

THE GOOD NEWS

of Repentance

*There is great joy in heaven
whenever we repent in
sincerity of heart.*



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Throughout all dispensations and in all scripture, we hear the Savior's plea for all people everywhere to repent. The Doctrine and Covenants refers to the “gospel of repentance” (D&C 84:27). And when we remember that “the word *gospel* means ‘good news’” (Bible Dictionary, “Gospels”), the principle of repentance emerges in a very positive light.¹

Some, however, see repentance as a punishment they must endure for their sins. This view is the exact opposite of the truth; repentance is among our greatest blessings. What can compare to the freedom, confidence, peace, and joy that come from complete repentance and forgiveness? And this feeling is not ours alone, for the Lord has said that “great is *his* joy in the soul that repenteth” (D&C 18:13; emphasis added) and that there is great “joy . . . in heaven over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:7).

What has the Savior Himself taught about the importance and requirements of repentance? And what blessings has He promised to those who repent?



The seeds of repentance are sown, grow, and blossom in the hope that a merciful Savior will forgive and heal us.



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The Savior Has Said We Must Repent

“The Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent,” the Savior told the Nephites (3 Nephi 11:32). Jesus commanded several early Latter-day Saints to “say nothing but repentance unto this generation” (D&C 6:9; 11:9). And He has explained that “the thing which will be of the most worth unto [us] will be to declare repentance” (D&C 16:6).

The importance of repentance is better understood when we realize that it is a key that unlocks the blessings of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice (see Alma 7:13–14). He told His Nephite disciples, “Nothing entereth into [the Father’s] rest save it be those who have washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins” (3 Nephi 27:19). And He explained to Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer that Christ “suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent,” and that “he hath risen again from the dead, that he might bring all men unto him, on conditions of repentance” (D&C 18:11–12).

To Adam the Lord declared, “Teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God . . . or dwell in his presence” (Moses 6:57).

This principle with a promise is certain:

“I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance;

“Nevertheless, he that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven” (D&C 1:31–32).

So our Lord lovingly invites, “Remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done” (D&C 3:10).

The Savior Has Taught Us How to Repent

The Lord has often explained how we may repent by pairing the word *repent* with other requirements of repentance. For example, to the Nephites He said, “Whoso repenteth *and* cometh unto me as a little child” (3 Nephi 9:22; emphasis added), “If ye will repent *and* return unto me with full purpose of heart” (3 Nephi 10:6; emphasis added), and “If they will repent *and* hearken unto my words, *and* harden not their hearts” (3 Nephi 21:22; emphasis added). To Father Adam He said, “Turn unto me, *and* hearken unto my voice, *and* believe, *and* repent of all thy transgressions, *and* be baptized” (Moses 6:52; emphasis added). In modern scripture the Lord has said, “He that repents *and* does the commandments of the Lord” (D&C 1:32; emphasis added), “Repent *and* walk more uprightly before me” (D&C 5:21; emphasis added), and “Unto him that repenteth *and* sanctifieth himself before the Lord shall be given eternal life” (D&C 133:62; emphasis added).

Two of the more challenging elements of repentance are found in

the Lord's teachings to the Saints in Missouri: "By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them" (D&C 58:43). He clarified this when He taught Alma the Elder that the sinner must "confess his sins before thee [a priesthood leader] and me [God]" (Mosiah 26:29). Confession is contrary to our personal pride and requires great humility.

Forsaking or discontinuing a sin is more difficult when that sin is a part of our natural inclination or has become an addictive habit. However, the Savior's repeated instruction is clear: "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11; see also D&C 6:35). The difficulty of forsaking sin is magnified by the possibility of facing that temptation every day for the rest of our lives.

To those who struggle with confession and forsaking sin, consider the Lord's counsel as you seek added strength: "Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21; see also Isaiah 58:6). Fasting can lead to increased spiritual power and self-control, especially when combined with prayer and scripture study. Remember, also, this encouraging promise from the Savior: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

The Savior Will Be Merciful

The seeds of repentance are sown, grow, and blossom in the hope that a

merciful Savior will forgive and heal us. He has promised: "I will have compassion upon you" (D&C 64:2); "[I know] the weakness of man and how to succor them who are tempted" (D&C 62:1); "[I will suit my] mercies according to the conditions of the children of men" (D&C 46:15); "My bowels are filled with compassion towards [you]" (D&C 101:9); "I will be merciful unto your weakness" (D&C 38:14); "As often as my people repent will I forgive them" (Mosiah 26:30); and "I, the Lord, remember [your sins] no more" (D&C 58:42).

