

Repentance is the process of changing and doing and becoming what God wants us to be so that we can return to His presence.

REPENTANCE THAT BRINGS CONVERSION



One of my favorite stories in the Book of Mormon relates the missionary efforts of the sons of Mosiah as they went among the Lamanites. Teaching a people whose traditions were seemingly not conducive to spiritual growth, these faithful missionaries nonetheless helped bring about a mighty change in these Lamanites. We know that the sons of Mosiah “taught with power and authority of God” (Alma 17:3), but one of the remarkable events in this story is that “as many of the Lamanites as believed in their preaching, and were converted unto the Lord, never

did fall away” (Alma 23:6).

I have watched people come into the Church through missionary work and through being raised in the Church, and I have seen some of them fall away. This process has made me wonder what occurred in the conversion of the Lamanites so that they “never did fall away.”

In teaching the king of the Lamanites, Aaron told him that if he would “bow down before God” and “repent of all [his] sins,” he would “receive the hope” he desired, which was eternal life. The king responded with a simple, heartfelt prayer, asking God, “Wilt

By Elder
James B. Martino
Of the Seventy



thou make thyself known unto me, and I will give away all my sins to know thee, . . . that I may be raised from the dead, and be saved at the last day” (Alma 22:16, 18). Here is a king who sincerely desired to give away his sins, turn to God, and change his lifestyle completely.

As a sign of his conversion, the king sent forth a proclamation that the sons of Mosiah be allowed to “go forth throughout all the land, that his people might be convinced concerning the wicked traditions of their fathers” (Alma 23:3). These traditions included blaming others for their condition, being lazy, and committing serious sins like murder, stealing, and immorality (see Mosiah 9:12; 10:12–13, 17).

Righteous Traditions

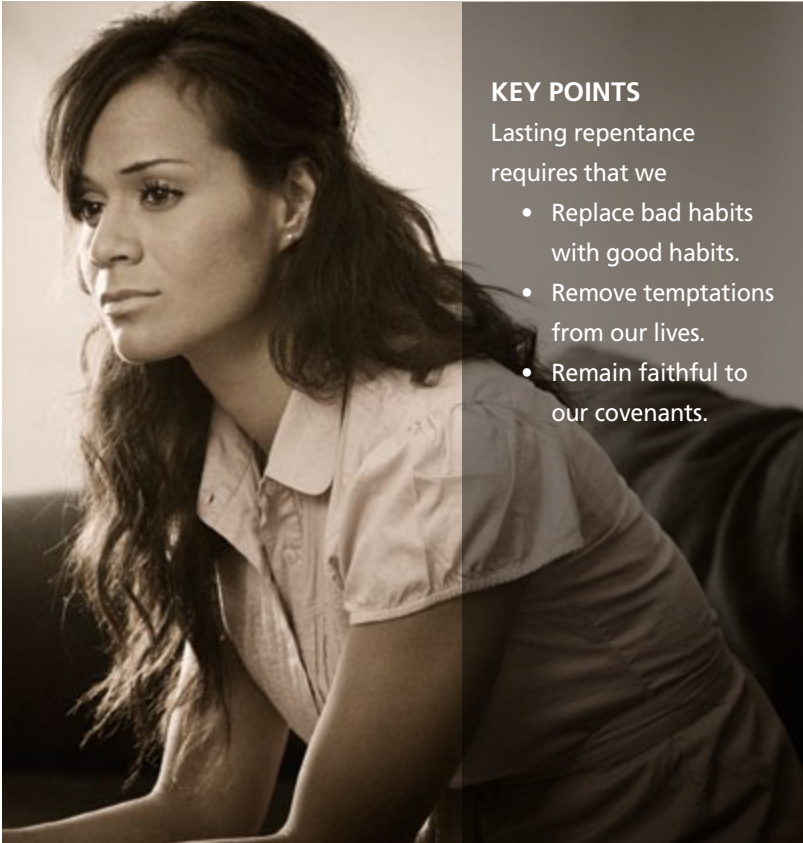
How did these converts become a peaceful people and an example for all to emulate? In Alma we are told that these Lamanites “were brought to believe in the traditions of the Nephites” (Alma 23:5). (In our day we might say they were brought to believe in the traditions of the Latter-day Saints.) Often we think that repentance is the process of only laying aside the wrong we have done; however, equally important is what we do to replace bad habits and traditions with new and better ones.

I remember when my parents joined the Church. I was 16 at the time and had no interest in following them, but it did not take long before I began to see meaningful changes taking place in our home. We had always attended church on Sunday, but now religion



was more than a Sunday activity. We began to hold family home evening and family prayer. We began to read the scriptures. We began to discuss gospel topics and render service to others throughout the week. In other words, our lives were changing and we were adding righteous habits and traditions. These traditions strengthened us through the difficult process of making necessary changes.

The process of repentance, therefore, is more than just asking forgiveness for what we have done wrong. Repentance requires further action on our part. When investigators commit to be baptized, they have felt the



KEY POINTS

Lasting repentance requires that we

- Replace bad habits with good habits.
- Remove temptations from our lives.
- Remain faithful to our covenants.

Spirit and want to repent. Sometimes, however, they fail to maintain their righteousness because they do not “lay down the weapons of their rebellion” (Alma 23:7), whatever they may be.

