

## INTRODUCTION

Today, we’re going to talk about “Repentance for Dummies.” I’m curious, how many of you have ever bought one of the books in the “for Dummies” series? The first one was published in 1991 and it was entitled *DOS for Dummies*. Some publishers thought that title would scare away buyers who might be offended by the notion that they were dumb, but just the opposite happened. The “for Dummies” books have sold over 35 million copies and have been published in 33 different languages. The series has published books about everything from *Arthritis for Dummies* to *Car Washing for Dummies* to *Neurosurgery for Dummies*. The tagline for Neurosurgery says, “For those who love ER but hate the idea of going to medical school.”

The success of the “for Dummies” books is due to the fact that the writer starts with the assumption the reader knows absolutely nothing about the subject, so the material is presented in a simple, easy-to-understand format. That’s the approach I want to take with you regarding repentance. It’s one of the most important truths in the Bible—it’s mentioned over 100 times. It was the primary message of the prophets who boldly proclaimed, “Repent! And sin no more!”

That reminds me about a joke I heard about a house painter who was the low bidder to paint his church building. When he got halfway through the job he saw he was going to be short on paint, but rather than buying more paint, he used water to thin it down. When he was two thirds done, he was running out of paint again, so he thinned it out even more. When he finished the job he stepped back to admire his work and he figured nobody would know the difference. But at that moment, the sky turned dark and a storm blew in. Torrents of rain fell and washed off the thin paint until the painter was left standing in puddles of his thinned out paint. Realizing his mistake, he fell to his knees and said, “God, I’m sorry. What should I do now?” A voice from heaven thundered, “Repaint, repaint, and thin no more!”

Not only was “repent and sin no more” the message of the Old Testament, the central theme of Jesus’ first public message was, “repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Let’s look at our text and discover what the Bible says about repentance.

2 Corinthians 7:8-10. “Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

There is a deep-seated need in the human heart to seek forgiveness. For those of us who know Christ, we find our forgiveness in God’s amazing grace. But what about the millions of people who claim to have no relationship with Jesus? They are still desperately seeking ways to find forgiveness and to unload their sense of guilt. Because of this need to confess and seek forgiveness, there are a number of “apology websites” in cyberspace where guilty people can go and anonymously confess their sins. For instance, one website is called “Joe Apology” (<http://joeapology.blogspot.com/>) Many of these posts are people saying they are “sorry” for someone else’s behavior, as much for their own mistakes. One person wrote: “I’m sorry that I

don't know what it's like to have a 'good' father. But you should be sorry that you weren't and haven't ever been one. Live your life the farthest from me, I'm glad you aren't in it.” Another person posted their cyber-apology: “I'm sorry I ate the 2 day old tuna fish sandwich in the refrigerator as it turns out that it belonged to a fellow employee and they actually wanted it even 2 days later. Nobody's name was on it, just a date, and food gets abandoned in that fridge all the time. I was really, really hungry. I hope the Universe will forgive me.”

Another similar website is called Grouphug.com. People go there to post their confessions. One person posted: “I am treading dangerously close to alcoholism. I'm not afraid of what I'm doing to myself, mentally or physically, or other people's opinions of me, but that I don't even care myself. I'm in an extreme state of apathy.” Another person wrote, “i'm still anorexic and no one knows. I guess i've gotten good at hiding it. I wonder when someone will find out.” On the Grouphug website readers can either click on a button that says “hug” in response to the post or “shrug” as if, I don't care. As I learned about these and other similar websites, my heart was broken to think that these people who are carrying such a load of guilt could find forgiveness and healing if they only understood one of the most important truths taught in the Bible—repentance. As we talk about repentance, I want to tell you what repentance IS—the ABCs of repentance. Then I want to share the positive results of repentance.

## I. THE ABCs OF REPENTANCE

Some people say it's hard to become a Christian, but it really isn't. Becoming a Christian is easy enough for a child to understand. The reason some adults aren't followers of Jesus is because they stumble over the simplicity of it. If you want to know what repentance is, it's as easy as ABC. Your soul, or personality, is comprised of three components: your mind, your emotions, and your will. Repentance engages your mind, your emotions, and your will.

