

The High Calling

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Good Grief!

By Stan Key

Five centuries ago, Martin Luther shook the foundations of Europe when he nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. The sound of his pounding hammer on October 31, 1517, sent shock waves reverberating across a continent and around the world that are still felt today. It was the *first* of those 95 theses that signaled the earthquake that was about to hit: “When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said ‘Repent,’ he called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence.”

The Reformation began when God’s people heard the call to repent. Luther explained that repentance is not a religious duty reserved uniquely for lost sinners living in rebellious unbelief. Neither is it something one does once, then moves on to other aspects of discipleship. No!



Luther caused a spiritual tsunami when he reminded God’s people that repentance is something we all need to do “the entire life.”

This issue of *The High Calling* is dedicated to the subject of repentance. Though some may see such a focus as a call to wallow in morbid introspection, I beg to differ.

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The First Word of the Gospel

By J. Edwin Orr (1912–1987)



J. Edwin Orr was a Baptist minister, hymn writer, professor, author, and promoter of church revival and renewal. This article is an edited abridgement of one of his most famous sermons.

It is interesting to notice the variety of response when people are asked: “What is the first word of the Gospel?”

Some say “Believe.” Others say, “Love,” or “Hope,” or “Heaven.” What then is the first word? With which word does the Gospel begin?

What was the first word in the mouth of John the Baptist? Matthew 3:2 tells us: “*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” In the following chapter, it is recorded, “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt. 4:17). In Mark’s Gospel, we read that after our Lord sent out his twelve disciples “they went out and preached that men should *repent*” (Mk. 6:12). What is most significant is that, in the last discourse of Jesus with the disciples, he stated plainly that the whole purpose of his death and resurrection was “that *repentance* and



remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations” (Lk. 24:47).

It is fitting to ask whether the apostles who received the final commission were faithful in carrying it out. When Peter reached the climax of his first great sermon at Pentecost, and his hearers cried out in conviction: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter told them: “*Repent* and be baptized every one of you” (Acts 2:38). And did the apostle Paul preach the same message? Many years after his conversion, Paul stated what he had been preaching from the beginning: “I declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem, and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should *repent* and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their *repentance*” (Acts 26:20).

Not only does the average Christian seem unaware of the first word of the Gospel, but he apparently does not at all know what the word means. To the average man, the word “repent” means “to feel sorry.” The Greek

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The Repentance of Believers

By John Wesley (1703–1791)



John Wesley believed that faith and repentance were not only important at the beginning of the Christian life (justification) but also were indispensable for growth in grace (sanctification). Using Mark 1:15 as its text, “The Repentance of Believers” is Sermon XIV in most collections of Wesley’s sermons. The article below is a slightly edited abridgement (*Wesley’s Works*, Vol 5, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1978: 156–70).

It is generally supposed that repentance and faith are only the gate of religion; that they are necessary only at the beginning of our Christian course, when we are setting out in the way to the kingdom. But there is also a repentance and a faith which are requisite *after* we have believed the gospel; yea, and in every subsequent stage of our Christian course, or we cannot run the race which is set before us. And this repentance and faith are full as necessary in order to our *continuance* and *growth* in grace, as the former faith and repentance were in order to our *entering* the kingdom of God. But in what sense are we to repent and believe after we are justified? This is an important question and worthy of being considered with the utmost attention.

First, in what sense are we to repent? Here we speak of repentance as a kind of self-knowledge, the knowing ourselves to be guilty, helpless sinners, even though we know we are children of God. While sin does not *reign*, it does *remain*. A conviction of the sin which remains in our heart is one great branch of the repentance we are now speaking of. For it is seldom long before he who imagined all sin was gone, feels there is still *pride* in his heart. Nor is it long before he feels *self-will*. Now self-will, as well as pride, is a species of *idolatry*. In process of time he will feel again, either “the desire of the flesh,” or “the desire of the eye,” or “the pride of life.” Nay, if he does not continually watch and pray, he may find *lust* reviving. He may feel in a thousand various ways a desire for earthly things or pleasures.

And do we not feel other tempers which are as contrary to the love of our neighbor as these just mentioned sins are to the love of God? Do we never find *jealousy*, *malice*, *hatred*, *bitterness*, or *covetousness* in our hearts? Is not this what Paul spoke of in the latter part of the seventh chapter of Romans? There does still remain, even in them that are justified, a mind which is in some measure

carnal; a heart bent to backsliding. And because sin remains in our hearts, so it cleaves to all our *words* and *actions*. And how many *sins of omission* are we chargeable with! We know the words of the Apostle: “To him that knows to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

Second, supposing we do thus repent, then it is necessary for us to come to a deeper experience of faith. We are to “believe the gospel.” This is to be understood in a different sense from that wherein we believed in order to justification. Here we are called to believe that he is “able to save to the uttermost” all that come to God through Christ. He is able to save you from all the sin that still

remains in your heart and from all the sin that still cleaves to your words and actions. He is able to save you from sins of omission and to supply whatever is wanting in you. It is true that this is impossible with man; but with the God-Man all things are possible.

Thus it is that in the children of God repentance and faith exactly answer each other. By repentance we feel the sin remaining in our hearts and cleaving to our words and actions: by faith, we receive the power of God in Christ, purifying our hearts and cleansing our hands. By repentance we have an abiding conviction that there is no help in us: by faith we receive not only mercy, but grace to help in every time of need. Repentance says “Without him I can do nothing:”

faith says, “I can do all things through Christ strengthening me.”

