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Repentance is sometimes a painful process, but it leads to forgiveness and lasting peace. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord said, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). In this dispensation the Lord has promised, “He who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more” (D&C 58:42). Repentance includes the following elements:

Faith in Our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. The power of sin is great. To become free from it, we must turn to our Heavenly Father, pray in faith, and act as He asks us to. Satan may try to convince us that we are not worthy to pray—that our Father in Heaven is so displeased with us that He will never hear our prayers. This is a lie. Our Father in Heaven is always ready to help if we will come to Him with a repentant heart. He has the power to heal us and to help us triumph over sin.

Repentance is an act of faith in Jesus Christ—an acknowledgment of the power of His Atonement. We can be forgiven only on His terms. As we gratefully recognize His Atonement and His power to cleanse us from sin, we are able to “exercise [our] faith unto repentance” (Alma 34:17).

Sorrow for Sin. In order to be forgiven, we must first acknowledge within ourselves that we have sinned. If we are striving to live the gospel, such an acknowledgment will lead to “godly sorrow,” which “worketh repentance to salvation” (2 Corinthians 7:10). Godly sorrow does not come because of the natural consequences of sin or because of a fear of punishment; rather, it comes from the knowledge that we have, through our actions, displeased our Heavenly Father and our Savior. When we experience godly sorrow, we have a sincere desire for change and a willingness to submit to every requirement for forgiveness.

Confession. “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). Essential to forgiveness is a willingness to disclose fully to our Heavenly Father all that we have done. We must kneel before Him in humble prayer, acknowledging our sins. We confess our shame and guilt, and then plead for help.

Serious transgressions, such as violations of the law of chastity, may jeopardize a person's membership in the Church. Therefore, such sins need to be confessed to both the Lord and His priesthood representatives in the Church. This is done under the care of a bishop or branch president and possibly a stake or mission president, who serve as watchmen and judges in the Church. While only the Lord can forgive sins, these priesthood leaders play a critical role in the process of repentance. They will keep confessions confidential and help throughout the process of repentance.

Abandonment of Sin. Although confession is an essential element of repentance, it is not enough. The Lord has said, “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:43).

We must maintain an unyielding, permanent resolve that we will never repeat the transgression. When we keep this commitment, we will never experience the pain of that sin again. We must flee immediately from any compromising situation. If a certain situation causes us to sin or may cause us to sin, we must leave. We cannot linger in temptation and expect to overcome sin.

Restitution. We must restore as far as possible all that has been damaged by our actions, whether that is someone's property or someone's good reputation. Willing restitution shows the Lord that we will do all we can to repent.

Righteous Living. It is not enough to simply try to resist evil or empty our lives of sin. We must fill our lives with righteousness and engage in activities that bring spiritual power. We must immerse ourselves in the scriptures and pray daily for the Lord to give us strength beyond our own. At times, we should fast for special blessings.

Full obedience brings the complete power of the gospel into our lives, including increased strength to overcome our weaknesses. This obedience includes actions we might not initially consider part of repentance, such as attending meetings, paying tithing, giving service, and forgiving others. The Lord promised, “He that repents and does the commandments of the Lord shall be forgiven” (D&C 1:32).