

LAYING MY SINS AT THE SAVIOR'S FEET

By Emily Platts

My heart seemed to beat in loud, slow-motion thuds as I drove, in my very best clothes, through the dark, rainy streets. I was headed to a meeting with an unknown bishop to whom I was about to confess 10 years' worth of Word of Wisdom failings, morality lapses, and other sins that I couldn't wait to repent of and ultimately leave behind me.

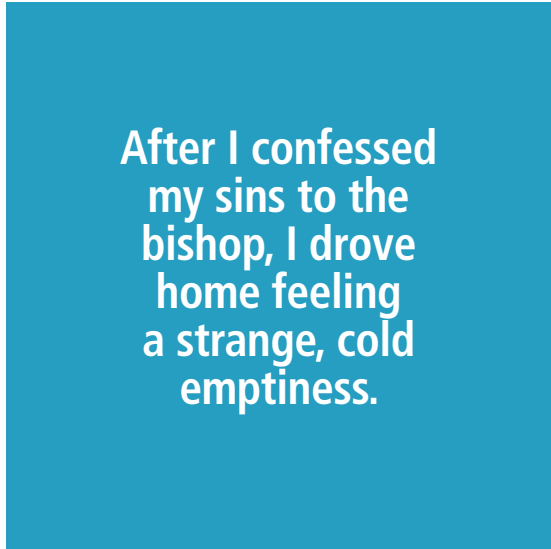
A Series of Poor Choices

After I had gone to college and had an apartment of my own, I found it easy to skip Sunday meetings. Sooner than I could have predicted, I was making poor choices in boyfriends and ultimately living a party lifestyle. I still watched general conference twice a year and went to church on Easter. I continually fooled myself into believing that my daily choices didn't define me or my future. I decided I was just taking a little break from Church

activity. I still felt that I had a general, everyday prayer in my heart and a belief in the Savior and my Heavenly Father.

Nevertheless, my language rapidly changed. My outfits changed. My previously gentle demeanor became pessimistic and suspicious, I was quick to anger, and I spoke of sacred things with crassness and rudeness. Eventually I forgot words to hymns that used to bring me comfort, and I couldn't face praying to my Father in Heaven at all.

Pieces of my previous life as an active member of the Church (100-percent-seminary-attendance winner and general gospel smarty) were slowly extracted from my heart and soul. I felt my body and its natural desires taking dominion over my once-strong spirit. Pangs of conscience struck me now and then, and I would drink more alcohol to squash the feeling.



After I confessed my sins to the bishop, I drove home feeling a strange, cold emptiness.

Drinking more led to more poor choices, which led to sorrow, which led to more drinking to quiet my suffering spirit. Occasionally I would run into other inactive Latter-day Saints in a club or a situation where I knew they weren't being true to their religion. I longed to tell them to turn back and leave this sinful lifestyle. My heart secretly ached for



what I knew too well they, and I, were missing.

The Time to Change Was Now

The pangs of spiritual torment became louder, more frequent, and more unbearable. My seemingly inconsequential choices had added up over the days, months, and years into a life I hadn't planned on. I had always felt a profound pull toward motherhood and a home filled with the Spirit, and I looked behind me and saw my young adult life wasted. How could I reconcile what I had always hoped for with the decisions I was making? The time to change and make things right was now, but how could I approach my Heavenly Father after shunning Him for so long?

One night the anguish in my soul was too much to bear for one more minute. I knew I needed to pray to at least try to get some sense of peace. I didn't know what to say in my prayer other than the truth. I told Heavenly Father about my insecurities, my sorrows, my sins, and my desire to change. The experience that followed was the most sacred and important event of my life. I was lifted and loved and felt with absolute conviction that the Lord was on my side, anxious for

me to return. I knew that He and a crowd of very real angels would help me through the important and holy process of repentance.