From what has been said, we may easily learn the mischievousness of that opinion that pretends we are wholly sanctified when we are justified; that our hearts are then cleansed from all sin. It is true, we are then delivered from the dominion of outward sin and the power of inward sin is so broken that we need no longer follow or be led by it. But it is by no means true that inward sin is then totally destroyed, that the root of pride, self-will, anger, love of the world, is then taken out of the heart, or that the carnal mind and the heart bent on backsliding are entirely extirpated. To suppose the contrary is not an innocent, harmless mistake. No! It does immense harm. It entirely blocks up the way to further change.



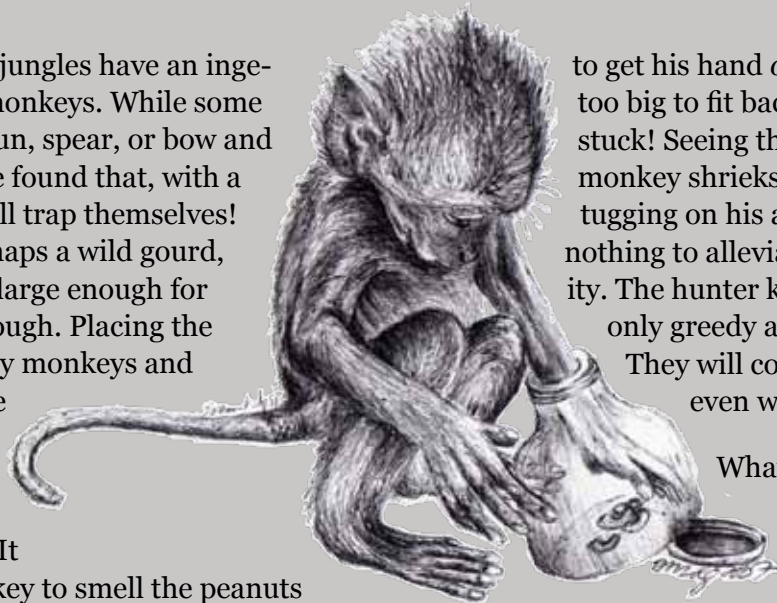
The Return of the Prodigal Son (1773) by Pompeo Batoni

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How to Catch a Monkey

A Word Picture

Certain tribes in tropical jungles have an ingenious way of catching monkeys. While some hunters may prefer a blowgun, spear, or bow and arrow, these tribesmen have found that, with a little craftiness, monkeys will trap themselves! Finding a hollow log or perhaps a wild gourd, the hunter drills a hole just large enough for a monkey's hand to slip through. Placing the trap in an area frequented by monkeys and making sure it is secured, he then drops peanuts into the hollowed cavity. Hiding nearby with his net or club, he watches and waits. It doesn't take long for a monkey to smell the peanuts and scamper up to investigate. Slipping his hand into the hole, he eagerly grabs a fistful of peanuts. But while it was easy to put his hand *in* the trap, it is impossible



to get his hand *out*! His clenched fist is just too big to fit back through the hole. He's stuck! Seeing the hunter approach, the little monkey shrieks in terror. But pulling and tugging on his arm with all his might does nothing to alleviate his self-imposed captivity. The hunter knows that monkeys are not only greedy and selfish, they're dumb.

They will continue to clutch the peanuts even when it costs them their lives!

What a powerful picture of the need for repentance! Monkeys everywhere who find themselves trapped by their own selfishness and

greed need to know there is a way out of their predicament: let go of the peanuts! ✦

Good Enough to Repent?

By C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)

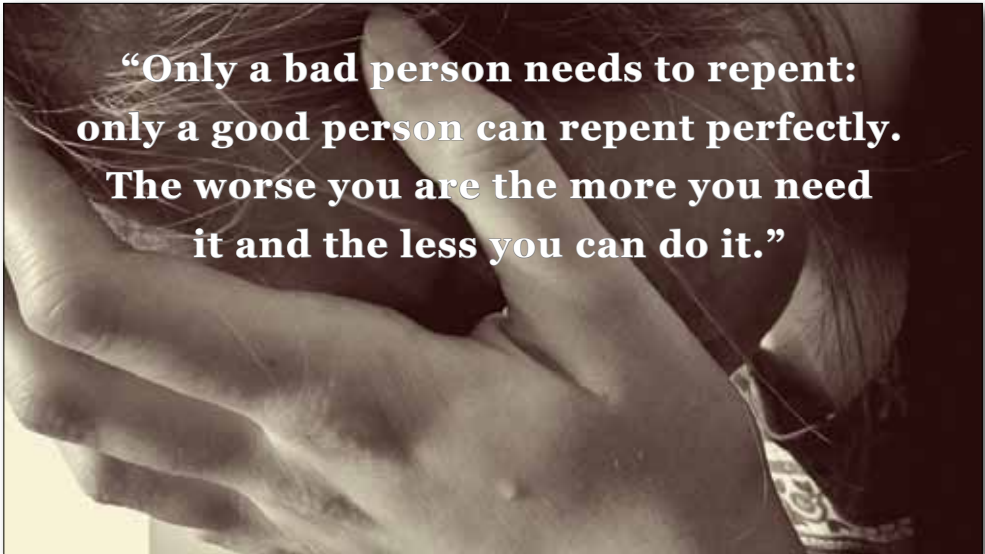
Mere Christianity has been a tremendous encouragement to millions of believers who need help in understanding with their minds what has happened to their hearts. In a chapter entitled "The Perfect Penitent" (New York: Macmillan, 1956: 44–45), Lewis discusses the nature and purpose of repentance.

Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor—that is the only way out of a "hole." This process of surrender—this movement full speed astern—is what Christians call repentance. Now repentance is no fun at all. It is something much harder than merely eating humble pie. It means unlearning all the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves into for thousands of years.

