

Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball

The miracle of forgiveness brings peace and helps us grow closer to God.

There is a glorious miracle awaiting every soul who is prepared to change. Repentance and forgiveness make a brilliant day of the darkest night. When souls are reborn, when lives are changed—then comes the great miracle to beautify and warm and lift. When spiritual death has threatened and now instead there is resuscitation, when life pushes out death—when this happens it is the miracle of miracles. And such great miracles will never cease so long as there is one person who applies the redeeming power of the Savior and his own good works to bring about his rebirth. ...

The essence of the miracle of forgiveness is that it brings peace to the previously anxious, restless, frustrated, perhaps tormented soul. In a world of turmoil and contention this is indeed a priceless gift.³

It is not easy to be at peace in today's troubled world. Necessarily peace is a personal acquisition. ... It can be attained only through maintaining constantly a repentant attitude, seeking forgiveness of sins both large and small, and thus coming ever closer to God. For Church members this is the essence of their preparation, their readiness to meet the Savior when he comes. ... Those who are ready will be at peace in their hearts. They will be partakers of the blessing the Savior promised to his apostles: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." ([John 14:27](#).)

[One of the purposes] of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to call people everywhere to repentance. Those who heed the call, whether members or nonmembers of the Church, can be partakers of the miracle of forgiveness. God will wipe away from their eyes the tears of anguish, and remorse, and consternation, and fear, and guilt. Dry eyes will replace the wet ones, and smiles of satisfaction will replace the worried, anxious look.

What relief! What comfort! What joy! Those laden with transgressions and sorrows and sin may be forgiven and cleansed and purified if they will return to their Lord, learn of him, and keep his commandments. And all of us needing to repent of day-to-day follies and weaknesses can likewise share in this miracle.⁴

We all need repentance.

"... There cannot any unclean thing enter into the kingdom of God. ..." ([1 Ne. 15:34](#).) And again, "... no unclean thing can dwell with God. ..." ([1 Ne. 10:21](#).) To the prophets the term *unclean* in this context means what it means to God. To man the word may be relative in meaning—one minute speck of dirt does not make a white shirt or dress unclean, for example. But to God who is perfection, cleanliness means moral and personal cleanliness. Less than that is, in one degree or another, uncleanliness and hence cannot dwell with God. Were it not for the blessed gifts of repentance and forgiveness this would be a hopeless situation for man, since no one except the Master has ever lived sinless on the earth.⁵

There is never a day in any man's life when repentance is not essential to his well-being and eternal progress.

But when most of us think of repentance we tend to narrow our vision and view it as good only for our husbands, our wives, our parents, our children, our neighbors, our friends, the world—anyone and everyone except ourselves. Similarly there is a prevalent, perhaps subconscious, feeling that the Lord designed repentance only for those who commit murder or adultery or theft or other heinous crimes. This is of course not so. If we are humble and desirous of living the gospel we will come to think of repentance as applying to everything we do in life, whether it be spiritual or temporal in nature. Repentance is for every soul who has not yet reached perfection.⁶

Repentance is the key to forgiveness. It opens the door to happiness and peace and points the way to salvation in the kingdom of God. It unlocks the spirit of humility in the soul of man and makes him contrite of heart and submissive to the will of God.

“Sin is the transgression of the law” ([1 John 3:4](#)), and for such transgression a punishment is affixed under eternal law. Every normal individual is responsible for the sins he commits, and would be similarly liable to the punishment attached to those broken laws. However, Christ's death on the cross offers us exemption from the eternal punishment for most sins. He took upon himself the punishment for the sins of all the world, with the understanding that those who repent and come unto him will be forgiven of their sins and freed from the punishment.⁷

Recognition of sin and feeling godly sorrow are a part of true repentance.

Repentance is a kind and merciful law. It is far-reaching and all-inclusive. ... It is composed of many elements, each one indispensable to complete repentance. ...

There is *no royal road to repentance*, no privileged path to forgiveness. Every man must follow the same course whether he be rich or poor, educated or untrained, tall or short, prince or pauper, king or commoner. “For there is no respect of persons with God.” ([Rom. 2:11](#).) ...

Before the many elements of repentance are set in motion there has to be a first step. That first step is the turning point at which the sinner consciously recognizes his sin. This is the awakening, the conviction of guilt. Without this there can be no true repentance because there is no acknowledgement of sin. ...

When we have become aware of the gravity of our sin, we can condition our minds to follow such processes as will rid us of the effects of the sin. Alma tried to convey this to Corianton when he said: “... Let your sins trouble you, with that trouble which shall bring you down unto repentance. ... Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point. ...” ([Alma 42:29–30](#).)⁸

The Holy Ghost can play an important role in convincing the sinner of his error. He helps in making known “the truth of all things” ([Moro. 10:5](#)); in teaching all things and bringing all things to one's remembrance ([John 14:26](#)); and in reproofing the world of sin ([John 16:8](#)).

