



The Gift of Forgiveness

The Savior stands with open arms to forgive all who truly repent of their sins and come unto Him.



By Elder Neil L. Andersen

Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles

Lasting happiness and joy come through faith in our Heavenly Father and in His Son, Jesus Christ. All that is good and beautiful, all that is holy and sacred, comes from Them. That includes forgiveness, which refreshes our soul and confirms where we stand with Them.

In our premortal world, we rejoiced with the opportunity to come to earth, receive a mortal body, and become more like our Heavenly Father (see Job 38:4–7). We knew, however, that we would experience disappointment, sickness, pain, injustice, temptation, and sin.

These challenges were anticipated in the Father's plan of redemption, and He called upon His Only Begotten Son to be our Redeemer and Savior. Jesus Christ would come to earth like no other, and through His righteousness, He would break the bands of death. As we choose to follow Him and repent of our sins, He eliminates, through His infinite Atonement, our mistakes and sins found in the book of life.

Prayer and Faith

Our repentance, followed by forgiveness from the Savior of the world, is the foundation of our prayers and efforts to return to our heavenly home. For each of us who has faith in Jesus Christ, our daily prayers, our efforts to follow the Savior, and our partaking of the sacrament regularly as we willingly take His name upon us combine with our desire to leave behind the pulls of the world and step by step come closer to our Savior.



As Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explained: “If we choose . . . the course of discipleship, we will . . . move from what may be initially a mere acknowledgment of Jesus on to admiration of Jesus, then on to adoration of Jesus, and finally to emulation of Jesus. In that process of striving to become more like Him . . . , we must be in the posture of repentance.”¹

Repentance becomes a continual thought, a constant effort. President Russell M. Nelson has said:

“Nothing is more liberating, more ennobling, or more crucial to our individual progression than is a regular, daily focus on repentance. . . .

“. . . Experience the strengthening power of daily repentance—of doing and being a little better each day.”²

In prayer we review the happenings of the day, asking, “Where did I see the Lord’s hand in my life? How did my actions reveal honesty and unselfishness? What more could I have

done? What thoughts and emotions do I need to control? How could I have better followed the example of the Savior? How could I have been more kind, more loving, more forgiving, and more merciful toward others? In what ways was I less than my Heavenly Father would want me to be?”

Then we pause and listen. Our personal prayers open the window to personal revelation from our Heavenly Father.

With faith in Jesus Christ, we openly acknowledge to our Heavenly Father our mistakes, oversights, and unthoughtful actions toward others. We humbly ask for forgiveness, listen to the quiet impressions of the

Spirit, and promise our Heavenly Father that we will be more attentive to those things we can improve. We confess our sins and we forsake them (see Doctrine and Covenants 58:43). We restore that which we can restore to those we have hurt or offended. It may be an apology to a spouse or a child, a message to a friend or coworker, or a resolve to follow a neglected spiritual impression.

Our partaking of the sacrament and our frequent attendance at the temple, when possible, magnify and bolster our faith in Jesus Christ and our desire to follow Him.

“Come unto Me”

In 3 Nephi, it is amazing how often the resurrected Savior Jesus Christ connects the word “repent” to the words “come unto me.”

“*Repent* of your sins, and *come unto me* with a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 12:19; emphasis added).

“*Repent* of your sins, and be converted. . . .

“. . . If ye will *come unto me* ye shall have eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will *come*, him will I receive; and blessed are those who *come unto me*” (3 Nephi 9:13–14; emphasis added).

“Whoso *repenteth* and *cometh unto me* as a little child, him will I receive. . . . Therefore *repent*, and *come unto me* ye ends of the earth, and be saved” (3 Nephi 9:22; emphasis added).

Jesus also spoke of those who, by choice or circumstance, no

longer attend places of worship. He said, “Unto such shall ye continue to minister; for ye know not but what they will return and *repent*, and *come unto me* with full purpose of heart, and I shall heal them” (3 Nephi 18:32; emphasis added).

President Nelson has declared, “Jesus Christ . . . stands with open arms, hoping and willing to heal, forgive, cleanse, strengthen, purify, and sanctify us.”³

We, of course, will want to do all we can. Our remorse, our resolve to change, and our broken heart, contrite spirit, and godly sorrow are all important. We will desire to change our behavior and make restitution to those we have hurt.

Forgiveness Is a Gift

We must remember, however, that the divine gift of forgiveness can never be earned; it can only be received. Yes, commandments must be obeyed and ordinances observed to receive forgiveness, but personal effort, no matter how great, pales in comparison to the cost of redemption. In fact, there is no comparison.

Forgiveness is a gift, and the only One who can give the gift is the Redeemer and Savior of the world, Jesus Christ (see Romans 5:1–12 and especially 15–18; see also Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 9:15; Ephesians 2:8). He offers His priceless gift willingly to all who turn to Him to receive it (see Doctrine and Covenants 88:33).

As President Nelson has said, “[The Savior’s] Atonement [is able to] redeem every soul from the penalties of personal transgression, on conditions that He [has] set.”⁴

Let us rejoice in the journey! Our Heavenly Father has given us these words of truth: “If ye will repent, and harden not your hearts, then will I have mercy upon you, through mine Only Begotten Son; . . . [and you] shall have claim on mercy through mine Only Begotten Son, unto a remission of [your] sins; and [you] shall enter into my rest” (Alma 12:33–34).

As one of the Lord’s Apostles, I promise you that these words of our Father are true. As you embrace them in your life, the Savior will shape forever the divine destiny awaiting you. ■

NOTES

1. Neal A. Maxwell, “Testifying of the Great and Glorious Atonement,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2001, 12.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2019, 67.
3. Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” 67.
4. Russell M. Nelson, “The Creation,” *Ensign*, May 2000, 84.



THE PROMISE OF CHRIST’S ATONEMENT

“Save for the exception of the very few who defect to perdition, there is no habit, no addiction, no rebellion, no transgression, no apostasy, no crime exempted from the promise of complete forgiveness. That is the promise of the atonement of Christ.”

President Boyd K. Packer (1924–2015), President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “The Brilliant Morning of Forgiveness,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 20.