It means killing part of yourself, undergoing a kind of death. In fact, it needs a good man to repent. And here comes the catch. Only a bad person needs to repent: only a good person can repent perfectly. The worse you are the more you need it and the less you can

do it. The only person who could do it perfectly would be a perfect person—and he would not need it.

Remember, this repentance, this willing submission to humiliation and a kind of death, is not something God demands of you before he will take you back and which he could let you off if he chose: it is simply a description of what going back to him is like. If you ask God to take you back without it, you are really asking him to let you go back without going back. It cannot happen. Very well, then, we must go through with it. But the same badness which makes us need it, makes us unable to do it. Can we do it if God helps us? Yes, but what do we mean when we talk of God helping us? We mean God putting into us a bit of himself, so to speak. He lends us a little of his reasoning powers and that is how we think: he puts a little

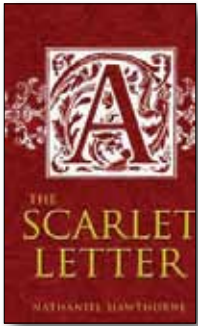


**“Only a bad person needs to repent:
only a good person can repent perfectly.
The worse you are the more you need
it and the less you can do it.”**

of his love into us and that is how we love one another. When you teach a child writing, you hold its hand while it forms the letters: that is, it forms the letters because you are forming them. We love and reason because God loves and reasons and holds our hand while we do it... ✦

Be True! Be True! Be True!

By Stan Key



Quotes for this article were taken from *The Scarlet Letter* as published by Wordsworth Editions Limited (Ware, 1992).

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) paints an unforgettable picture of the tyranny of a guilty conscience in his classic novel *The Scarlet Letter* (originally published in 1850). Though most readers remember Hester Prynne and the scarlet “A” (standing for adulteress) she was condemned to wear on her dress to shame her, perhaps the deeper meaning of the story is found in the contorted agony of the man who fathered her child, the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale. Envious of Hester’s freedom because her part in the sin is known to all, Dimmesdale groans under the burden of his own unconfessed secret sin.

“Happy are you, Hester, that wear the scarlet letter openly upon your bosom! Mine burns in secret!... Had I one friend—or were it my worst enemy!—to whom, when sickened with the praises of all other men, I could daily betake myself, and be known as the vilest of all sinners, methinks my soul might keep itself alive thereby... But now, it is all falsehood!—all emptiness!—all death!” (232)

Eventually, Dimmesdale can bear the torment of his guilty conscience no longer. Going to the public square, he climbs the scaffold and loudly admits the truth of his sin.

“People of New England!” cried that rose over them: and majestic—yet had through it, and some—struggling up out of a of remorse and woe—“ye me!—ye that have deemed me holy!—behold me here, the one sinner of the world! At last!—at last!—I stand upon the spot where, seven years since, I should have stood, here, with this woman, whose arm... sustains me at this dreadful moment from groveling down upon my face! Lo, the scarlet letter which Hester wears! Ye have all shuddered at it!... But there stood one in the midst of you, at whose brand of sin and infamy ye have not shuddered!... Now, at the death-hour, he stands up before you! He bids you look again at Hester’s scarlet letter! He tells you, that, with all its mysterious horror, it is but the shadow of what he bears on his own breast, and

that even this—his own red stigma—is no more than the type of what has seared his inmost heart! Stand any here that question God’s judgment on a sinner? Behold! Behold: a dreadful witness of it!”

With a convulsive motion he tore away the ministerial band from before his breast. It was revealed!... The minister stood, with a flush of triumph in his face, as one who in the crisis of acutest pain had won a victory. Then down he sank upon the scaffold!... “Praised be his name! His will be done! Farewell!” (305–08)

In tearing revealed letter,

open his shirt, Rev. Dimmesdale to the shocked onlookers a scarlet similar to the cloth “A” worn by Hester, but this one was seared into his flesh. In his dying moments Dimmesdale apparently found forgiveness and peace. The reader can only imagine how the story would have unfolded if his confession had occurred seven years earlier! Hawthorne himself states the meaning of his tragic tale in the “Conclusion” of his story.

Among many morals which press upon us from the poor minister’s miserable experience, we put only this into a sentence: “Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred!” (311)

Hester wore the scarlet letter for the rest of her life. Strangely enough, it ceased to be an embarrassing stigma and became, instead, a sort of sacred symbol that inspired reverence and awe to all who knew the story. Indeed, people began to visit Hester seeking guidance and counsel for their own struggles and troubles. In the eyes of many

the scarlet letter had the effect of the cross on a nun’s bosom. It imparted to the wearer a kind of sacredness, which enabled her to walk securely amid all peril... It was reported, and believed by many, that an Indian had drawn his arrow against the badge, and that the missile struck it, but fell harmless to the ground. (196)

Hawthorne illustrates dramatically how confession and repentance can transform the symbols of our greatest shame into symbols of holiness. ✨

Taming the Soul

By Alan E. Nelson

This article is edited and abridged from Nelson's book, *Embracing Brokenness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002: 18–20).

The human soul is much like an untamed stallion with his unbridled energy. Sometimes it is majestic and powerful, and at other times it is stubborn and destructively dangerous. Regardless of its potential, the untamed soul has limited capacity for constructive use. Just as the unbroken horse cannot be ridden for enjoyment or be used to herd cattle, a person's unbroken spirit is confined to the sheer beauty of its potential productivity. An unbridled soul restricts God's work in a person's life. That kind of soul cannot be guided. Energy cannot be harnessed in the untamed state.

I once believed that when a person had a personal experience with God, all that was left was to learn more and "grow in grace." However, I continue to discover, often painfully, that there is a silent, but common and active process in the building of the Christian called brokenness. I doubt that people who have ever achieved significance for a long period of time, or who have been used productively by the Holy Spirit in ministry, have eluded this process. The soul of a person, in its early and natural state, is wildly undisciplined. Whether it aggressively rebels against God's harnessing like a bucking bronco, or passive-aggressively resists guiding like an old, stubborn mule, the human spirit resents the influence of God's Spirit.