Often people indicate that they have repented when all they have done is to express regret for a wrong act. But true repentance is marked by that godly sorrow that changes, transforms, and saves. To be sorry is not enough. ... Paul put it this way to the Corinthian saints:

“Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” (2 Cor. 7:9–10.)⁹

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. There must be a broken heart and a contrite spirit. There must be “sackcloth and ashes.” There must be tears and genuine change of heart.¹⁰

Abandonment of sin includes building a new life.

Of course, even the conviction of guilt is not enough. It could be devastating and destructive were it not accompanied by efforts to rid oneself of guilt. Accompanying the conviction, then, must be an earnest desire to clean up the guilt and compensate for the loss sustained through the error.¹¹

There is one crucial test of repentance. This is abandonment of the sin. Providing that a person discontinues his sin with the right motives—because of a growing consciousness of the gravity of the sin and a willingness to comply with the laws of the Lord—he is genuinely repenting. This criterion has been set by the Lord: “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and *forsake them*.” (D&C 58:43. Italics added.)

In other words, it is not real repentance until one has abandoned the error of his way and started on a new path. ... The saving power does not extend to him who merely *wantsto* change his life. True repentance prods one to action.

One must not be surprised that effort is required, and not merely desire. After all, it is work which develops our moral as well as our physical muscles.¹²

In abandoning sin one cannot merely wish for better conditions. He must make them. He may need to come to hate the spotted garments and loathe the sin. He must be certain not only that he has abandoned the sin but that he has changed the situations surrounding the sin. He should avoid the places and conditions and circumstances where the sin occurred, for these could most readily breed it again. He must abandon the people with whom the sin was committed. He may not hate the persons involved but he must avoid them and everything associated with the sin. He must dispose of all letters, trinkets, and things which will remind him of the “old days” and the “old times.” He must forget addresses, telephone numbers, people, places and situations from the sinful past, and build a new life. He must eliminate anything which would stir the old memories.¹³

In abandoning evil, transforming lives, changing personalities, molding characters or remolding them, we need the help of the Lord, and we may be assured of it if we do our part. The man who leans heavily upon his Lord becomes the master of self and can accomplish anything he sets out to do, whether it be to secure the brass plates, build a ship, overcome a habit, or conquer a deep-seated transgression.¹⁴

Confession lifts burdens.

The confession of sin is a necessary element in repentance and therefore in obtaining forgiveness. It is one of the tests of true repentance, for, “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, *he will confess them* and forsake them.” ([D&C 58:43](#). Italics added.) ...

Perhaps confession is one of the hardest of all the obstacles for the repenting sinner to negotiate. His shame often restrains him from making known his guilt and acknowledging his error. Sometimes his assumed lack of confidence in mortals to whom he should confess his sin justifies in his mind his keeping the secret locked in his own heart. ...

Knowing the hearts of men, and their intents, and their abilities to repent and regenerate themselves, the Lord waits to forgive until the repentance has matured. The transgressor must have a “broken heart and a contrite spirit” and be willing to humble himself and do all that is required. The confession of his major sins to a proper Church authority is one of those requirements made by the Lord. These sins include adultery, fornication, other sexual transgressions, and other sins of comparable seriousness. This procedure of confession assures proper controls and protection for the Church and its people and sets the feet of the transgressor on the path of true repentance.

Many offenders in their shame and pride have satisfied their consciences, temporarily at least, with a few silent prayers to the Lord and rationalized that this was sufficient confession of their sins. “But I have confessed my sin to my Heavenly Father,” they will insist, “and that is all that is necessary.” This is not true where a major sin is involved. Then two sets of forgiveness are required to bring peace to the transgressor—one from the proper authorities of the Lord’s Church, and one from the Lord himself. [See [Mosiah 26:29](#).] ...

