

One of the things that pastors, doctors, fire-fighters, and police have in common that they all receive occasional night calls. And most pastors would agree that some of our most significant opportunities to help people have come in response to night-time calls, usually of an emergency nature.

However, not all of our night calls are that significant. Dr. Robert Ozmont of First United Methodist Church in Atlanta received a call one night about 2:00 AM. He did not know the lady who called; she had found his number in the yellow pages. She had a problem. The truth is it was not an emergency; certainly, it could have waited until morning. Nevertheless, Dr. Ozmont tried to offer what advice he could. Then he asked, "*Ma'am, do you belong to a church in Atlanta?*" "Yes," she replied. "*I am a member of Calvary Presbyterian.*" "*Why,*" asked Dr. Ozmont, "*didn't you call your pastor about your problem?*" "*I thought about that,*" she said, "*but my pastor works so hard that I just hated to bother him in the middle of the night.*"

The gospel of John tells us about a night-time call Jesus received from a prestigious Jew named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a ruler, a member of Israel's Supreme Court. He was wealthy and a man of strict religious standards. He came to Jesus by night because it would have been politically embarrassing for him to come during the day. It would have been just as bad for President Biden to ask guidance from Donald Trump. **The Jewish establishment, of which Nicodemus was a prominent part, regarded Jesus with contempt.**

Jesus did not criticize Nicodemus for coming to see him at night. He was willing for their meeting to be confidential if that's the way Nicodemus wanted it. Jesus seemed to acknowledge that there are some legitimate things that we all do that we would just as soon not have publicized.

I read a story about two sisters that had whooping cough at the same time. The hacking and coughing continued around the clock. Their Dad, a Methodist preacher, was told by someone that a mixture of whiskey and honey would reduce the discomfort and the coughing. He was desperate enough at that point to try most anything. There must be no more uncomfortable person in all the world than a Methodist preacher in a small town looking for a half-pint of whiskey. I'm sure any Father would have gone to the liquor store at night if it had been open for their sick children. **Nicodemus was just like those sick children...in need of medicine and delighted that Jesus was willing to meet him under cover of darkness.**

You see, Nicodemus had a big problem. Depression was stalking him like a hungry lion. He had everything that was supposed to make life complete: *money, political power, family, and the approval of his religious group.* Yet, there was still a vast, gnawing emptiness within him. **So, he went to Jesus for help.**

Jesus' solution for his struggles was, "*Nicodemus, you must be born again.*" Nicodemus replied, "*What? Is there some way I can turn back the time clock; return to my mother's womb, and repeat the birth experience?*"

Jesus must have smiled as he shook his head. Here you have a classic case of miscommunication. Like the little boy who visited his grandmother in New York City. She took him on a tour of the city, including the huge and imposing St. Patrick's Cathedral. When they got to altar area down front she said, "*Under here is where all the cardinals are buried.*" He looked in amazement and said, "*you mean the whole team?*"

My favorite mis-communicator of all time was a businessman who attended a week-long business convention in Miami Beach. Actually, he was an officer in the business and therefore was terribly busy with convention arrangements. Suddenly, it occurred to him that he had been at the convention three days and had not communicated with his wife back home at all. So, during a convention break, he rushed down to the hotel lobby, purchased a picture postcard and stamp, scribbled a quick message on it, mailed it, and then rushed back to the convention session. He did it a little too fast, really, but he made only one small mistake. He left just one letter off one word. The card his wife received read as follows: "*Dear honey, having a wonderful time. Wish you were her. Love, Jim.*"

Nicodemus was thinking in physical terms, but Jesus was declaring spiritual truth. Jesus was saying, in effect: *"Nicodemus, when you were born, the forces of selfishness and sin had a head-start on you. In your natural state you can't tune in on spiritual truth. Your frequencies are foiled up."*

The Bible says it this way: *"The natural man does not receive the gifts of God for they are spiritually discerned."*

The first birth everyone has is a natural, physical one. The second birth is by the Holy Spirit. When that second birth happens, God takes over the controls in a life, restraining the forces of evil and selfishness. His spirit permeates our subconscious. *Gradually we become people with new values, new purposes, new joy, new power. Then we can hear and receive spiritual truth.*

St. Paul expressed it as follows: *"If any man or woman can be in Christ, he or she is a new creation."*

The good news I declare today is that any person can be BORN AGAIN. *One need not be haunted by mistakes of the past or fears of future judgment.* One can be marvelously fulfilled and vibrantly creative today –YES, RIGHT NOW!