An unbroken person refuses to accept difficult challenges and questions unexplained events with frustration. This poor soul seeks success and achievement, but, a master of himself, risks depression, disillusionment, failure, and suicide in order to "do it myself." This same person fights reliance on God in an effort to go "my own way." This unbridled orientation seems natural and acceptable, but it inevitably results in hurt and alienation. The person who demands to follow himself, or others, and not God alone, is destined to a future of futility.

I have noticed three parallels between breaking a horse and taming a soul.

The *first* is that the world has little use for a wild, unbroken soul. An unbroken soul is primarily a consumer. It occupies space and carries on many of the functions of a broken soul; but it performs little good. Its activities

are not very useful in the eternal view of things. Like the horse, an unbroken soul can have natural beauty, but it tends to be one of latent potential and not pragmatic beauty.

The *second* observation is that the breaking process ultimately strengthens the bond between the cowboy (owner, rider, caretaker) and the horse. Prior to being broken, all that exists is admiration from a distance, and the basic maintenance of life (feeding, watering). Once brokenness occurs, there is bonding and affection. The love relationship is able to grow as trust is manifested.

Third, one would think that the breaking process would sap the spirit, drive, and energy of the horse. It does not. The horse is just as strong after breaking as before, but



“Horse jumping” by Dagur Brynjólfsson [CC BY-SA 2.0] via Creative Commons

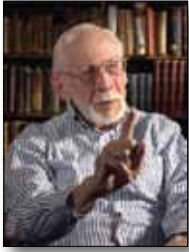
his abilities multiply many times over and his energy is no longer wild, but directed. The process of being broken in the right place is not a matter of becoming passive, unmotivated, or lackluster. Rather, it is a catalyzing process which ultimately helps the soul reach its potential.

A breaking process that results in bitterness, cynicism, or low self-esteem is not the right process. A horse can be broken by beatings, poisons, and drugs, but that animal will not be helpful for a creative cause. When people become broken in the wrong places, they do not grow into people who are mature, productive, and Christ-like.

All metaphors have their shortcomings and this one is not intended to portray God as a spur-digging cowboy riding on our backs. Rather, the breaking process allows us the often painful opportunity to grow and reach a level of maturity which cannot otherwise be achieved. ✨

Seven Myths of Repentance

By Richard Owen Roberts



Richard Owen Roberts is a lifelong student of revivals and spiritual awakenings. In conjunction with Wheaton College, he helped to establish the Billy Graham Center (Illinois) especially focusing on the Graham Center Library. The following article is an abridgement of a chapter from his book *Repentance* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002: 85–103).

There are certain popular myths that many have embraced as repentance that I must caution you against.

Myth One: Sorrow Equals Repentance

People think that they have come to repentance because they have been overwhelmed with sorrow for their sins. Others are fearful that possibly they have not repented sufficiently because they see persons around them weeping profusely and they worry, thinking, “I have never wept like that; perhaps I don’t know true repentance.” While there is a very significant place for sorrow in repentance, it is possible to be filled with sorrow and yet not repent at all. Both Esau and Judas demonstrate this (Heb. 12:15–17; Matt. 27:3–5). Indeed, we must all learn to distinguish between the sorrow that comes from being caught and the sorrow that comes from a deep, inward hatred of sin.

Myth Two: Self-Preservation Is Repentance

Multitudes who have been caught in sin have tried to lessen its consequences by repentant-like behavior. Others who find themselves in dangerous and even frightening circumstances have vowed to repent if their lives are

spared. This practice used to be called “foxhole religion.” Many soldiers on the battlefield have been frightened and have made spiritual vows that they fully intended to keep. But foxhole religion is not repentance, and you may be sure that many of those dear young men returned to their sins soon after their fears passed. It is not without consequence that neither John the Baptist nor Christ preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of hell is at hand.” God’s purpose in demanding our repentance is not that we might escape the damnation of hell but that we might experience that “change of mind” which characterizes the citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

Myth Three: Penance and Repentance Are Equal

Generally the term “penance” refers to acts of self-castigation produced by a sorrow for sin. By the fifteenth century, the Roman church had formalized a sacrament of penance consisting of contrition, confession, and satisfaction on the part of the penitent, and absolution by the priest. This concept of penance is by no means limited to those who view it as a sacrament. The idea of earning God’s favor has a very broad appeal. Multitudes erroneously believe that in acts of self-castigation and devotion they are repenting.

Myth Four: Reformation Is Repentance

Anyone can turn over a new leaf. It does not require the help of God to sin less or to sin differently. Because self-improvement, including moral reformation, is at least occasionally practiced by millions of persons with or without religious inclinations, it has been called “pagan repentance.” This myth of self-reformation as repentance can be illustrated in the temporary change that occurred

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Seven Myths of Repentance

1. Sorrow equals repentance
2. Self-preservation is repentance
3. Penance and repentance are equal
4. Reformation is repentance
5. Repentance and self-defense can exist together
6. Repentance can be selective
7. Repentance eliminates the consequences of evil.

in King Ahab after being denounced by the prophet Elijah (see I Kings 21:27–29). Ahab tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, fasted, and went about despondently. The merciful God, who saw the wicked king humble himself, postponed the evil threatened, albeit not permanently. In the last days of Ahab's life there is not so much as a hint that he was a changed man. He died under the judgment of God just as the prophet had predicted.

