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 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 remorse for your actions, it’s a good sign that you need to talk to your bishop about what you’ve done to correct it.
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.

“But 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 per-
son 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 inter-
viewing 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. **NE**

**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* May 2013, 44.