

“Peter Mead presents this essential doctrine in a way that is warm, clear, rich, and readable. Carefully and persuasively, he unpacks the ‘whats,’ ‘hows,’ and ‘whys’ of being born again. The book is accessible and engaging, and the addition of stories and reflection questions at the end of each chapter enables us to consider and imagine the way that the truth of the gospel can and should shape our lives.

This is a lovely and helpful book—a great introduction to those new to or exploring faith and a refreshing encouragement to those who have been Christians for a while.”

Ellidh Cook, Student Worker, All Souls
Langham Place, London

“This tiny book conveys a huge reality: that Jesus came to raise spiritually dead people into abundant life! Peter Mead’s insights into the new birth that Jesus offers are both pastorally wise and profoundly helpful.”

Philip Miller, Senior Pastor, The Moody
Church, Chicago

“When I became a Christian, I didn’t really grasp what had happened. It was an infinitely bigger deal than I realised—it was (and is) beyond my wildest dreams. Peter Mead has given us an excellent primer into this huge adventure. This lovely, heart-warming book opens up the foundational truth of the new birth. As with the rest of the Essentials series, it is short and simple, yet full of deep and delightful teaching.”

Jonathan Thomas, pastor, broadcaster, and author of *Intentional Interruptions*

“I found Peter Mead’s contribution to the Essentials series, *The New Birth*, most helpful, because it weaves together our story with the big story of Scripture through the lens of the work of the Holy Spirit. Taking as its anchor point Jesus’ encounter with Nicodemus, it wonderfully explains the theology and the felt experience of Christian conversion, and all along there are thrilling stories of how the Spirit transformed the likes of Spurgeon, Whitefield, C. S. Lewis, and modern men and women.”

Rico Tice, Co-founder, Christianity Explored

Union

The New Birth

Peter Mead

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Essentials Series Preface

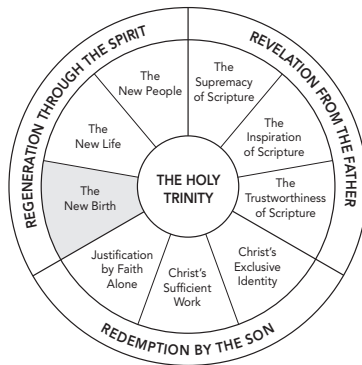
Very simply, this series introduces the essential, non-negotiable truths of the gospel.

And what are they? This is how the apostle Paul speaks of the gospel in the opening sentence of his letter to the Romans:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord. (Rom. 1:1–4)

THE NEW BIRTH

For Paul, the gospel is a God-centred message: it is “the gospel of God.” It is a Trinitarian message: the Father revealing his Son in the power of the Spirit. It is a biblical message: proclaimed “in the holy Scriptures.” It concerns Christ, the Son of God, and his work of redemption. And it is a message made effective in the regenerating power of the Spirit. In other words, the Christian gospel is good news concerning the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and the work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, in revelation, redemption, and regeneration.¹



¹ This diagram was first used and explained in Michael Reeves, *Gospel People: A Call for Evangelical Integrity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 20, 119.

These truths are all interconnected, and together they make up our beautiful, biblical, Trinitarian, Christ-centred, and Spirit-effected good news. This series will introduce, and refresh readers in, this gospel. Ten short books cover the most basic subject areas of the gospel, as shown in the two inner circles of this diagram.

Each book will address its own subject area, and yet the aim of this series is not merely to communicate content. The gospel, after all, is not merely revelation. It is a revelation that *redeems* and *regenerates*. And so, may you be renewed as you read, and brought to worship and enjoy “the glory of the blessed God” (1 Tim. 1:11).

Michael Reeves
Series Editor

Introduction

All over the world, you will find individuals whose lives have been transformed by becoming followers of Jesus. They gather together to praise God for the new life he has given them. They speak to others about the new life offered to all. They mark the moment that this new spiritual life was birthed in them as *the most significant moment of their lives*.

