



The Way Forward Series Guide

Oct. 25: Through Repentance

Welcome for the group and Check-in

"I am feeling..."

Psalm 23 Rhythm

- Slowly read as a group twice.
- Make observations about your experience of the meditative reading of Psalm 23
- What part resonates or creates an allergic reaction within you as we read the Psalm today?

Group Prayer:

"Good Shepherd, thank you for pursuing us, providing for us, and protecting us. Continue to refine our thoughts of you and your ways. We open our lives to receive your goodness and mercy and correction. Remind us of your love as we engage in reflection and see both virtue and vice, healing and brokenness, love and apathy. Amen."

Group Discussion about The Way Forward: Through Repentance

Overview of ideas the sermon explores:

"The purpose of repentance is to repeatedly tap into the joy of our union with Christ in order to weaken our need to do anything contrary to God's heart." (Timothy Keller)

1. Repentance is the result of real sorrow (a painful guilt).
2. Repentance leads to real change.
3. Repentance produces salvation, a way of life, a means of progressing in our union with Christ.
4. In an endeavor to bring about church wide change through repentance in Corinth, Paul encountered opposition – we should expect opposition.
5. Godly sorrow can shake us into action. It's disruptive, it's uncomfortable, it's awkward. And honestly, your leaders have brought Union Center's focus onto sorrow, because it is God's intent that we experience genuine sorrow over our sin.
6. Repentance, as a way of life, is how we progress between justification and glorification. It's not simply a 'get out of jail free card' to be used sparingly, it's a way of life.

Reading of passages from the sermon: 2 Cor 7:5-13a

Group Discussion:

1. For the Corinthians to change, to become a healthy church, they had to admit they had left sins unaddressed. How has Union Center left sins unaddressed? (Please discuss sins left unaddressed without gossip, without speaking about those who are not present)
2. Do the sins of Union Center grieve you? I'm not asking you to own everything, I'm asking if *you feel painful sorrow over the sins of your church family?* Please explain.
3. Pastor Dave mentioned how Judas had regret over betraying Christ, he felt horrible but that wasn't godly sorrow leading to repentance. For some facing our sin results in feeling ruined, or bitter – *can you explain how that isn't godly sorrow but a lie from the enemy?*
4. Reflecting on the Tim Keller Article "All of Life is Repentance":
 - a. Do you repent more often or less often as you mature in Christ?
 - b. Define "Religious Repentance" and "Gospel Repentance"
 - c. Religious repentance brings misery and condemnation, why is that?
 - d. In Christ it is easier to admit our flaws, why is that?
 - e. Keller writes "The more you see your own flaws and sins, the more precious, electrifying, and amazing God's grace appears to you." Is that your experience, why or why not?
 - f. Do you agree with the statement "The sin under all other sins is a lack of joy in Christ." Why do believe that is true?

Practice for this week:

1. Before your group meeting read "All of Life is Repentance" by Tim Keller (2 pg. article **attached**).
2. Use the final section of the article "*The Disciplines of Gospel-Repentance*", to practice self-examination and repentance. Reflect on one a day: Deep Humility, Burning Love, Wise Courage, Godly motivations.

Closing Prayer:

From Desiderius Erasmus (1467 - 1536)

Lord Jesus Christ, you said that you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Help us not to stray from you, for you are the Way;

Nor to distrust you, for you are the Truth;

Nor to rest on any other than you, as you are the Life.

You have taught us what to believe, what to do, what to hope, and where to take our rest.

Give us grace to follow you, the Way, to learn from you, the Truth, and live in you, the Life.

Amen

All of Life is Repentance

BY TIM KELLER

Martin Luther opened the Reformation by nailing "The Ninety-Five Theses" to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral. The very first of the theses was: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ.willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." On the surface this looks a little bleak! Luther seems to be saying Christians will never be making much progress. But of course that wasn't Luther's point at all. He was saying that repentance is the way we make progress in the Christian life. Indeed, pervasive, all-of- life-repentance is the best sign that we are growing deeply and rapidly into the character of Jesus.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF REPENTANCE.