Myth Five: Repentance and Self-Defense Can Exist Together

Whenever a person is seemingly repentant and yet busily defends himself, you can be sure his repentance is not genuine. Consider King Saul, who was commanded by God to go and utterly destroy the Amalekites. Instead, he spared alive the best of the sheep and goats and preserved some of the gold and the goods. He also showed leniency to Agag the king, sparing his life and defying the Lord. When Samuel confronted him about his disobedience, the self-defense began (see I Samuel 15). Although Saul blurted out, "I have sinned," he would not abandon his self-defense. Mark it down as a fact: repentance and self-defense can never coexist.

Myth Six: Repentance Can Be Selective

It is pure myth to suppose that when a person comes to repentance it is his prerogative to pick and choose those sins of which he will repent. Whenever people resort to selective repentance, their tendency is to repent of their glaring errors, especially those sins of which they are generally known to be guilty. Such pretended repentance may satisfy others, but it will have no impact whatever upon eternity. True repentance must include everything that is offensive to God, including the secret sins of the heart, which are often the most devastating sins.

Myth Seven: Repentance Eliminates the Consequences of Sin

It is absurd and erroneous to suppose that when you have repented, all the consequences of your sin cease. There are multitudes of sins that carry an automatic penalty with them, and no level of repentance can change that. For instance, suppose the mother of an aborted child comes to true repentance. Is the child restored to life? No! The effects of sin remain. A substance abuser may come to very thorough repentance and yet the lingering problems caused by years of abuse may continue to harm his or her spouse and offspring for years to come.

Now let me ask, "Do any of these myths fit you?" Is it possible that what you have been calling repentance is nothing other than a foolish and grievous myth? What about your church? Have you considered the likelihood that many in your church have embraced the myths of repentance and are clinging to the repentance that leads to eternal death rather than the repentance that leads to salvation and eternal life (II Cor. 7:8–10)? ✱

Mind Your Mind

By William Temple (1881–1944)

This article is an excerpt from Temple's book *Christian Faith and Life* as recorded in a devotional tract (Nashville: Upper Room, 1968).

John came, and after him Jesus came, saying, "Change your way of looking at life; the kingdom of heaven is at hand." But we have lowered the term "repentance" into meaning something not very different from remorse... Repentance does not merely mean giving up a bad habit. What it is concerned with is the mind; get a new mind. What mind? The mind of Christ—our standard of reference; learn to look at the world his way. To repent is to adopt God's viewpoint in place of your own. There need not be any sorrow about it. In itself, far from being sorrowful, it is the most joyful thing in the world, because when you have done it you have adopted the view point of truth itself, and you are in fellowship with God. It means a complete re-valuation of all things we are inclined to think good.



The world, as we live in it, is like a shop window in which some mischievous person has got overnight and shifted all the price-labels

round so that the cheap things have the high price-labels on them, and the really precious things are priced low. We let ourselves be taken in. Repentance means getting those price-labels back in the right place. The reason our Lord gave for calling one of his disciples "Satan" was that he thought like a man instead of thinking like God—for that he was called "Satan."

No doubt, repentance will often begin in sorrow, because it is our disgust at discovering the kind of people we are that moves us to seek a new attitude of mind. The only thing that matters is getting a new outlook; if sorrow does not lead to that, it is quite useless and wasted. Therefore, the first thing necessary for repentance is the vision of God. Do not begin ever considering what is wrong with you without first being quite sure your mind is directed towards the glory of God as it has shone forth in Jesus Christ. In this we must begin by having our minds turned towards God, and the inevitable result of that is always humiliation, as it was for Isaiah when he had heard the song of the Seraphs. "Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips... my eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts." You can always know whether you have really attained to any understanding of God by finding out whether you have been humiliated. If not, you have not got there. To get there is the first necessity. ✱

The Prayer of Tears

By Richard J. Foster

Edited and abridged from *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992: 41–45).

Tears are a sign—not an infallible sign, to be sure, but a sign nevertheless—that God has touched the emotive center of our lives. Through the Prayer of Tears we give God permission to show us our sinfulness and the sinfulness of the world at the emotional level...

The most rock-bottom reality for the Prayer of Tears is that we are sinners. I do not mean that we commit sins—though I am quite sure that is true, too. I am giving not a moralistic judgment on our activities but a theological judgment on our separation from God. We are not sinners because we commit sinful acts; rather, we commit sinful acts because we are sinners. The theologians call this essential corruption *peccatum originis*, or original sin, and the sin that is at the heart of all sin is a refusal to believe, a lack of faith, a *defectus fidei*. From this fundamental lack and estrangement from God flow all of the warped and distorted actions we call sins.

The New Testament opens with the frequent, almost monotonous call of John the Baptist to “repent for the kingdom of God is at hand.” The refrain is taken up by Peter at Pentecost, and finally our Bible closes with Jesus’ call to the seven churches to repent and turn into God’s way. Martin Luther declares that the life of the Christian should be one of daily repentance. Daily we confess, daily we repent, daily we “turn, turn, ‘til we turn ‘round right.” The Prayer of Tears is the primary aid to our turning. How this is done, however, is not well understood in our day. It is to this concern that we now turn.

God never despises “a broken and contrite heart,” says the Psalmist (Ps. 51:17). But the real question for us in the modern world is: how do we experience a contrite heart? A grieving, broken, sorrowing, repentant heart?

We begin by *asking*. I wish that did not sound so trite, for it is the deepest truth we can ever know about our turning toward God. *We* simply cannot make heart repentance happen. It is not something that we cause to come about by creating a certain kind of mood with a certain

kind of atmosphere and a certain kind of music. It is a gift from God, pure and simple. But it is a gift that God loves to bestow upon all who ask. And so with boldness and persistence we ask for contrite hearts. We ask for weeping, lamenting hearts. “Lord,” we may pray, “let me receive the gift of tears.” Like the tax collector in Jesus’ parable, we plead, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” (Luke 18:13). Not just once, or now and again, but with every breath.