But what does it mean to be “born again”? What exactly is the new birth?

According to Peter, a disciple of Jesus during his earthly ministry, all true followers of Jesus have been “born again to a living hope” (1 Pet. 1:3). They were born again “through the living and abiding word of God” (v. 23).

This invites several questions. How can God's Word birth life and hope into an already living human? Is this just a biblical label for being intellectually persuaded about Christianity? Is it just a description of joining a religion? Is it some mystical experience?

After encountering the good news about who Jesus is and what he did when he died on the cross and rose again, many people experience a transformation in the very depth of their beings. It is not just wishful thinking, nor mere assent to a set of truths. It's not even turning over a new leaf or kickstarting a new habit. It is an entirely new life birthed at the core of a person's being.

The Bible calls this a new birth. It brings new values, new drives, and new affections. We can be changed from feeling spiritual indifference to suddenly caring deeply about Jesus. We can even be moved from a settled position of overt antagonism to profoundly treasuring Jesus, for in the new birth God gives us a new heart that treasures Jesus above all else.

In this little book, we will see what God's Word says about the new birth. As you read, be sure to have a Bible open and look up the verses to check them for yourself.

If you are already a follower of Jesus, you might feel both delight in your salvation and maybe some frustration with your ongoing struggles. Something has changed, but not everything. May this little book excite you with the wonder of what God has done in you—something you could never have earned by your own efforts, but which now is of more value to you than anything else.

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus, may this little book help you understand what God wants to do in your heart and life. You cannot earn his love, but he invites you to lean towards him and ask him to birth his life within you. He will respond to those who seek him with all their hearts.

Perhaps it feels like something is holding you back? It could be that there are questions you still need to have answered. Or it might be human pride that rises up in all of us when

we are asked to humble ourselves. Whatever the hurdle might be, please take it seriously. It is important to get questions answered or to be honest about pride if it's holding you back. After all, we are not asked just to be religious, nor to act like a Christian, nor to simply say certain words (see Matt. 7:21–23; Rom. 10:9).

Ultimately, becoming a Christian means loving Jesus (see 1 Cor. 16:22). Jesus wants our love, not our empty words. And he has done everything necessary to give us the new spiritual life we need. While we could never make ourselves love him, God “shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

As we are born again, God’s love is “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5). So, we can love God because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). The new birth is the best news anyone could ever receive! Let’s explore this glorious gift together, starting with someone who encountered Jesus up close and personal, face to face.

A Matter of Death and Life

“What’s your problem?”

That question could mean trouble or lead to help—depending on who is asking it. When a plumber or a doctor asks it, hopefully help is on the way. But if an aggressive drunk on the street asks it, perhaps trouble is brewing.

But what if God himself were to ask us that question? What *is* our problem? Do we even know? And if we do, can we solve it? Or does God have a solution for us?

What’s our problem?

I think you’ll agree with me when I say that life isn’t perfect. No matter where we are from or where we are now, we see pain and suffering in our own lives and the lives of others. And even though we may have good intentions, we know what it is to aim for something and fail.

If we are honest, we tend to fall short of our own standards all the time.

What is our problem? If our problem is that we are guilty, then we need forgiveness. If we are separated from God, then we need reconciliation. If we are condemned, then we need to be justified. If ignorance is our issue, then we need knowledge. If we are weary, more strength is the answer.

But what if our problem is even more significant, even more severe, than guilt, separation from God, legal condemnation, ignorance, and weariness? What if our most urgent problem is that we are spiritually dead? Does God have a solution for *that*?

In the third chapter of the Gospel of John, we read that Jesus was having a conversation with Nicodemus. This Jewish leader was so educated that he was called “the teacher of Israel” (v. 10) and was a member of the ruling council, wielding significant influence. He belonged to a pious group of Jews known as the Pharisees, so he was religiously impressive to those around him. To the