

# Sunday July 29 through Sunday August 5

- Please make sure that the children take their activity packets with them over the next couple of weeks. These are perfect opportunities to have some quality time with the family and to reinforce the sermons over the next couple of weeks. We hope that they will be conversation starters at home.
- Pastor Robert will continue his Sermon Series *Entering the Kingdom of Heaven*. This week he will focus on being blinded by the world.
- UMYF will meet this evening at 5 pm.
- Boy Scouts will meet Monday at 7 pm.
- Prayer Team will meet Wednesday at 6 pm. All are invited to join in this time of prayer with God.
- The August Fellowship Supper will be Wednesday at 6:30 pm. This is a potluck dinner and everyone is encouraged to attend and bring along a friend.
- Choir Practice will be Wednesday at 7 pm. All are invited to join in lifting up their voices to praise God.



## Sunday July 29

10:00 am—10:45 am Sunday School  
11:00 am—12:00 pm Morning Worship  
5:00 pm—UMYF

## Monday July 30

7:00 pm—Boy Scouts

## Tuesday July 31

No Scheduled Activities

## Wednesday August 1

6:00 pm—Prayer Team  
6:30 pm—Fellowship Supper  
7:00 pm—Choir Practice

## Thursday August 2

11:00 am—Susanna Wesley & Wesleyan Circles

## Friday August 3

9:00 am—MEOC

## Saturday August 4

No Scheduled Activities

## Sunday August 5

10:00—10:45 am Sunday School  
11:00 am—12:00 pm Morning Worship  
5:00 pm—UMYF Meeting



## FROM OUR PASTOR

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### Stages of Religious and Spiritual Growth

In my sermon on the Parable of the Sower I said that I am the path, the rocky ground, the thorny ground, and the good soil. The path, the rocky ground, thorny ground, and good soil are stages of religious and spiritual development. The path, rocky ground, and thorny ground are tilled with religion. The good soil is spiritual and therefore, the Kingdom of God.

We know that an infant will pass through many stages of development to become a healthy, functioning, and contributing adult. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be “born again.” Nicodemus had eyes to see and ears to hear, but could not understand how a grown man could be born again. Jesus told him that he must be born of water and spirit. Nicodemus was nurtured in the water of his mother’s womb. Jesus invites Nicodemus to be nurtured in the Spirit of God.

In the story of Nicodemus we meet a mature religious person. Nicodemus knew there must be more than religious ritual, tradition, doctrines, and service. Surely, Nicodemus came to visit Jesus cloaked in the darkness of night seeking to see if Jesus’ message of the Kingdom of God held that something ‘more.’

Nicodemus, Peter, and Paul were born again. Their religion had prepared for something more! They were born of the Spirit. Their lives produced 100, 60, and 30 times what God had sown into their hearts. I contend that most of what we read in the Book of Acts and the Epistles are stories of those who were ‘born again’ encountering various stages of spiritual development.

The following comes from George Barna. George studies trends in the Church. He describes himself as a Born Again, Evangelical, Bible Believing, Christian. He has written countless books and taught even more seminars on church trends and church growth. Through his research he offers 10 Stops in the Christian Faith. The Book is titled: Maximum Faith

Barna describes transformation as a series of ten stops:

- (1) ignorance of the concept or existence of sin
- (2) aware of and indifferent to sin,
- (3) concerned about the implications of personal sin,
- (4) confession of and forgiveness for sin,
- (5) commitment to faith activities,
- (6) experiencing a prolonged period of spiritual discontent,
- (7) experiencing personal brokenness,
- (8) choosing to surrender and submit fully to God,
- (9) enjoying a profound intimacy with, and love for God, and
- (10) experiencing a profound compassion and love for humanity.

His interviews indicate that only 11% of adults get past stop 5, and only 2% get past stop 7.

My journey convinces me that Stop 1-5 develop mature religion. Nicodemus, and Paul were at Stop 5 when they were born of the spirit of God. Much of Paul’s writings reveal his journey through Stops 6-10. The Book of Romans focuses on Paul’s experience of Stops 8- 10.

I share Barna’s Ten Stops hoping that you will see that an infant-disciple will pass through many stages of spiritual development to become a healthy, functioning, and contributing person who bears fruit of the Kingdom of Heaven. Barna’s research helps me see why churches in western culture are in steep decline. Like Nicodemus, Peter, and Saul/Paul; we are stuck in religion.

One in Christ, Robert