

# FINDING *Forgiveness*



Recently, while traveling on an unfamiliar road, I encountered a large temporary sign declaring Rough Road Ahead, and indeed it was. Had I not been warned, that experience would have been disastrous. Life is like that. It's full of rough spots. Some are tests to make us stronger. Others result from our own disobedience. Helpful warnings in our personal life can also save us from disaster. A damaged road presents the same obstacles to every traveler until others repair it. The highway of life is different. Each one of us encounters unique challenges meant for

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growth. Also, our own bad choices can put more barriers in the path. Yet we have the capacity to smooth out the way, to fill

in the depressions, and to beautify our course. The process is called repentance; the destination is forgiveness.

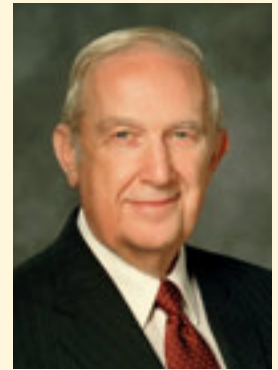
If you have ignored warnings and your life has been damaged or disabled by a rough road, there is help available. Through that help you can renew and rebuild your damaged life. You can start over again and change your course from a downward, twisting, disappointing path to a superhighway to peace and happiness.

I want to help you find that relief. To do that it is necessary to give you some background information that will make the remedy more logical and the steps to healing more meaningful.

### **Understand the Atonement**

Every incorrect choice we make, every sin we commit is a violation of eternal law. That violation brings negative results we generally soon recognize. There are also other consequences of our acts of which we may not be conscious. They are nonetheless real. They can have a tremendous effect on the quality of our life here and most certainly will powerfully affect it hereafter. We can do nothing of ourselves to satisfy the demands of justice for a broken eternal law. Yet, unless the demands of justice are paid, each of us will suffer endless negative consequences.

Only the life, teachings, and particularly the Atonement of Jesus Christ can release us from this otherwise impossible predicament. Each of us has made mistakes, large or small, which if unresolved will keep us from the presence of God. For this reason, the Atonement of Jesus Christ is the single most significant event that ever has or ever will occur. This selfless act of



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infinite consequence, performed by a single glorified personage, has eternal impact in the life of every son and daughter of our Father in Heaven—without exception.<sup>1</sup> It shatters the bonds of death. It justifies our finally being judged by the Master.<sup>2</sup> It can prevent an eternity under the control of the devil.<sup>3</sup> It opens the gates to exaltation and eternal life for all who qualify for forgiveness through repentance and obedience.<sup>4</sup>

The Redeemer can settle your individual account with justice and grant forgiveness through the merciful path of repentance.<sup>5</sup> Full repentance is absolutely essential for the Atonement to work its complete miracle in your life. By understanding the Atonement, you will see that God is not a jealous being who delights in persecuting those who misstep. He is an absolutely perfect, compassionate, understanding, patient, and forgiving Father. He is willing to entreat, counsel, strengthen, lift, and fortify. He so loves each of us that He was willing to have His perfect, sinless, absolutely obedient, totally righteous Son experience indescribable agony and pain and give Himself in sacrifice for all.<sup>6</sup> Through that Atonement we can live in a world where absolute justice reigns in its sphere so the world will have order. But that justice is tempered through mercy attainable by obedience to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

#### **Repentance is the path to forgiveness**

Which of us is not in need of the miracle of repentance? Whether your life is lightly blemished or heavily disfigured from mistakes, the principles of recovery are the same. The length and severity of the treatments are conditioned to fit the circumstances. Our goal surely must be forgiveness. The only possible path to that goal is repentance, for it is written: “*There is no*

*other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. . . .*

“The Lord . . . [will] not come to redeem [His people] *in* their sins, but to redeem them *from* their sins.

“And he hath power given unto him from the Father to redeem them *from* their sins *because of repentance.*”<sup>7</sup>

Obedience and faith in the Savior give you power to resist temptation. Helaman taught: “It is upon the rock of our Redeemer, who is Christ, the Son of God, that ye must build your foundation; that when the devil shall send forth his mighty winds, . . . when all his hail and his mighty storm shall beat upon you, it shall have no power over you to drag you down to . . . endless wo, because of the rock upon which ye are built, which is a sure foundation, . . . whereon if men build they cannot fall.”<sup>8</sup>

Forgiveness comes through repentance. What is repentance? How is it accomplished? What are its consequences? These may seem to be simple questions, but it is clear that many do not know how to repent.

### Follow the steps of repentance

In *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) gives a superb guide to

forgiveness through repentance. It has helped many find their way back. He identifies five essential elements of repentance.

#### **SORROW FOR SIN**

Study and ponder to determine how serious the Lord defines your transgression to be. That will bring healing sorrow and remorse. It will also bring a sincere desire for change and a willingness to submit to every requirement for forgiveness. Alma taught, “Justice

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exerciseth all his demands, and also mercy claimeth all which is her own; and thus, none but the truly penitent are saved.”<sup>9</sup>

#### **ABANDONMENT OF SIN**

This is an unyielding, permanent resolve to not repeat the transgression. By keeping this commitment, the bitter aftertaste of that sin need not be experienced again.