... The ideal confession is voluntary, not forced. It is induced from within the offender’s soul, not sparked by being found out in the sin. Such confession ... is a sign of growing repentance. It indicates the sinner’s conviction of sin and his desire to abandon the evil practices. The voluntary confession is infinitely more acceptable in the sight of the Lord than is forced admission, lacking humility, wrung from an individual by questioning when guilt is evident. Such forced admission is not evidence of the humble heart which calls forth the Lord’s mercy: “... For I, the Lord, forgive sins, and am merciful unto those *who confess their sins* with humble hearts.” ([D&C 61:2](#). Italics added.)¹⁵

While the major sins such as those listed earlier ... call for confession to the proper Church authorities, clearly such confession is neither necessary nor desirable for all sins. Those of lesser gravity but which have offended others—marital differences, minor fits of anger, disagreements and such—should instead be confessed to the person or persons hurt and the matter should be cleared between the persons involved, normally without a reference to a Church authority.¹⁶

Confession brings peace. ... Confession is not only the revealing of errors to proper authorities, but the sharing of burdens to lighten them. One lifts at least part of his burden and places it on other shoulders which are able and willing to help carry the load. Then there comes satisfaction in having taken another step in doing all that is possible to rid oneself of the burden of transgression.¹⁷

Restitution is a necessary part of repentance.

When a person has experienced the deep sorrow and humility induced by a conviction of sin; when he has cast off the sin and resolutely determined to abhor it henceforth; when he has humbly confessed his sin to God and to the proper persons on earth—when these things are done there remains the requirement of restitution. He must restore that which he damaged, stole, or wronged.¹⁸

The repentant sinner is required to make restitution insofar as it is possible. I say “insofar as it is possible” because there are some sins for which no adequate restitution can be made, and others for which only partial restitution is possible.

A thief or burglar may make partial restitution by returning that which was stolen. A liar may make the truth known and correct to some degree the damage done by the lie. A gossip who has slandered the character of another may make partial restitution through strenuous effort to restore the good name of the person he harmed. If by sin or carelessness the wrongdoer has destroyed property, he may restore or pay for it in full or in part.

If a man’s actions have brought sorrow and disgrace to his wife and children, in his restitution he must make every effort to restore their confidence and love by an overabundance of ... devotion and fidelity. This is true also of wives and mothers. Likewise if children have wronged their parents, a part of their ... repentance must be to right those wrongs and to honor their parents.

As a rule there are many things which a repentant soul can do to make amends. “A broken heart and a contrite spirit” will usually find ways to restore to some extent. The true spirit of repentance demands that he who injures shall do everything in his power to right the wrong.¹⁹

In the process of repentance we must restore completely where possible, otherwise restore to the maximum degree attainable. And through it all we must remember that the pleading sinner, desiring to make restitution for his acts, must also forgive others of all offenses committed against him. The Lord will not forgive us unless our hearts are fully purged of all hate, bitterness and accusation against our fellowmen.²⁰

True repentance includes a commitment to live the Lord’s commandments.

In his preface to modern revelation, the Lord outlined what is one of the most difficult requirements in true repentance. For some it is the hardest part of repentance, because it puts one on guard for the remainder of his life. The Lord says:

“... I the Lord cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance;

“Nevertheless, he that repents and *does the commandments of the Lord* shall be forgiven.”
([D&C 1:31–32](#). Italics added.)

This scripture is most precise. First, one repents. Having gained that ground he then must live the commandments of the Lord to retain his vantage point. This is necessary to secure complete forgiveness. ...

Since all of us sin in greater or lesser degree, we are all in need of constant repentance, of continually raising our sights and our performance. One can hardly do the commandments of the Lord in a day, a week, a month or a year. This is an effort which must be extended through the remainder of one's years. ...

... Repentance must involve an all-out, total surrender to the program of the Lord. That transgressor is not fully repentant who neglects his tithing, misses his meetings, breaks the Sabbath, fails in his family prayers, does not sustain the authorities of the Church, breaks the Word of Wisdom, does not love the Lord nor his fellowmen. ... God cannot forgive unless the transgressor shows a true repentance which spreads to all areas of his life. ... "Doing the commandments" includes the many activities required of the faithful. ... General good works and devotion accompanied by constructive attitudes are what is needed. In addition, a sound way to neutralize the effects of sin in one's life is to bring the light of the gospel to others who do not now enjoy it. This can mean working with both inactive members of the Church and nonmembers—perhaps more usually the latter. Note how the Lord has related the forgiveness of sins to the bearing of testimony respecting the latter-day work:

"For I will forgive you of your sins with this commandment—that you remain steadfast in your minds in solemnity and the spirit of prayer, *in bearing testimony to all the world* of those things which are communicated unto you." ([D&C 84:61](#). Italics added.)²¹

Can we not understand why the Lord has been pleading with man for these thousands of years to come unto him? Surely the Lord was speaking about forgiveness through repentance, and the relief that could come from the tenseness of guilt, when he followed his glorious prayer to his Father with this sublime entreaty and promise:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." ([Matt. 11:28-30](#).)

It is my hope and prayer that men and women everywhere will respond to this gentle invitation and thus let the Master work in their individual lives the great miracle of forgiveness.²²