Second, we *confess*. We acknowledge our lack of faith, our distance, our hardheartedness. Before a loving and gracious Father we declare our sins without excuse

or abridgment: unbelief and disunity, arrogance and self-sufficiency, and offenses too personal to name and too many to mention. C. S. Lewis notes, “The true Christian’s nostril is to be continually attentive to the inner cesspool.” Paul’s shocking declaration “Wretched man that I am!” is the cry of the mature Christian longing for the spirit of repentance (Rom. 7:24).

Third, we *receive*. Our God, who is faithful and just—and also full of mercy—*will* forgive and *will* cleanse (I John 1:9). Like the father of the prodigal, he rushes to us at the first sign of our turning toward home. He lavishes us with good gifts that we do not deserve and cannot earn.

Fourth, we *obey*. It is not enough to ask God for a heart soft and broken where there is space for repentance. It is not enough to confess freely and openly our many offenses. Embedded in the word of forgiveness is the call to obedience. Perhaps there surfaces to the conscious mind an attitude of self-righteousness. We confess it instantly. Maybe we remember an unkindness spoken. We go to the person without hesitation and ask forgiveness. Perhaps a past act of injustice comes to mind. Immediately we make restitution. On the affirmative side of the ledger we engage in the practice of virtue with boundless zeal. Perhaps at work we have a chance to strike a blow against injustice. We speak up right away. Maybe we see an opportunity to influence our children for good. We do it posthaste. Perhaps a neighbor needs a hand in repairing the fence. We rush to help. Through it all we experience the joy of obedience. ✦



Good Grief! continued from page 1

Yes, repentance may bring us to grief but it is a *good* grief, a grief “that leads to salvation without regret” (II Cor. 7:10). As we consider the coldness of our hearts, the stubborn unbelief of our children, the worldliness of our churches, and the moral bankruptcy of our nation, is there anything more important than a clarion call to “Repent!”? No one stated it better than the apostle Paul when he stood in Athens and boldly proclaimed: “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:30–31).

When was the last time you heard a sermon on repentance? Voices today that urge the church to be “cutting edge,” “on the right side of history,” and “in sync with the times” are siren voices luring us to destruction. “Stand by the roads, and



look, ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls” (Jer. 6:16). The way forward is to back up!

It is easy to assume that a call to repentance should be addressed to drug addicts, sex traffickers, Islamic terrorists, and the like. However, the Bible consistently reminds us that the real hindrance to revival and reformation is *not* the unbelievers “out there” but the believers “in here.” “If *my* people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (II Chron. 7:14). As you read these articles and prayerfully consider what is said, may God grant his people once again the gift of repentance (Acts 5:31). ✦

The First Word of the Gospel continued from page 1

scholar, Richard Trench, defined repentance as “that mighty change in the mind, heart, and life, wrought by the Spirit of God.” Modern Christians use the word to signify an emotional, sentimental experience better described by regret or remorse. But the essential sense of the word is “to change.”

It has a moral as well as an intellectual impact that is best summed up by Paul’s insistence that converts should “perform deeds worthy of their repentance” (Acts 26:20).

Sad to say, repentance is a missing note in much evangelism. The appeal is not for repentance, but for enlistment. Defective evangelism has become a national scandal, for while evangelistic enterprises are claiming untold numbers of converts, murder, robbery, rape, prostitution, pornography, and other social evils are abounding. The fault must lie in

“Not only does the average Christian seem unaware of the first word of the Gospel, but he apparently does not at all know what the word means.”

the message for in the great awakenings of previous generations, sinners were urged to repent and believe the Gospel.

It was the Lord Jesus himself who said, “Repent and believe the Gospel” (Mk. 1:15). Does this mean that the sinner must do two things to be saved? No, the exhortation is really only one requirement. The instruction: “Leave Los Angeles and go to London” may sound like two separate requests, but it really is only one. For it is quite impossible to go to London without leaving Los Angeles. It is likewise quite impossible to believe truly without really repenting. The difference between true faith and what the Scripture calls false faith is simple: it is the lack of true repentance. ✦

The Repentance of Believers continued from page 2

We allow that at the very moment of justification we are born again. In that instant we experience that inward change from darkness into marvelous light. But are we entirely changed? Are we wholly transformed into the image of him that created us? Far from it. We still retain a depth of sin, and it is the consciousness of this which constrains us to groan for a full deliverance to him that is mighty to save. Hence it is that those believers who

are not convinced of the deep corruption of their hearts who have little concern about entire sanctification. They have no great uneasiness for the want of it and no great hunger or thirst after it. They cannot until they repent in the sense above described, until God unveils the inbred monster’s face and shows them the real state of their souls. Then only, when they feel the burden, will they groan for deliverance from it. ✦

Judas and Peter: Remorse or Repentance?

By David A. Seamands (1922–2006)



Former missionary to India, pastor, and best-selling author, Seamands was a master of applying the truth of Scripture with pastoral compassion and psychological astuteness. This excerpt is taken from his book, *If Only: Moving Beyond Blame to Belief* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1995: 95–97).

Both Judas and Peter represent the “If only” of looking back at sins and failures. And in both cases, the sins were *very serious*. Judas and Peter both contributed to the sufferings of Jesus, one by *betraying* him and the other by *denying* him. They both *disowned* him, one for the desire for gain, thirty pieces of silver, and the other for fear of loss, people’s approval. Furthermore, their sins were irrevocable; there was no way of recalling them, retrieving them, or reversing them.