Remember: “But unto that soul who sinneth shall the former sins return.”<sup>10</sup> Joseph Smith declared: “Repentance is a thing that cannot be trifled with every day. Daily transgression and daily repentance is not . . . pleasing in the sight of God.”<sup>11</sup>

#### **CONFESSION OF SIN**

You always need to confess your sins to the Lord. If they are serious transgressions, such as immorality, they need to be confessed to a

bishop or stake president. Please understand that confession is not repentance. It is an essential step, but is not of itself adequate. Partial confession by mentioning lesser mistakes will not help you resolve a more serious, undisclosed transgression. Essential to forgiveness is a willingness to fully disclose to the Lord and, where necessary, His priesthood judge all that you have done. Remember, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”<sup>12</sup>

#### **RESTITUTION FOR SIN**

You must restore as far as possible all that which is stolen, damaged, or defiled. Willing restitution is concrete evidence to the Lord that you are committed to do all you can to repent.

#### **OBEDIENCE TO ALL THE COMMANDMENTS**

Full obedience brings the complete power of the gospel into your life with strength to focus on the abandonment of specific sins. It includes things you might not initially consider part of repentance, such as attending meetings, paying tithing, giving service, and forgiving others. The Lord said: “He that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven.”<sup>13</sup>

I would add a sixth step:

#### **RECOGNITION OF THE SAVIOR**

Of all the necessary steps to repentance, I testify that the most critically important is for you to have a conviction that forgiveness comes because of the Redeemer. It is essential to know that only on His terms can you be forgiven. Witness Alma’s declaration: “I was . . . in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul; and never, until I did cry out unto the Lord Jesus Christ for mercy, did I receive a remission of my sins. But . . . I did cry unto him and I did find peace to my soul.”<sup>14</sup> You will be helped as you exercise faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>15</sup> That means you trust Him and you trust His teachings. Satan would have you believe that serious transgression cannot be

entirely overcome. The Savior gave His life so that the effects of all transgression can be put behind us, save the shedding of innocent blood and the denial of the Holy Ghost.

The fruit of true repentance is forgiveness, which opens the door to receive all of the covenants and ordinances provided on this earth and to enjoy the resulting blessings. When a repentant soul is baptized, all former sins are forgiven and need not be remembered. When repentance is full and one has been cleansed, there comes a new vision of life and its glorious possibilities. How marvelous the promise of the Lord: “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more.”<sup>16</sup> The Lord is and ever will be faithful to His words.

#### **Serious sins require deep repentance**

Do not take comfort in the fact that your transgressions are not known by others. That is like an ostrich with his head buried in the sand. He sees only darkness and feels comfortably hidden. In reality he is ridiculously conspicuous. Likewise our every act is seen by our Father in Heaven and His Beloved Son. They know everything about us.

Adultery, fornication, committing homosexual acts, and other deviations approaching these in gravity are not acceptable alternate lifestyles. They are serious sins. Committing physical and sexual abuse are major sins. Such grave sins require deep repentance to be forgiven. President Kimball taught: “To every forgiveness there is a condition. The plaster must be as wide as the sore. The fasting, the prayers, the humility must be equal to or greater than the sin.”<sup>17</sup> “It is unthinkable that God absolves serious sins upon a few requests. He is likely to wait until there has been long, sustained repentance.”<sup>18</sup>

If you have seriously transgressed, you will not find any lasting satisfaction or comfort

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in what you have done. Excusing transgression with a cover-up may appear to fix the problem, but it does not. The tempter is intent on making public your most embarrassing acts at the most harmful time. Lies weave a pattern that is ever more confining and becomes a trap that Satan will spring to your detriment.

### Repent now

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.

This scripture will help you know what to do: “Nevertheless they did fast and pray oft, and did wax stronger and stronger in their humility, and firmer and firmer in the faith of Christ, unto the filling their souls with joy and consolation, . . . because of their yielding their hearts unto God.”<sup>19</sup>

In closing, with all the tenderness and sincerity of heart I invite each one of you to thoughtfully review your life. Have you deviated from the standards that you know will bring happiness? Is there a dark corner that needs to be cleaned out? Are you now doing things that you know are wrong? Do you fill your mind with unclean thoughts? When it is quiet and you can think clearly, does your conscience tell you to repent?

For your peace now and for everlasting happiness, please repent. Open your heart to the Lord and ask Him to help you. You will earn the blessing of forgiveness, peace, and the knowledge you have been purified and made whole. Find the courage to ask the Lord for strength to repent, now. I solemnly witness that Jesus Christ is the Redeemer. I know that He lives. I testify that He loves you personally and will help you.

Obtain His forgiveness by repenting, now. **NE**

*From an April 1995 general conference address.*



### NOTES

1. See Mosiah 5:10–13.
2. See 2 Nephi 2:10.
3. See 2 Nephi 9:7–9.
4. See 2 Nephi 2:5–8.
5. See Alma 42:15.
6. See Helaman 5:9.
7. Helaman 5:9–11; emphasis added.
8. Helaman 5:12.
9. Alma 42:24.
10. D&C 82:7.
11. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 148.
12. Proverbs 28:13.
13. D&C 1:32; emphasis added.
14. Alma 38:8.
15. See Alma 11:40; 2 Nephi 9:22–24.
16. D&C 58:42.
17. *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (1969), 353.
18. *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (1982), 85.
19. Helaman 3:35.