### 1. Admit you have sinned: This involves your mind

Repentance begins when we mentally acknowledge that we are sinners. That includes every one of us because the Bible says, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:8-9)

The word “repent” is *metanoia*, which literally means “to change your mind.” In other words, you must change your mind about your sin. Instead of justifying your sinful behavior, you agree with God that it is indeed sin. It's our human nature to try to deny sin or at least to blame someone else for our behavior. But this first step of repentance requires us to take full responsibility for our sins. There's a funny song by Anna Russell that satirizes the influence of Freudian psychology today. It says: “I went to my psychiatrist to be psychoanalyzed, / To find out why I kicked my cat and blackened my friend's eye. / He laid me on a comfy couch to see what he could find, / And here's what he delivered up from my subconscious mind. / When I was five my mommy locked my dolly in a trunk, / And so it follows naturally that I am always drunk. / When I was eight I saw my father kiss the maid one day, / And that is why I feel the urge to have things my own way. / At nine I felt resentment toward my older brothers, / And so it follows naturally I've poisoned all my lovers. / But I'm so happy now to see the lesson this has

taught, / Everything I do that’s wrong is someone else’s fault!” True repentance says, “I am guilty, and I take responsibility for my sin.” Repentance begins when you admit you’re responsible for your sin, but there is more than just admitting it mentally.

## **2. Be sorry about your failure: This involves your emotions**

Jeremiah wrote about his sorrow over sin, “After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.” (Jeremiah 31:19) To be sorry for your sin doesn’t mean you are sorry you got caught. It means your heart is broken over your sin and rebellion against a loving God. This step affects us emotionally. It’s what Jesus meant when He said, “Blessed are those who mourn.” (Matthew 5:4). When we see our sin the way God sees our sin, you’ll experience Godly sorrow which leads to repentance. Notice these first two steps—you can realize mentally that your action or attitude is sinful, but until you experience Godly sorrow over it, you’re not on the pathway to repentance.

The great prophet of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century A.W. Tozer understood repentance. He wrote: “We have reduced repentance to a change of mind. It is a mental act, indeed, but I point out that repentance is not likely to do us much good until it ceases to be a change of mind only and becomes a wound within our spirit. No man has truly repented until his sin has wounded him near to death, and he sees himself as the one who nailed his Saviour on the tree. Until we allow the consciousness of sin to wound us, we will never develop a fear of evil. Do a thorough job of repenting. Do not hurry to get it over with. Let godly sorrow do her healing work. (*Man: The Dwelling Place of God*). The third step in repentance is to:

## **3. Change your direction: This involves your will**

Repentance involves not only a change in your mind, but also a change in your behavior. It’s not enough to say, “I’m guilty, and I’m sorry about it.” As I read through those apology websites, the first thing that caught my attention was the people posting their apologies seemed to be sorry for what they had done, but there was not a single mention of anyone saying they were going to change their behavior.

Paul reveals what repentance is when he said, “I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds.” (Acts 26:20) The only way we can “prove” we’ve repented is when our actions are different.

This passage talks about two kinds of sorrow. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, but worldly sorrow leads to death. Worldly sorrow is like driving up to a stop sign. Your sorrow and your regret may lead you to stop for a moment, but then you proceed in the same direction. But godly sorrow is stopping, and then turning around and going back in the opposite direction.

Ray Stedman writes: “Repentance is basically a U-turn. Instead of going away from God, or ignoring him, you turn around, go to Him and choose to give him his rightful place in your life. Repentance, therefore, has more to do with your will than it has to do with your feelings.”

A good example of the difference between Godly and worldly sorrow can be seen in the

behavior of two of Jesus' disciples, Judas and Peter. Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, and Peter denied Jesus three times. Judas was sorry for his betrayal, and went back to the chief priests and threw the money back at them and said, "I have betrayed innocent blood!" But then he went out and committed suicide by hanging. That was worldly sorrow that led to death. After Peter's denial, he went out and wept bitterly, but unlike Judas, Peter remained with the followers of Jesus and was one of the guys running to the empty tomb on resurrection morning. That was Godly sorrow that led to repentance. Have you done a good job of truly repenting?