I found out which ward I belonged to, discovered the executive secretary's contact details, and made an appointment with the bishop to confess and begin the path toward a new life in the gospel. Now, on that rainy night in October, I walked into a church building I had never set foot in, down a hall and toward an office I had never seen. The priesthood leader with whom I would entrust my personal failings and hopes for the future



FINDING FORGIVENESS

"Sometimes the steps of repentance are initially difficult and painful, like the cleansing of a soiled garment. Yet, they produce purity, peace of mind, self-respect, hope, and finally, a new person with a renewed life and abundance of opportunity."

Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Finding Forgiveness," *Ensign*, May 1995, 77.

was someone I had never met. I was nervous, but my heart leapt to know I would be heading home that night with a serious weight lifted off my shoulders.

The bishop was kind and humble. He tenderly heard my confession. I tearfully described the previous years of my life and my sins against the Lord. It was a powerful meeting, and I felt the Holy Ghost comforting my anguish and strengthening my resolve. We agreed to meet again in a week.

A Strange Emptiness

I left, expecting the spirit of the meeting to cling to me like a new skin. It did not. I drove home with a strange emptiness, trying to discern the feeling of coldness that had crept over me. I went inside my condo and fell to my knees, hoping to feel the same heavenly fire I felt when I first came to the Lord with my desire to leave my sins behind. I was so confused, so disheartened. I sobbed and begged for the Lord to hear me and to comfort me, to help me through the next hard part. I felt nothing.

My dad was a man who had always been an example of honoring his priesthood and having unwavering faith in God. I phoned him, distraught,

and told him of the evening's events. "I don't understand!" I cried. "Where is He? Why do I feel worse than when I went in to see the bishop?" He thoughtfully listened to me demanding answers. Why had the weight on my shoulders simply morphed into a flat emptiness?

"Emily," he said, "for years you have been wearing the shabby and filthy clothing of your choices. Your sins have kept you warm in a way. Now you have laid those tattered rags at the feet of the Savior."

I had only taken the first steps of the repentance process. I had forsaken my sins. Now I needed to let the Savior's sacrifice work in my soul and to embrace the enabling power of His Atonement.

The Chastening of the Lord

That night, pondering the evening's events in my mind, I read in Hebrews 12:

"Let us run with patience the race that is set before us. . . .

". . . My [daughter], despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every [child] whom he receiveth.

“If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with [daughters]; for what [daughter] is [she] whom the father chasteneth not?” (Hebrews 12:1, 5–7).

I felt a burning in my chest and an overwhelming confirmation that this was what was happening to me—I was being chastened. I had reached out and felt His love and His desire to help me return to my true self. I had confessed my sins and felt the love and humble acceptance of a priesthood leader, whose primary job was to aid me in my spiritual journey. Now I was feeling the loving chastening of

a perfect Father in Heaven, who was reminding me that this was only the beginning of my journey and that I needed to requalify for the privileges of the Holy Ghost as a constant companion. I needed to have faith and works to be forgiven, and I had a lot of steps ahead of me before I could be completely cleansed.

I wouldn't wish the dark years of my life upon anyone, and I would never say I am grateful for my sins. But I am profoundly grateful to have had such a sacred and meaningful experience with the gift of repentance and to know of the very real love and concern

my Father in Heaven and Savior Jesus Christ have for me. Through the power of the Holy Ghost, the Lord taught me as He forgave me. His love, mercy, and blessings I never want to forsake again. I also felt the darkness of Satan during this transition in my life, and I know he will always try to thwart our attempts to be closer to Christ.

My testimony of repentance and the power of the Savior's Atonement has grown ever stronger since those fateful months returning to the gospel. Now as a happily married mother of five children, I feel even more the importance of communicating with my Heavenly Father and of repenting continually for my mistakes. Attending the temple, receiving my endowment, and keeping my covenants have brought me great strength and a feeling of closeness to the Lord.

Jesus Christ is the author of our eternal salvation, offering us a peace that “passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). I know the blessings of forgiveness are available to all God's children and that there is no sinful chasm too deep that our Savior will not lovingly and purposefully deliver us from if we are willing to faithfully repent and lay our sins at His feet. ■

The author lives in Utah, USA.

