

*DEVOTIONAL*

*GUIDE*

ALIVE MINISTRIES

STUDENT CONFERENCE

2008

**SUR-PRISE!**

“No way! You can’t be serious!”

“Yeah..., but that’s what Mom said.”

“This is so weird. So you’re, going to have a baby sister?!”  
Amanda asks.

“...or baby brother,” you reply. “I can’t believe it either. When Mom told me this morning I was like, ‘No way.’ I mean, Mom is nearly forty years old. And who ever heard of having a baby brother or sister when you’re in high school?! It surprised me to death – I still can’t believe it!”

Over the next few days you still can’t quite shake the strange feeling about having a new baby brother or sister. It’s even playing around in the back of your mind as you go to church the next Sunday. And you’re really surprised when the pastor reads John 3:7 for his sermon text. He says, “Jesus told Nicodemus,

*‘Do not wonder that I said to you, “You must be born again.”’*”

You start to think, “Wow! As if my Mom having a baby isn’t strange enough.... Now you tell me that Jesus told this guy he had to be *born again*?! And don’t be surprised about it? Yeah, right!”

The preacher goes on to explain that there are two different kinds of birth. One birth is the process that results in a mother delivering a new baby into the world to be a special part of their family. The other birth is the process where new life is given to a person’s spirit – the part within each of us that God created to live with a special relationship with Him as our Father.

As you’re shaken from your thoughts you realize that the pastor is reading from John 3 again, and he’s down to verse 16:

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

You start thinking about the way that the little baby inside of your mother has a new life – where there used to be nothing, now a new person is growing. And then you start to see the connection between that and the new life that God offers. Down in your heart – down there where it feels all empty and dead – God can start a new life in you. Not a physical life like your new baby brother or sister..., but a new spiritual life – a life that will let you be part of a special relationship with God.

Stop and think about this for a moment. We all know about babies being born – where once there was nothing, by a miracle of God a new life begins. And God can do that same kind of miracle within each person’s heart – in the place that is empty and lifeless, He can give new life. If you’ve been saved, this has happened to you. If you haven’t been saved, then one day God will let you know down in your heart that the time is right to make that commitment and for that new spiritual life can begin inside you too.

Has God ever made that change inside you? \_\_\_\_\_

Read John 3:16 again:

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

Who is the Son that this verse is talking about? \_\_\_\_\_

How does this verse say a person receives eternal (spiritual) life?

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We’ll look more at what it means to believe in Jesus in our next devotional.

## SPIRITUAL FACTS OF LIFE

Continuing his sermon the pastor says, “We all know the ‘facts of life’ – that is we know what is involved in that process of a baby being born. We know that there has to be a mother and a father, and without them there can be no baby.

“There are also spiritual ‘facts of life’ that explain how a person can be born again – that is, what things are essential to the process of a person being born spiritually. Let’s look at these....,” the pastor says. Here are the items your pastor discusses.

Repent – Repent means to be genuinely sorry for your sins, and genuinely desire to turn away from them. But what is sin? How would you define or explain what sin is?

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If you said that sin is disobeying anything God says, then you’re right. Take a moment to think of some of the sins that you have done. Are you sorry for them? Do you want to quit doing them?

Admit. After repenting we must confess (which means to admit). But admit *what*, and admit it to *whom*? The Bible says,

*If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins....* (see 1 John 1:9)

So, to whom does this verse say that we are to confess? \_\_\_\_\_

What does the verse say that we are to confess to Him? \_\_\_\_\_

When people are truly sorry for their sins and admit those sins to God, that implies that in their heart they want God to forgive them. What does this verse say that God is willing to do for the person that admits his or her sins and wants God’s forgiveness?

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Believe. In order to be spiritually born again a person must also believe. But believe what? Well, basically it means that you believe that Jesus was a real man that died for you so that God could forgive your sins and take you to heaven.

But believing is more than just what you think or know. It’s also what you commit to. It’s like being in front of several vending machines where everything costs a dollar, and all you have is one dollar bill. After you look at the options you say, “I believe I’ll have the root beer,” and put your dollar in the soda machine and press the root beer button. What you believed, you committed to. When the Bible talks about our need to believe in Jesus, it’s the same kind of thing – we must commit to Him and Him alone to get us to heaven.

God’s persuading. There’s one other very important thing that is necessary to be born again – God’s nudging or persuading within your heart (John 6:44). We sometimes call this *conviction*. This is a sense within you that God makes you realize that you have sinned and He wants you to make things right with Him.

It’s important to realize that God begins this persuading when He is ready, not when we want Him to. Think about the process of a baby being born. Does the baby decide when it’s time for the delivery to start? No way. The delivery starts when the *mother’s* body says that it’s time, and her muscles and all the other stuff starts working to deliver the baby. Spiritual birth works the same way – the process of our spiritual birth doesn’t begin when *we* want to begin, but when *God* decides that the time is right. And it feels good knowing that God is in charge of it all, and that He will start that process in each one of us when the time is right.

Is God stirring your heart to let you know that He is ready for you to be born again? If He isn’t, that’s fine. You might say a prayer telling God that you are ready when He is ready, and ask Him to help you to understand when the time is right – and you can be confident that He will.

However, if you do sense that God is telling you that the time is right to be born again, then this would be a great time to pray to God telling Him that ...

- ...you are sorry for your sins (if that is what you really feel),
- ...you admit (confess) your sins and ask Him to forgive them,
- ...you believe that Jesus died for you and you commit your life to Him and ask Him to be your savior.

If you do that, then God will save you.



## SPIRITUAL GROWTH

“Well, is there a place to write down the first times she sneezed and hiccuped, too?” you jokingly ask your mom.