The Holy Spirit is the obstetrician for second births. But our wills are involved. **In order for the Holy Spirit to make a new person out of someone, that person must make two prior decisions.**

FIRST, ONE MUST REPENT. *That means to get honest with God, to admit that we have violated his standards and have sought our ways above his way.*

Our secular culture tries to make jokes about sin, refusing to take it seriously. God hates sin almost as much as he loves sinners. **Sin is the cancer wrecking his creation.** Asking how big a sin must be in order to be serious is like asking a physician how big a malignant tumor has to be in order to be dangerous. **All sin is lethal.** *Unforgiven sin wrecks human beings in this world and separates our eternal souls from God in the next life.*

The Evil One wants us to do almost anything with our sin except repent for it. He wants us to rationalize it; to compare our sins to other people who are worse; and to make excuses. Anything except humble, honest repentance.

King Frederick II, an Eighteenth-Century king of Prussia, visited a prison in Berlin one day. The inmates jumped at the opportunity to plead their cases directly to the king. **All except one. One prisoner sat quietly in the corner.**

This aroused the king's curiosity. The king quieted the other inmates and approached the man in the corner. *"What are you in for?"* he asked. *"Armed robbery, your honor."* The king asked, *"Are you guilty?"* *"Yes sir,"* he answered. *"I entirely deserve my punishment."*

The king then gave an order to the guard: *"Release this guilty man. I don't want him corrupting all these innocent people."*

How ironic! Only when we admit our guilt can that guilt be washed away. One of the greatest promises of scripture is this one: *"If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (I John 1:9)

Repentance is the first step toward new birth. Think for a moment. Is there some failing in your life that you have never admitted to God?

The Second Decision Necessary for New Birth Is...TO BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST, GOD'S SON AS OUR SAVIOR & LORD.

When we call Jesus "Savior," we are saying that HE DIED FOR US!! If I had to express my faith in just four words I would say, "Jesus died for me." Someone might ask, "How could the death of Jesus Christ on a cross take the place of or have the power to erase the sins of all persons of all generations?" I would have to answer, "I don't know."

The mystery of the Cross is too big for me to get my mind around. But, thanks be to God, I can get my heart around it. **I believe that through that Cross my sin was cancelled and my soul saved.**

Years ago, the evangelist Gipsy Smith expressed it this way: *"I am not afraid of the cross. I know that men used to come there to die, but since He died, they come there to live."*

But we must go one step further. It is not enough to call Jesus our Savior; **WE ALSO MUST NAME HIM IN OUR LIVES... "LORD."** *The word "Lord" means commander in chief, first priority, highest commitment.*

Lots of folks are happy to believe that Jesus died for them. But they aren't willing to let him be their Lord. Something or someone else comes ahead of Jesus. It could be money or family or status or power. If anything, or anyone means more to you than does Jesus, you cannot honestly call him Lord. **Those who are "born again" claim Jesus Christ as both Savior and Lord.**

Let me share a sports story told by the outstanding Christian coach at Florida State University, Bobby Bowden. Back in the 1920s there was a great major league baseball player named Goose Gosling. His team was in the World Series one year. In the bottom of the 9th inning of the final game, the score was tied. Goose came to the plate. He got the kind of pitch he wanted and hit a solid line drive over the shortstop's head. It rolled all the way to the wall. The left-fielder fumbled the ball as he tried to make the play. Goose rounded second. As he neared third base, the coach was waving him toward home. The ball reached the catcher a half-second before Goose did. Goose lowered his shoulder as he had been taught and hit the catcher as hard as he could. The ball squirted loose and Goose Gosling stepped on home plate. The fans erupted in an uproar and poured onto the field. In all the confusion no one noticed the first baseman retrieving the ball, racing to first, and tagging the base. He then appealed to the umpire, claiming that Goose had never touched first base. The umpire agreed with the first baseman and called Goose out.

Many people are like Goose Gosling. They seem to be altogether successful. Everybody is cheering for them. They glitter with success. But if in the course of living, they never repent—never admit they “missed first base” and claim Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, **they never even make it to first base.**

Where do you stand today? The single most important question that any person can ask another is this: **Have you repented of your sin, your moments when you missed 1st base?** The answer to that question will determine the quality of your life here on earth and the destination of your life for all eternity. Those who respond with a genuine "yes" to that question are TRULY "born again" PERSONS.

MY FRIENDS...IT IS TIME TO CLAIM JESUS AS BOTH YOUR SAVIOR AND YOUR LORD—IT IS TIME TO GIVE HIM THE REIGNS TO YOUR PHYSICAL LIFE AND ETERNAL SOUL... AND SEE HOW FULL LIFE CAN TRULY BE. Amen.