In the spirit of His mercy, the Savior has provided some additional joyful ways to petition Him for forgiveness. He has promised forgiveness if we "forgive men their trespasses" (Matthew 6:14), hear the words of His servants (see D&C 50:36), "go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day" (D&C 59:9), share the gospel with others (see D&C 4:2; 31:3–5), and study the scriptures (see D&C 84:57–61).

After doing all they can to repent, some worry whether they have been forgiven. The Lord has said that when we refuse to repent, He "will withdraw [His] Spirit" (Helaman 13:8) and that as we repent, He will "pour out [His] spirit" upon us (Proverbs 1:23). Therefore, when we regularly feel the influence of the Holy Ghost in our lives, we can be assured that the Lord has forgiven us (see Mosiah 4:1–3). We can move forward with

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

What are the consequences of delaying repentance?

The prophet Amulek taught that if we procrastinate "the day of [our] repentance even until death," we "become subjected to the spirit of the devil" and the Spirit of the Lord withdraws from us (see Alma 34:35).

President Henry B. Eyring, First Counselor in the First Presidency, has stated:

"Any choice to delay repentance gives [Satan] the chance to steal happiness from one of the spirit children of our Heavenly Father. . . .

". . . Today is always a better day to repent than any tomorrow. . . . Sin has its debilitating effects on us. The very faith we need to repent is weakened by delay. The choice to continue in sin diminishes our faith and lessens our right to claim the Holy Ghost as our companion and comforter. . . .

"One of the questions we must ask of our Heavenly Father in private prayer is this: 'What have I done today, or not done, which displeases Thee? If I can only know, I will repent with all my heart without delay.' That humble prayer will be answered. And the answers will surely include the assurance that asking today was better than waiting to ask tomorrow" ("Do Not Delay," *Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 34).



Jesus testified: “For behold, . . . whosoever is baptized . . . unto repentance . . . him will I freely forgive. For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world” (Mosiah 26:22–23).

confidence in our Redeemer and look to a bright future.

As a mission president I had the blessing of conducting many baptismal interviews. A primary purpose of the interview is to determine if the individual has repented. I was impressed by how many individuals wanted to feel God’s forgiveness for their sins. Some had committed very serious sins. I remember one sister who was so weighed down with past sins that she wept throughout the interview, barely able to speak. I could see her tragic past noticeably manifested in her countenance. Yet I felt she had truly repented of her sins. Months after her baptism, I attended her stake conference. I saw her in the congregation but barely recognized her—her countenance was so different. Her eyes were bright with the light of the gospel. I was struck by the immense relief and joy that repentance and forgiveness had brought her and the obvious physical effects this had on her countenance.

When we consider what the Savior Himself has taught about repentance, we better understand the role of repentance in our Father’s plan of happiness. Repentance connects us to a loving, merciful Savior and His Atonement. The more we recognize that our Heavenly Father and His Son have made the blessing of repentance possible, the more our gratitude for Them will deepen. Jesus testified:

“For behold, . . . whosoever is baptized . . . unto repentance . . . him will I freely forgive.

“For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world. . . .

“ . . . I am [your] Redeemer. . . .

“Yea, and as often as my people repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me” (Mosiah 26:22–23, 26, 30).

When our Savior walked the earth in mortality, He sat at dinner with a group of social outcasts known as publicans and sinners. A group of Pharisees criticized Him for eating and drinking with them. Jesus taught these critics about repentance and His Atonement:

“They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.

“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:31–32).

For those who have felt the redeeming power and blessing of repentance, the words of this hymn strike a solemn chord:

*Jesus, the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast. . . .
To those who fall, how kind
thou art!
How good to those who seek!² ■*

NOTES

1. Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said, “Repentance is a divine gift, and there should be a smile on our faces when we speak of it” (“The Divine Gift of Repentance,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2011, 38).
2. “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee,” *Hymns*, no. 141.