So repentance is as simple as ABC. First, you *admit* you have sinned. You don't try to excuse your sin or justify it, you simply agree with God that you're guilty. Second, you must *be sorry* about your sin. It means having your heart broken over your moral depravity. But repentance doesn't end there. You must also change direction: Turn away from doing that sin. When I was a youth evangelist I had a simple message about sin that had three points: Admit it; Quit it; Forget it. That's still pretty good advice! Next, let's talk about:

## II. THE RESULTS OF REPENTANCE

I don't want to just tell you HOW to repent, but I also want to share with you some of the positive benefits of repentance. The first result of repentance is:

### 1. Salvation for unbelievers

About fifty days after Peter denied knowing Jesus he stood up on the Day of Pentecost and proclaimed the truth about Jesus. He preached that the Jewish leaders had crucified the Messiah, but God raised him from the dead. "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied, 'REPENT and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" (Acts 2:37-38) The Bible says 3,000 people repented and were baptized that day. The only way to come to Christ is through repentance.

Have you ever driven the wrong way on a one-way street? When I was in college I was driving for the first time in New Orleans and got confused. I found myself driving the wrong way on a one way street. The other drivers were blowing their horns and shaking their fists at me, and I yelled out, "I'm sorry. I'm from Alabama!" (As if that was a good enough excuse!)

Jesus said there are two roads in life. One road is wide and smooth and leads one way—to destruction. Jesus spoke of another road, the narrow road that led to life. Repentance means turning around. There was a time when all of us were on the wrong road, and we turned around. We turned from our sin and turned to God in faith. I've come to realize the road to life is right in the middle of the road to death, and only when we turn around do we realize that we're going against the flow. The reason we don't really fit in very well in the place is because we're like someone going the wrong way on a one way street! Repentance is how we turn to God for salvation.

### 2. Restoration for believers

Repentance is not a one time act that happens only when you become a Christian. It is a lifestyle every believer must live. If you are living a perfect life, and you never sin, you don't need to repent. But if you're like me, sin still creeps into your life. Sin disrupts our fellowship with our Heavenly Father—the relationship is intact, but the fellowship is broken.

A great illustration of this is found in the life of King David. The Bible calls him “a man after God's own heart,” yet David sinned terribly by committing adultery and murder. For a time, he hid his sin and thought no one knew about it. But God knew about it, and he sent his servant Nathan to confront David. David followed the ABCs of repentance. He admitted he was guilty, he became sorry, and then he changed direction.

Listen to the words of David's great prayer of repentance found in Psalm 51. “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me ... Restore to me the joy of your salvation.” (Psalm 51:10, 12) David hadn't lost his salvation, but he had certainly lost the JOY of his salvation. Repentance is how we are restored to fellowship with our Father.

### **3. Celebration in heaven**

We've learned repentance is how you enter the Christian life, and repentance is how you stay in fellowship with God, but there's another result of repentance that we can't really see: There is a celebration in heaven every time a person repents. Jesus said, “I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Luke 15:10) Notice those words carefully. It doesn't just say the angels are the ones who are rejoicing; it says there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God. Who lives in the presence of the angels? Of course that includes God. I believe that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit celebrate and rejoice every time a person repents.

I also believe our loved ones who have died and gone on to heaven are part of this celebration. People often ask me if our loved ones in heaven are aware of what's happening on earth, and I believe they are. I agree with Randy Alcorn who wrote in his excellent book entitled, *Heaven*: “It doesn't speak of rejoicing by the angels but in the presence of angels. Surely this includes saints in Heaven, who would deeply appreciate human conversions, especially of those they knew and loved on Earth. To rejoice over conversions on Earth, they must be aware of what is happening on Earth—not just generally, but specifically.” I believe there is celebration in heaven over a person who repents because there is someone in heaven who spent much of their live praying for that particular person to repent!

Repentance is the doorway to salvation. Repentance is the pathway to maintaining fellowship with God, and repentance is the cause of celebration in heaven.

## **CONCLUSION**

Immediately after Jesus spoke the words found in Luke 15:10, He told a story to illustrate repentance. It's often called the story of the Prodigal son, but Jesus was teaching us more about the character and nature of the Father than the behavior of his two sons. The younger son demanded his father give him his inheritance. That request was an insult because the son was

saying, “I don’t want to wait until you die, dad, give me what I’ve got coming to me, and give it to me now!”

The father granted his son’s request, and gave him about 1/3 of his net worth. The younger son went off and promptly blew all the money on what the NIV translates as “wild living.” Soon all his money was gone, and, out of desperation, the son hired himself out to a hog farmer. To realize just how far the son had fallen consider that the phrase “to hire himself” meant he became a slave. To make matters worse he was reduced to feeding swine, which were both ceremonially and literally dirty animals.

