



**By Elder
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Of the Seventy

Helping you to repent is a special part of a bishop's calling. Your conscience will tell you when you need to talk to him.

You may wonder why you are taught to confess to your bishop or branch president when you have committed serious sins. You may say to yourself, "Isn't repentance a personal thing between me and the Lord? If I have stopped my wrong behavior and have confessed it to God, why do I need to talk with my bishop?"

Why the Bishop and Not Someone Else?

Many youth feel more comfortable confessing their mistakes to their parents or youth leaders. Although your parents and leaders can provide necessary support and counsel, the Lord has declared that the bishop is a common judge in Israel (see D&C 107:72, 74). He has the responsibility to determine the worthiness of the members of his ward. By ordination and righteous living, the bishop is entitled to revelation from the Holy Ghost regarding the members of his ward, including you.

The bishop can help you through the repentance process in ways your parents or other leaders are unable to



WHY AND WHAT DO I NEED TO **CONFESS** TO MY BISHOP?

provide. If the sin is serious enough, he may determine that your privileges in the Church should be restricted. For example, as part of your repentance process, he may ask you to refrain from partaking of the sacrament or exercising the priesthood for a period of time. He will work with you and determine when you are worthy again to resume those sacred activities.

Your bishop will counsel you on what to do to strengthen your ability to resist temptation. He may encourage you to study a doctrinal topic,

such as repentance, and then to share with him what you have learned. He may ask you to visit with him each week to report how you are doing in removing yourself from tempting situations.

When Should I Talk to Him?

You may be thinking, "That all sounds good, but how can I know if what I have done is serious enough that I need to talk to the bishop?" The short answer: "Your conscience will tell you." When you feel the sting

of conscience, act immediately (see Alma 34:31–34).

Regarding repentance, King Benjamin taught, “I cannot tell you all the things whereby ye may commit sin; for there are divers ways and means, even so many that I cannot number them” (Mosiah 4:29). So rather than giving a detailed list of things that you must confess to your bishop, let me share some principles that will help you make that decision.

What Do I Need to Confess?

I know that you have tried to be obedient, but maybe you have made some mistakes—even some serious mistakes. Most of the mistakes people make can be resolved through personal prayer and sincere repentance. Some mistakes, especially those regarding immorality, require confession to the bishop before you can receive the Lord’s forgiveness.

As you think about mistakes you have made, you may be feeling guilty, unsettled, unhappy, or even miserable. If you are experiencing any of those feelings, then you probably need to talk with your bishop about those mistakes.

Don’t try to excuse yourself or rationalize your way out. You may be thinking, “It would be too embarrassing to tell the bishop what I have done. He thinks I am a better person than that. He will be shocked if I tell him what I did. He won’t like me anymore.”

I promise you he will not condemn

you. As a servant of the Lord, he will be kind and understanding as he listens to you. He will then help you through the repentance process. He is the Lord’s messenger of mercy to help you become clean through the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

The Lord has said: “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.

“By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:42–43).

When you confess and forsake your sins, the Lord will forgive you. You will not have to account to Him for those sins when the time comes for you to be judged.

What If I Don’t Confess?

Sometimes a person will stop doing wrong but never confess, when it is needed, to his or her bishop. As a consequence, the person continues to carry the burden of sin alone, instead of letting the Savior take away the burden.

Let me give you an example. One evening a few years ago, I was interviewing adults for renewal of their temple recommends. A middle-aged woman came in for her interview. She had been married in the temple and was active in the Church all her life.

I sensed a deep sadness in her soul. As the interview progressed, I received a spiritual impression. I said

to her, “Sister, I have the impression that you made a serious mistake when you were a teenager that you haven’t confessed to a priesthood leader. Would you be willing to tell me about it?”

She immediately began to cry. She told me that was true, but she had always felt too embarrassed to confess it to a bishop. As she confessed what she had done, she shared sufficient detail for me to make a determination of her worthiness.

The confession of her sin to a priesthood leader marked the end of her repentance process rather than the beginning. She had unnecessarily carried the burden and sorrow of that sin for more than 30 years.

Because she had completed the final step of repentance, her guilt was swept away. I would occasionally see her after the night of that interview. Her countenance became bright, and she was happy.

I want you to know that I do not remember her name. The Lord can remove such memories from bishops. What I do remember is that through confession to her priesthood leader, a middle-aged woman was relieved of feelings of guilt that she had carried far too many years.

Please don’t make that mistake. If you have feelings of guilt but are not sure if you need to confess to your bishop, go see him. Let him help you. Don’t risk carrying an unnecessary burden through your life, which will



leave you feeling miserable. Through your confession to the bishop and your repentance, the Lord will lift that burden from your soul (see Isaiah 1:18).

Why Do I Need to Repent?

Jesus Christ paid the price of the sins of all mankind through His atoning sacrifice. He invites you to repent and avoid additional sorrow and suffering. “Repent, lest . . . your sufferings be sore—how sore you know not, how exquisite you know not, yea, how hard to bear you know not.

“For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent;

“But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I. . . .

“Wherefore, I command you again to repent, . . . and that you confess your sins, lest you suffer these

punishments of which I have spoken” (D&C 19:15–17, 20).

I testify that through His suffering, Jesus Christ already paid the price for your sins. You can be forgiven insofar as you repent. Don’t try to pay the price for your sins. No amount of your own suffering will redeem you; it is only through the Atonement that you receive forgiveness.

May you exercise faith in Jesus Christ and His Atonement. I testify in the name of Jesus Christ that through repentance, including confession to your bishop when necessary, you will become clean. In addition, through the Savior’s grace—His enabling power—you can be strengthened in your ability to resist temptation in the future. Thus, you will have peace of mind and happiness in this life, and you will inherit eternal life in the world to come. ■



OUR GREAT PHYSICIAN

“The Savior is often referred to as the Great Physician.

. . . Guilt is to our spirit what pain is to our body—a warning of danger and a protection from additional damage. From the Atonement of the Savior flows the soothing salve that can heal our spiritual wounds and remove guilt. However, this salve can only be applied through the principles of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, repentance, and consistent obedience. The results of sincere repentance are peace of conscience, comfort, and spiritual healing and renewal.

“Your bishop or branch president is the spiritual physician’s assistant who is authorized to help you repent and heal.”

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “We Believe in Being Chaste,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2013, 44.