What made the difference in the endings of their stories, one so tragic and the other so triumphant? Both Peter

and Judas were filled with loathing for their sin, and loathing for themselves.

Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken... And he went outside and wept bitterly... (Matt. 26:75)

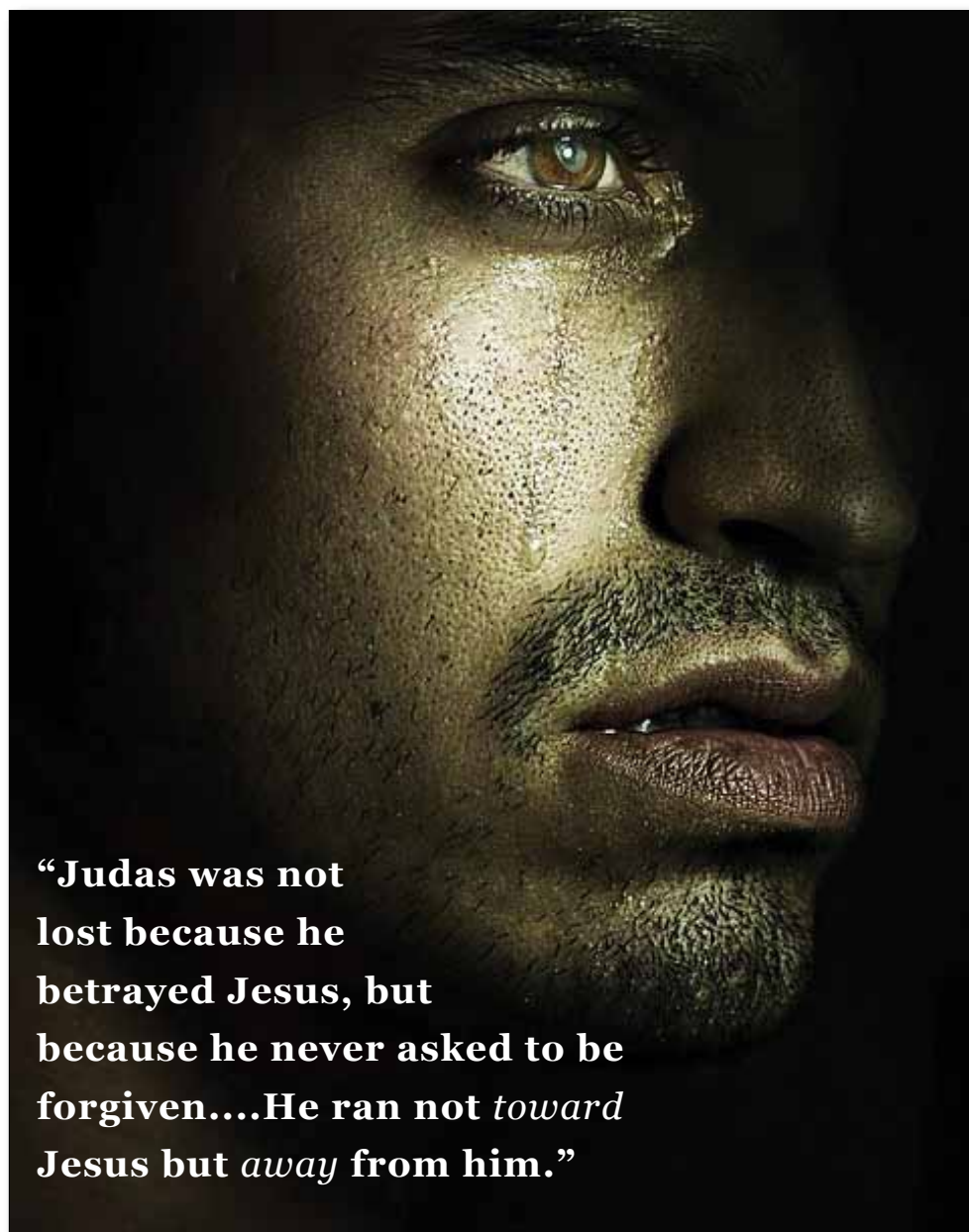
When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. “I have sinned,” he said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.” “What is that to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.” So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. (Matt. 27:3–5)

The key to the different endings is in the great distinction between *remorse* and *repentance*. The Greek word for remorse is *metamelomai*, meaning “to feel regret, to be concerned, or in anguish about something.” It is a purely backward look which says, “I’m angry at myself for what I did. It was terrible. If only I hadn’t done it!” Remorse contains regret, sorrow, and self-hate, but it’s all pointed backward.

The Greek word for repentance is *metanoieo*. It has all the backward looking “If only” feelings of *metamelomai*, but it also has a forward look which means “to turn around, to make an about-face.” The word is sometimes translated, “to change one’s mind” or “to be converted.” It combines the “If only” of past anguish and self-accusation with the all-important element of *present hope and determination to change direction*.

There is a great message here for some of us who would gladly give thirty or even thirty thousand silver coins to erase some painful memory of sin off the blackboard of our minds. Judas *said* the right thing, “I have sinned!” Those very words are at the heart of what is perhaps the greatest story Jesus ever told. The Prodigal Son, bruised and broken by his own sins, was filled with a kind of self-loathing which only the metaphor of a pigpen could aptly convey to Christ’s Jewish listeners. When he “came to his senses”—what a tremendous phrase—the

Continued on page 11



“Judas was not lost because he betrayed Jesus, but because he never asked to be forgiven....He ran not toward Jesus but away from him.”

first thing he said was, "I have sinned." Those words are the turning point of the parable, and they could have been the turning point for Judas. Instead, they turned his self-loathing into self-destruction. The Prodigal was saved because those words turned him around, so that he no longer looked backward or inward or downward. He looked forward to seeing his father and asking him for mercy.

**"God's grace and self-forgiveness
are so closely linked together
that without the latter we
really do not experience
the joy of the former."**

Remorse fills us with regret and self-recrimination. Repentance does too, but it turns us around so that we can see the possibility of being restored to a new relationship. Judas was not lost because he betrayed Jesus, but because he never asked to be forgiven. He self-destructed not because his sin was too great to be forgiven, but because he kept looking back at it and never turned around so that he could look at Jesus once again. He ran not *toward* Jesus but *away* from him.

Peter, knowing that he too had sinned, "went out and wept bitterly." Of course, there was the great divine initiative; there had to be, since true repentance is always a gift from God (II Cor. 7:10). Our responsibility is in deciding whether we will *receive* or *reject* it. The Gospels give us the details of that initiative of grace. Luke tells us, "The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered... And he went outside and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61-62). Mark reminds us that after the Resurrection, the angels sent a special message to Peter, "Go, tell his disciples and Peter" (Mark 16:7). And Paul informs us that "Jesus appeared to Peter" (I Cor. 15:5). At least Peter was there to receive these wonderful gifts. In his self-loathing, he hadn't run away and destroyed himself. He was available to the offers of God's grace.

There are people today who desperately need this message, for the "If only" of self-loathing is keeping them entombed in a dark cave of guilt and condemnation. They need to break out of their condition by fully accepting God's offer of forgiveness and his offer of grace and courage to forgive themselves. God's grace and self-forgiveness are so closely linked together that without the latter we really do not experience the joy of the former. ✨

U-Turn

By Stan Key

*I met a man the other day
Who asked me if I knew the way
To Syracuse.*

*He had a map and had a car
And told me he had traveled far
Without success.*

*"I'm tired and filled with consternation;
I can't reach my destination!
Can you help?"*

*I smiled and touched his trembling hand
And tried to help him understand
His lost condition.*

*"I know what's wrong, for don't you see
The same mistake was made by me
Some years ago.*

*I too was trying hard to find
My own direction, peace of mind,
To no avail."*

*"Your problem, sir, is plain and clear,
If you have an ear to hear
And humbly listen.*

*You'll only reach your destination
When you make a full rotation;
Turn around!*

*The road is right, but you are wrong,
For you have traveled all along
In wrong direction!"*

*At first, he gave a sheepish grin
And asked for me to say again
What I had told him.*

*"The road is right, the way is wrong!"
I prayed my words were not too strong
Or condescending.*

*"Do not give up in despair;
Just turn around, and travel where
Your back was facing."*

*He paused, then turned his car around
And drove away; I heard the sound
Of tires screeching.*

*Now he fully understood!
O it felt so very good
To have direction!*

*As I watched him drive away,
I prayed for friends who'd lost their way
To make a U-turn.*

Upcoming Events

September 16–18

Holy Living Conference (Michigan)

Speaker: Blake Neff

September 23–25

Priscilla Classes (Wilmore, KY)

October 3–9

Salem Camp Meeting (Salem, MS)

Bible Teacher: Stan Key

The High Calling—September–October 2016

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The Francis Asbury Society

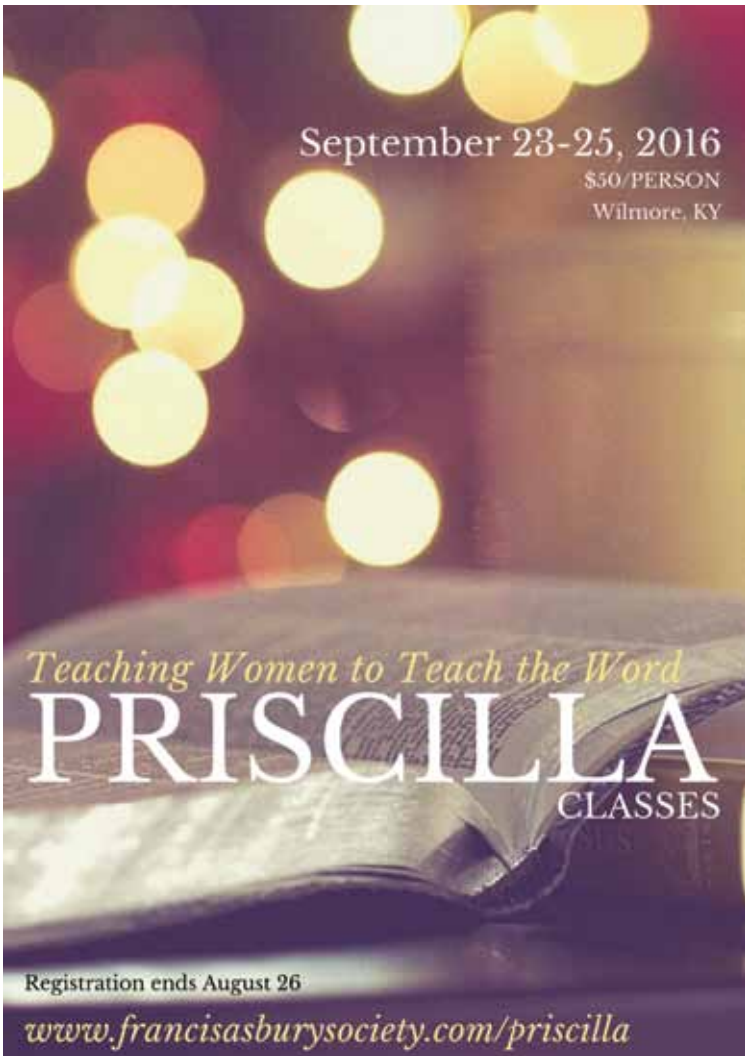
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