



Series Title—Spiritual Growth
Part One—Where It All Begins
John 3:1-7 NLT

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Objective Sentence: *Everyone can grow spiritually by making nine commitments the Scriptures detail in the life of a devoted follower of Jesus.*

Introduction: There should be a definite beginning and end which are polar opposites of one another in the life of a follower of Jesus Christ. Some people begin and end their walk with the Lord looking very much the same at the end of their spiritual lives as they looked in the beginning—this cannot and should not be.

John 3:1-7 NIV Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him. In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth no one can see the kingdom of God unless he or she is born again. V5 I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he or she is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying—You must be born again.
In order for you to grow spiritually ...

#1. *You Must Be Born Again [This is Where it all Begins] (Romans 8:9, 11-14 ...if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. Now if the Spirit of Him that raised up Christ from the dead dwell in you then He that raised up Christ shall give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. [v 12 NLT Therefore dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do.] v13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if you through the Spirit put to death the deeds of the flesh you will live. For as many as led by the Spirit of God, there are the children of God).*

- a. *1 Peter 1:23 AMP* You have been born again [that is, reborn from above—spiritually transformed, renewed, and set apart for His purpose] not of seed which is perishable but [from that which is] imperishable *and* immortal, *that is*, through the living and everlasting word of God. **[Acts 2:38-39; Romans 6:4, 23; Ephesians 2:8-9]****

1. **Old Things are Passed Away (Half the Distance—Half Hearted Followers of Jesus)** *(2 Corinthians 5:17 AMP Therefore if anyone is in Christ [that is, grafted in, joined to Him by faith in Him as Savior], he or she is a new creature [reborn and renewed by the Holy Spirit]; the old things [the previous moral and spiritual condition] have passed away. Behold, all things have become new [because spiritual awakening brings a new life].*
 - a. *Pastor Dan:* So many who claim to be followers of Jesus only go half the distance with God by seeking only to be **forgiven** of their sins but **not washed** from them.
1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators [sexually immoral], nor idolaters [greedy people], nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites [male prostitutes], ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers [*gossipers* whose words are used as weapons to abuse, insult, humiliate, intimidate, or slander], nor extortioners [swindlers] will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were **washed**, but you were **sanctified**, but you were **justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.
 - b. *Pastor Dan:* Many go half the distance with Jesus and center God around their lives instead of centering their lives around God [**Philippians 2:12-14**].
 - c. *Pastor Dan:* You are only going half the distance with Jesus if you are only a hearer of God's word but not a doer of God's word [**Colossians 3:1-6, 14-17**].
 - d. *Pastor Dan—Peter rebukes Jesus—Matthew 16:22:* You are only half the distance for Jesus when you are attempting to move Jesus in your direction instead of allowing him to move you in His direction
 - e. *Pastor Dan—Mary—Mark 3:20-21* You are only going half the distance with Jesus if you seek for Jesus to surrender to your plan for Him instead of surrendering to His plan for you. *(Mark 3:20-21 AMP Jesus came to ... [Capernaum], and a crowd formed ... so [many] that Jesus and His disciples could not even eat a meal [together]. ²¹ When His own family heard this they went to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He is out of His mind*
 - f. **2 Peter 1:2-8** Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self control, to self control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound you will not be barren or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - g. *Pastor Dan:* Many go half the distance with Jesus in their church life by attending church and not being the church. *Pastor Dan:* You are only going half the distance with Jesus if you stop doing bad things but do not practice doing good things. My dad used to pay my sister to be good but he said that I was good for nothing. If you can miss church and the body of Christ not feel the loss then you are not making a contribution that matters.
2. **All Things Have Become New** *(2 Corinthians 5:17 AMP Therefore if anyone is in Christ [that is, grafted in, joined to Him by faith in Him as Savior], he or she is a new creature [reborn and renewed by the Holy Spirit]; the old things [the previous moral and spiritual condition] have passed away. Behold, new things have come [because spiritual awakening brings a new life].*

- a. **Mark 3:17** Jesus gave James and John, two of His disciples the name Boanerges or Sons of Thunder. **Ellicott and Whitby:** Christ gave James and John this name from a foresight of the heat and zeal of their temper, of which they quickly gave an instance in their desire to call down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans (**Luke 9:54**). John and James had an untempered impulsive reckless hotheaded zeal in following Jesus. John's desire to stop the work of one who cast out devils (**Luke 9:49**), or the prayer of the two brothers that they might sit on their Lord's right hand and on His left in His kingdom (**Matthew 20:21**). Doubtless, Jesus in giving them this name, had respect to three things: the warmth and impetuosity [impulsiveness] of their spirits, their fervent manner of preaching, and the power of their word.
- b. **Pastor Dan:** Paul began by taking the lives of Christ's followers and he ended his life by giving it for those who were followers of Jesus. **Galatians 2:20** I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. **1 Corinthians 15:31** ... I die daily.
- c. **Pastor Dan:** Mark began his ministry as a quitter and ends as a winner. **Acts 13:13-14 NLT** Paul and his companions then left Paphos by ship for Pamphylia, landing at the port town of Perga. There John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ But Paul and Barnabas traveled inland to Antioch of Pisidia. **Acts 15:37-38** Barnabas agreed [to revisit the cities where they had ministered on the 1st missions trip] and wanted to take along John Mark. ³⁸ But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work. ³⁹ Their disagreement was so sharp that they separated. **2 Timothy 4:11** Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you when you come, for he will be helpful to me in my ministry.

Closing and Invitation: James Cash Penney was born near Hamilton, Missouri (population 1,535) September 16, 1875. His dad and grandfather were ministers and taught young James scrupulous honesty. By the time he was eight J.C. was buying his own clothes and earning his own money for his needs.

His first venture as a retail proprietor was in a butcher shop in Longmont, Colorado which he opened in 1899. He failed miserably in the meat business almost before he got started because he refused to bribe an important local hotel chef with a weekly bottle of bourbon. Penney said, "I lost everything I had, but I learned never to compromise.

J.C. began working at a mercantile store [old time general store] before moving in 1902 to Wyoming to open his own store—the Golden Rule—in the mining town of Kemmerer, Wyoming. When he first started out in business on his own, things did go so well and he had a physical collapse. He ended up in a little hospital [sanitarium], rebuilding his health. One day as he was walking down a corridor in that little rehabilitation center, he heard someone playing hymns on the organ. J.C. Penney walked in there, bowed down and said, 'Lord, I'm giving my life to You.' After getting out of the rehab center the Lord dealt with his heart and he felt convicted and convinced that even while in debt and poverty, he should begin returning a tithe to God. As he began to obey the Lord and tithe, Mr. Penney began to prosper. He opened more stores and in 1913 he changed the name of his stores to the J. C. Penney Co., Inc. J.C. Penney department stores sprang up all over America. The more he prospered the more he gave—he regularly gave 10% of his earnings and sometimes as much as 30% to the Lord. When he retired in 1946, more than 1,600 J.C. Penney stores were in business. He built an empire without ever compromising his values or principles. He neither smoked nor drank "I believe in adherence to the Golden Rule, faith in God and the country ... I would rather be known as a Christian than a merchant." He died at the age of 95 in 1971.