In the story, the son practiced the ABCs of repentance. While he was there in the muddy slime of the hog pen, the son “came to his senses.” That means that he engaged his mind and considered his situation. He took step #1, he admitted he had sinned. As he thinks about it he prepares to return to his father and say, “Father I have sinned against you and against heaven.” Then he took step #2, he became sorry for his rebellion. He not only conducted a mental inventory of his life, he was moved emotionally by his mistake. He was so brokenhearted over his behavior that he was willing to forfeit his position as a son, and he would simply ask to be a servant working in his father’s household. He was experiencing Godly sorrow because it led him to repentance.

But it’s very important to notice that simply admitting his sin and being sorry about it wasn’t enough. He could have remained in the pig slop just feeling guilty, but he exercised his will. He took step #3 and changed his direction. He said, “I will get out of this muddy mess and return to my father.” He didn’t just think about it or talk about it, he took action. By a bold act of his will, he took a first step of the pig pen, and took a step toward his Father.

Sometimes we overlook a nuance of Jewish law called *ketsatsah* that applied to this situation. Ketsatsah is the Jewish law of dis-ownership. Once a son left and disgraced his family, Jewish law directed the family to consider that son to be dead and if he ever returned he was to be stoned. So any member of the household or community had the right to stone this son on sight. So the son must have feared if he returned he might even be stoned to death.

In my sanctified imagination, I can visualize that broken-down son heading back toward his dad. With every tortured step the son rehearsed his speech, “Father I have sinned against you and against heaven, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me one of your hired men.” Can you picture him as he nears his father’s property? Barefoot, hungry, tattered clothing, thin, frail, and as weak as a kitten? As he passes some of the fields perhaps some of the servants look at him and consider him a beggar until they recognize him. A cry goes up and the servants scramble to pick up rocks to participate in the Ketsatsah. As the son stumbles onward he hears the sound of someone running toward him. Perhaps he feared it was one of the servants ready to confront him and stone him. But he glances up and sees something he will never forget. It’s his dad, papa, Abba. Jesus said that his dad saw him at a distance, had compassion on him and RAN to him. I love the picture of the dad literally tackling and embracing his rebellious son. Instead of the taunts, the punches, and the stones he expected, his Father embraced him and showered his face with kisses. The repenting son begins his rehearsed speech, “Father I have sinned against you and against heaven. I am no longer worthy to be called you son ....” But before he can finish his speech, his father interrupts him and says, “Hush, son. Hush. It’s okay now.” The Father

helps him to his feet and starts shouting order to the servants. “Bring me the best robe in my closet and put it on him. Bring me one of our family rings and put it on his hand. And bring some sandals, too! And, kill that fattened calf because we’re going to have a party tonight!” Then he formally rejects the law of Ketsatsah and says, “For this SON OF MINE was dead, but now he’s alive. He was lost, and now he’s found!” And then Jesus said, “So they began to celebrate!” Hallelujah!

Just like this boy, some of you have wandered away from your heavenly Father. You haven’t lost your salvation, but you’ve lost the joy of your salvation. You haven’t forsaken God; you just aren’t enjoying sweet fellowship with your Father. God is calling you back to Himself today. Will you come to your senses and repent? If you’ll take that one step back toward fellowship with the Father today, I promise you your heavenly Father will run to embrace you in His love.

So that’s “Repentance for Dummies.” But the real dummy is someone who, after hearing about how much God loves him or her, still refuses to turn to Him. Wise up, and start repenting today!

## OUTLINE

### I. THE ABCs OF REPENTANCE

#### 1. Admit you have sinned: This involves your mind

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1  
*John 1:8-9*

#### 2. Be sorry about your failure: This involves your emotions

"After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth." *Jeremiah 31:19*

#### 3. Change your direction: This involves your will

"I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds."  
*Acts 26:20*

### II. THE RESULTS OF REPENTANCE

#### 1. Salvation for unbelievers

"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied, 'REPENT and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" *Acts 2:37-38*

#### 2. Restoration for believers

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me ... Restore to me the joy of your salvation." *Psalms 51:10, 12*

#### 3. Celebration in heaven

"I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."  
*Luke 15:10*





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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes