 'no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water; that is, the Spirit.' As usual, when we start to dig beneath the surface of the story, there is something deeper going on here.

Jesus is trying to introduce Nicodemus to the life he could have, if only he was willing to step into it. He gives Nicodemus the keys to enter this new life. In verse 14 Jesus explains that the key to this new life, this born again experience, is something to do with a snake that was lifted up, and a Son of Man that also must be lifted up. The snake reference goes all the way back to the Old Testament. The Jewish nation were pilgrims in the desert and a great plague of snakes attacked them. God instructed them to hang a bronze snake from a pole in the middle of their camp, then said that everyone who looked to the snake and believed that they would be made well again could be healed. It sounds pretty counter-intuitive because they had to look to a snake, which was the cause of all their problems to begin with, for their healing. But there are some massive hints in here to what Jesus is trying to communicate with Nicodemus.

In verses 15 and 16, Jesus describes what it is that we need healing from and how we can overcome that. We are not trying to be healed from a snake bite but from death itself. In the words of Jesus, if we can enter into this new birth then we won't 'perish' but will receive eternal life. So what is His key to discovering that? Just like the snake was hung on a pole, He would be hung, but on a cross. And just like they had to look to a snake to be healed from snake bite, we must look to His death in order to be freed from death and to inherit eternal life. This is how we step into the new life He has for us. We look to Him crucified, and we believe that He

saved us by dying there. This is the key to stepping into this new life.

Paul, one of the major authors of the New Testament, describes it this way.

Read [2 Corinthians 5:17](#).

[In your own words, what is it that this text is trying to say?](#)

'The old has gone, and the new has come.' Paul describes doing life with Jesus like you are made brand new. Now that doesn't necessarily mean that you won't still remember your life before or lose all the baggage of life's experiences, but it does mean that in Christ your future is always better than your today. There is always hope and when life doesn't go your way, now you get to face those times knowing the God of the whole universe is right there with you through it all.

The real question is then, how do we allow this new birth experience to shape and change us? You might be thinking, well it's all well and good to look to Jesus on the cross and claim some vague new life over myself, but what does that mean? How does that work? And what does it look like in my life? Let's see how Paul describes this new life in another one of his writings.

Read [Philippians 3:7-11](#).

[What has changed in Paul as he has stepped into a new life with Jesus?](#)

Something incredible has happened inside of Paul. As he has stepped into new life with Jesus, his desires have shifted, and in so doing, his whole reason for being has transformed. It all comes back to where we started today's session talking about how our experience shapes who we become. Paul has had an experience with Jesus and now all he longs is for a greater and deeper experience with Him. Things that he once looked to to shape who he was and build himself up he now describes as being utter garbage in comparison to knowing or experiencing Jesus Christ. The more he experiences Jesus, the more he wants to experience Jesus, and as this happens he is being shaped into a completely different person. He is more graceful and compassionate than he used to be, he is a better leader than he used to be, and he desires better things for himself and others than he used to desire. His entire purpose for life has shifted, and it's so much more and so much bigger than it used to be.

So how do we start to have this new life experience? It all boils down to one thing, an experience with the risen Jesus. And the only way to have this experience is to give Him your time. Any time that we give to God, He can turn up in and shape us and change us in powerful ways. If we give Him no time at all, He respects our right not to choose His life. But if you start to give Him some of your time, you will see what He can do in you.