“Don’t be cute, smarty,” she replies with a smile. “Okay, maybe it’s a mama-thing, but I just like to write in Nicole’s baby book all the “firsts” that she does – the first time she crawls, her first words, her first steps, her first haircut...”

“...and all the way to pictures of her first grandchild, I bet!” you add with a laugh.

“Well, I don’t know about that. But we better put this away and get ready for another first – her first birthday party. People will be getting here soon.”

As you help your mom get ready for the party you think about how much your baby sister has grown in the past year. In a way she doesn’t even seem like a baby any more. She stays awake a lot more than she did when she first came home from the hospital. She can move around on her own – although it’s not much fun for you when she sneaks into your room and messes with your stuff. She’s really fun to play with now. And she’s so much bigger than she was when she was first born.

And you start thinking about what it will be like in the next few years. As she grows she will be able to do so many more things. In another year or so maybe she’ll be big enough for you to take her to the church’s big Easter egg hunt. Not long after that she’ll be riding a tricycle..., and then even a bicycle. Maybe she’ll be on the little league soccer team like you were. Maybe she’ll even go to the same school that you did.

Part of growing up means being able to do more. As our muscles grow stronger, and our coordination improves, our bodies are able to do more things. Growing up also means learning more things, making you smarter and (hopefully) wiser.

Just like children should naturally grow physically and mentally, those of us who have been born again should grow spiritually as well. As we take in the spiritual food, it should help us to grow and eventually be able to do things for God and our fellow Christians that we couldn’t do when we were spiritual babies.

Have you grown up enough spiritually that you can do some of the “big people” ministries?

- Can you help with some of the ministries that your church does?
- Are you willing to help some people that are lonely by spending a little time with them?
- Will you help the elderly with some yard work or house work?
- Is there something in your church service that you can help do?
- Could you volunteer to help your church’s children’s ministry?

In each of these examples you can see that as we mature spiritually, we move our focus off ourselves and on to others. Think about the things that are most important to you and the things that you’ve worked hardest for in the past few days. What you spend your extra money on and your free time doing? Do these things show that you are most interested in others, or in yourself? Do they suggest that you have some spiritual growing up to do?

It would be terrible if Nicole never grew any bigger and wasn’t able to do the things that bigger kids do. But the same problem can happen to us spiritually. Are you any more spiritually mature than you were a year or two ago? Are you growing up..., or just getting older? Are you able to do more for God now? Are you actually doing more? Or do you need to get serious about your spiritual maturity?

Maybe you have never thought about what you can do for God and for your church. Take a little time to ask God if you have grown up enough spiritually to help in His work. Ask Him if there is anything that He would like for you to do. Then let your pastor or youth leader know that you would like to help, and what ideas you might have. Maybe in time they will find a way to use you or your ideas in some of the church’s ministry.

### SPIRITUAL REPRODUCTION

“I can’t believe it’s been eight years!” you tell D.J. as the two of you are driving back to visit with your family. “Today is Nicole’s eighth birthday – it just doesn’t seem possible.”

“Yeah, but a lot has happened in the past eight years, too,” D.J. replies, “...including our getting married a year ago!”

“Yeah, a whole lot has happened!”

As you think about it, it’s really hard to believe what all has happened. Seems like it was just last week that you got the news that your mom was going to have a baby. Wasn’t it only a couple of days ago that you were helping to feed Nicole and watching her grow. But today you are going to the surprise birthday party for that baby sister! But that won’t be the only surprise today, because you and D.J. will announce that just this morning you found out that you are parents and your new baby should be born in nearly eight months!

Once you tell everyone the news, Nicole is more excited about the new baby than she is about her own birthday. She thinks that it is so cool that she’s going to be an aunt. “I bet I’m the only aunt in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade!” she tells everyone.

As you watch Nicole’s excitement you think about how it seems the whole thing has come full circle. Eight years ago you were the one shocked and excited about a new baby, and now that ‘baby’ is the one that’s excited about yet another baby – and this time, *you* are the parent!

You remember your pastor’s sermon over eight years ago comparing a baby’s birth to a person’s need to be born again, and you start wondering if there is a spiritual parallel to this coming ‘full circle’ that you’re feeling. You were once the baby yourself, then later you were excited about someone else’s baby being born, and now you’ve got a baby about to be born. So, the next Sunday you ask the pastor about these things.

“Sure, there is a spiritual parallel to that ‘coming full-circle’ idea. We are born again when we are saved – just like I said in the sermon you remember. As we mature spiritually, we enjoy the news when we hear of others that are born again. But you know, the time

should come when we can lead others to Christ – when we share the Good News of God’s love to them, and they make the commitment to God that we have.”

“So, it’s like being a spiritual parent?” you ask.

“Yes, I think that would be a pretty good way of saying it,” the pastor replies. “But there is one big difference. It takes several years from the time that a baby is born before he or she can be a parent of another child. But the person that has been born again can share what happened to them and help others see their need to be born again – and they don’t have to wait..., they can do it right away.

If you have accepted Jesus as your savior, take a few minutes to think about when that happened. What did you feel in your heart? Who told you about salvation, and what did they say? Although the exact words are not so important, what did you feel and believe in your heart when you prayed for God to say you?

Okay..., now find at least two people to share that with. If they are not saved, let them know that God loves them and wants to take them to heaven. You can even share the “Spiritual Facts of Life” that you studied earlier in this booklet.

*Hello. I am Pastor Don Burke and I wrote the devotionals in this booklet. If you have a questions I hope you will email me and ask. If you’ve made a decision to ask Jesus to be your savior, or witnessed to someone and you want to talk about it, I’d love for you to hear from you. My email address is [PotosiPastor@gmail.com](mailto:PotosiPastor@gmail.com).*