

Chapter 3

It's after dark, when Nicodemus comes to Jesus. Nicodemus, a Pharisee, tells Jesus he knows he is from God, but he still doesn't really understand what that means.

Jesus could have taken this opportunity to lay out every detail for him. He could have sent him back to the other Pharisees with a clean, well thought out explanation. But, instead, he tells him he will have to be born again if he really wants to understand. Instead of laying out a masterful apologetic argument, he leaves him wanting more.

Sometimes we have a tendency to want to argue so well that we will force someone to agree with us. Jesus, however, decides it's not worth trying to argue Nicodemus into understanding.

Nicodemus tells Jesus he wants to know how to be born again. How many times have you wished someone would ask you that question? But Jesus doesn't give him four spiritual laws or a special prayer. Instead, he tells him it is like the wind. That's the opposite of clarification.

What Jesus is saying is that we don't follow a pattern to be born again. That's the Spirit's job. Jesus describes how people are either drawn to him or repelled by him, and he says those who God is working in will be drawn to him. Whether they know it is happening or not.

Jesus is telling Nicodemus, a man who is used to studying things in order to understand them, that he will have to be patient. He will only gradually come to understand over time. Is that your approach? Do you allow time for the Spirit to work?

It isn't always easy in our fast food, microwave, high-speed internet culture, but we need to allow people to gradually see God. It takes time for people to recognize that God is at work in and around them. And, you need to trust that they will grow more and more interested as the Spirit reveals himself through their interactions with Christians like you.

Trying to speed up the process will only end up causing us to look down on people for not understanding quickly enough and that certainly isn't what Jesus came to do.

Next, we see that people who once flocked to John the Baptist are now leaving him to follow Jesus. John's disciples are becoming increasingly worried as his fame slowly fades away. They want their favorite person to get more credit. But, John responds that this is a good thing. His followers still haven't grasped that this has been the point all along. Now that Jesus has begun his ministry, it's time for John to fade into the background.

Think about this. If John the Baptist is happy to see his crowds moving on and away from him as they understand the value of Jesus, then shouldn't we do the same? Shouldn't we be glad to see people following after Jesus in whatever direction the Holy Spirit leads them?

John's job is to draw people in and introduce them to Jesus. And that's exactly what he does. It isn't his job to take them all the way through the journey, from start to finish. We all have a role to play, and that role is given to us by God.

So, is it selfish or prideful of us to want people to continue following us forever? It's an understandable desire, but we need to be humble enough to recognize that God can and will use others too.

Where does our traditional church experience fit in with all of this? John draws people to himself, much like many Sunday services are designed to do. "Come and see!" we cry. But then he does something we don't often do. He sends people away from himself to follow Jesus as they continue to live their lives. Are you allowing people to do that?

This doesn't mean people shouldn't continue attending Sunday services. On the contrary, this is where many people can learn about God together. Where Christians can spend time together and build one another up. But, when it comes to knowing Jesus, there has to be more than a scheduled gathering to learn about God in a sterile environment. We have to go out and live the things we learn. As we do that, we're going to gain a whole new understanding of Jesus and his words by actually living them out. The separation from real life provided by a church building is only helpful to a certain point.

John's disciples receive their first introduction to Jesus at the Jordan River, and a church service or small group might be where we get our first introduction. But if the things we learn and the changes that take place inside of us never translate into our daily public lives, then what is it really worth? What's the point of a faith that doesn't express itself anywhere except within the safety of Christian segregation?