

Date:

*Who is Jesus to you?*

**PRAY** Lord, as well as knowing about you, please show me how I can have a relationship with you as I read your Word today.

**READ** John 3:1–21

**REFLECT**

I've worked in non-profit organisations all my life and that's given me many opportunities to try my hand at fundraising. I once telephoned a man I had never met; I was hoping to begin a relationship that would someday lead to a contribution. I had my phone script all prepared, but before I got even a few seconds into it the man cut me off with, 'What's the bottom line; how much do you want?'

In a way, that's what Jesus does to Nicodemus; he cuts him off and goes straight to the bottom line: you must be born again (3:3,7). Jesus interrupted Nicodemus' theological script because he wanted to address the real issue: in spite of his high position and religious knowledge, Nicodemus was outside God's kingdom (3:3,5). It reminds us that just going to church, or even knowing a lot about the Christian faith, does no good unless we've been truly born again.

But what exactly does it mean to be 'born again'? Today, millions of people claim they are. Some think of born-again Christians as unpleasant zealots. In the US, some think of them as a voting block to be manipulated. But Jesus defined them as people who believe that he is the Son of God, the one who died on the cross to save humankind from sin (3:14–18). And when a person finally accepts that truth, they begin a whole new life.

That was a lot for Nicodemus to swallow all at once (3:9), and there's no evidence here that he accepted Jesus' message. But the seed planted that night began to grow; later Nicodemus defended Jesus (John 7:50,51) and finally he identified himself publicly as a follower of Christ (John 19:38–42). Some people put their trust in Jesus the first time they hear the gospel message. For others, believing in Jesus is a process with many steps. But no matter how it happens or how long it takes, the bottom line is this: you must be born again.

**APPLY** Where are you in the process of believing in Jesus?

**PRAY** Spend a few minutes talking to Jesus, imagining that he has personally addressed this challenge to you: 'You must be born again'...

Date:

*Who is Jesus to you?*

**PRAY** 'I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame' (Psalm 34:4,5).

**READ** John 4:1–42

**REFLECT**

The woman in our passage today was carrying more than just a water jug as she walked to the well; her heart was burdened. How do we know?

*She was a Samaritan* – a group of people ostracised by the Jews.

*She was a woman* – many at that time, including even the disciples, would have considered her a second class citizen.

*She had lived a sinful life* – one that produced a series of broken relationships (4:17,18).

No wonder she went to the well by herself in the heat of the day. Many people today struggle with a deep sense of shame. Some can't forgive themselves for a terrible sin in their past; others have been deeply wounded by someone else's sin. Either way, sin and shame can leave us feeling broken, unworthy and alone. But sometimes our lowest moment is when we are closest to God (Psalm 34:18).

That's what happened to this woman. She met Jesus and he used the encounter to change her life for ever. First he revealed that he was the source of 'living water' (4:10,13,14); she probably thought he meant 'running water' from a moving stream. But he meant the Holy Spirit; that's what Jesus offers to all who follow him. Next he told her that soon everyone could have a relationship with God; everyone, not just the Jews (4:22), would worship God in spirit and truth (4:23,24). But this would only be possible because God's promised Messiah had arrived (4:25,26).

By the end of the encounter, the woman accepted Jesus not just as a man or as a prophet; she believed in him as 'the Saviour of the world' (4:42). And that's what turned her burden of sin and shame into a source of joy. She could invite her friends to meet the man 'who told me everything I ever did' (4:29,39) because he had forgiven her. And that joy is available to everyone who believes in Jesus today.

**APPLY** How would you feel if you met someone who knew all your darkest secrets?

**PRAY** Lord, you know everything I've ever done. I ask you to forgive me and then fill me with your living water.