When the Lamanite converts recognized that their traditions were wrong, they realized they had to change. They decided to take their weapons of rebellion and “bury them up deep in the earth” (Alma 24:17).

In other words, they took away their temptation and placed it where it could not get to them. What about us? Do we likewise remove “the temptations and the sins

which do so easily beset [us]” (2 Nephi 4:18)? Do we stay away from people and places that might tempt us to break the Word of Wisdom? Have we installed an Internet filter on our computer and moved it to a public area of our home? Have we figuratively buried habits that keep us from the companionship of the Holy Spirit?

The Lamanites also began to establish righteous patterns in their lives. This was the key to their success—they filled the vacuum in their lives by implementing new traditions that drew them closer to God.

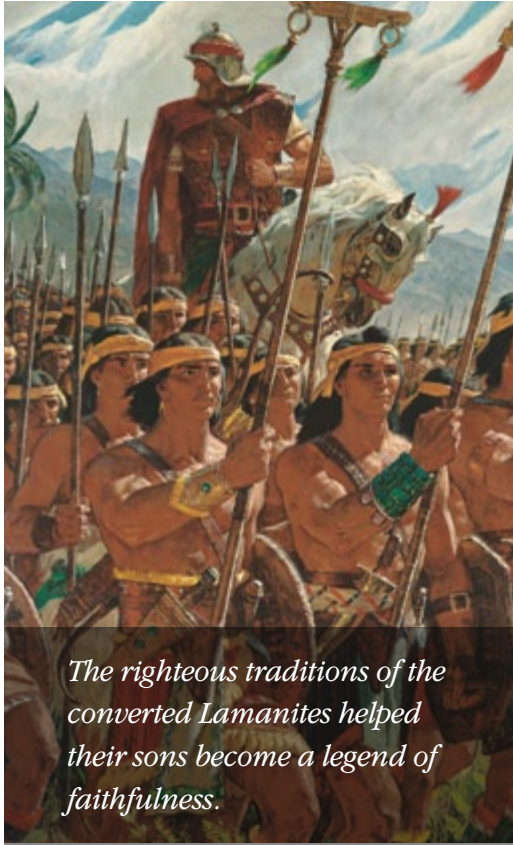
Changing Our Lives

Our goal is to become like the converted Lamanites so that we too might have great desires to be forgiven and, therefore, “not fight against God any more” (Alma 23:7).

“It has been all that we could do . . . to repent of all our sins . . . and to get God to take them away from our hearts,” they said, “for it was all we could do to repent sufficiently before God that he would take away our stain” (Alma 24:11).

Their hearts were changed, which moved them to action. Their repentance led to an application of new traditions that would strengthen them in the face of temptations. These traditions replaced old ones and allowed them to remain strong despite continued testing.

Moved by compassion because of “the many afflictions and tribulations which the Nephites bore for them,” these Lamanites later considered taking up their weapons “in the defence of their country” (Alma 53:13).



The righteous traditions of the converted Lamanites helped their sons become a legend of faithfulness.

But with persuasion from Helaman and his brethren, they remained faithful to their covenants. And what was the result? Their righteous traditions helped the rising generation become righteous; in fact, their sons became a legend of faithfulness. (See Alma 53:15–21.)

The scriptures tell us that their sons “did obey and observe to perform every word of command with exactness; yea, and even according to their faith it was done unto them.” In addition, “they [were] young, and their minds [were] firm, and they [did] put their trust in God continually” (Alma 57:21, 27). This type of faith came from the example

of repentant, righteous parents who established new traditions—the traditions of righteous Nephites—in their homes.

For both new and old members of the Church, here are five practices that can change our lives. These are commandments of God and will help us remain faithful, even in the face of trials and temptations. If we follow them, these practices will allow the Holy Spirit to continue to strive with us and strengthen us as our testimonies grow:

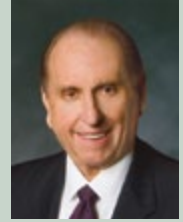
1. Hold personal and family scripture study.
2. Hold personal and family prayer.
3. Hold family home evening.
4. Pay an honest tithe.
5. Serve others by fulfilling Church callings.

If we establish the traditions of a righteous people, we will overcome our weaknesses, progress in our faith, and not fall away.

When my parents joined the Church, their lives changed. Were they perfect? No. But the patterns of righteousness they established changed their lives as well as the lives of generations that will follow.

Holding on to the iron rod and calling upon God in all we do are major parts of the repentance process. So is casting off evil habits and replacing them with righteous traditions.

Whether we are newly baptized or were born into the Church, our spiritual strength comes from consistently engaging in righteous actions that draw us closer to God. Repentance, after all, is the process of changing and doing and becoming what Heavenly Father wants us to be so that we can return to His presence. ■



STAYING ON THE PATH

“Decisions are constantly before us. To make them wisely, courage is needed—the courage to say no, the courage to say yes. Decisions *do* determine destiny.

“I plead with you to make a determination right here, right now, not to deviate from the path which will lead to our goal: eternal life with our Father in Heaven.”

President Thomas S. Monson,
“The Three Rs of Choice,”
Ensign, Nov. 2010, 68.