It is important to consider how the gospel affects and transforms the act of repentance. In 'religion' the purpose of repentance is basically to keep God happy so he will continue to bless you and answer your prayers. This means that 'religious repentance' is a) selfish, b) self-righteous, c) and bitter all the way to the bottom. But in the gospel the purpose of repentance is to repeatedly tap into the joy of our union with Christ in order to weaken our need to do anything contrary to God's heart.

'RELIGIOUS' REPENTANCE IS SELFISH.

In religion we only are sorry for sin because of its consequences to us. It will bring us punishment - and we want to avoid that. So we repent. But the gospel tells us that sin can't ultimately bring us into condemnation (Rom 8:1.) Its heinousness is therefore what it does to God-it displeases and dishonors him. Thus in religion, repentance is self-centered; the gospel makes it God-centered. In religion we are mainly sorry for the consequences of sin, but in the gospel we are sorry for the sin itself.

Furthermore, 'religious' repentance is self-righteous. Repentance can easily become a form of 'atoning' for the sin. Religious repentance often becomes a form of self-flagellation in which we convince God (and ourselves) that we are so truly miserable and regretful that we deserve to be forgiven. In the gospel, however, we know that Jesus suffered and was miserable for our sin. We do not have to make ourselves suffer in order to merit forgiveness. We simply receive the forgiveness earned by Christ. (1 John 1:8) says that God forgives us because he is 'just.' That is a remarkable statement. It would be unjust of God to ever deny us forgiveness, because Jesus earned our acceptance! In religion we earn our forgiveness with our repentance, but in the gospel we just receive it.

Last, religious repentance is "bitter all the way down." In religion our only hope is to live a good enough life for God to bless us. Therefore every instance of sin and repentance is traumatic, unnatural, and horribly threatening. Only under great duress does a religious person admit they have sinned-because their only hope is their moral goodness. But in the gospel the knowledge of our acceptance in Christ makes it easier to admit we are flawed (because we know we won't be cast off if we confess the true depths of our sinfulness.) Our hope is in Christ's righteousness, not our own-so it is not so traumatic to admit our weaknesses and lapses. In religion we repent less and less often. But the more accepted and loved in the gospel we feel the more and more often we will be repenting. And though of course there is always some bitterness in any repentance, in the gospel there is ultimately a sweetness. This creates a radical new dynamic for personal growth. The more you see your own flaws and sins, the more precious, electrifying, and amazing God's grace appears to you. But on the other hand, the more aware you are of God's grace and acceptance in Christ, the more you able you are to drop your denials and self-defenses and admit the true dimensions of your sin. The sin under all other sins is a lack of joy in Christ.

THE DISCIPLINES OF GOSPEL-REPENTANCE.

If you clearly understand these two different ways to go about repentance, then (and only then!) you can profit greatly from a regular and exacting discipline of self-examination and repentance. I've found that the practices of the 18th century Methodist leaders George Whitefield and John Wesley have been helpful to me here. In a January 9, 1738, letter to a friend, George Whitefield laid out an order for regular repentance. (He ordinarily did his inventory at night.) He wrote: God give me a deep humility and a burning love, a well-guided zeal and a single eye, and then let men and devils do their worst!" Here is one way to use this order in gospel-grounded repentance.

Deep humility (vs. pride)

Have I looked down on anyone? Have I been too stung by criticism? Have I felt snubbed and ignored?

- Repent like this: Consider the free grace of Jesus until I sense a) decreasing disdain (since I am a sinner too), b) decreasing pain over criticism (since I should not value human approval over God's love.) In light of his grace I can let go of the need to keep up a good image-it is too great a burden and now unnecessary. Consider free grace until I experience grateful, restful joy.

Burning love (vs. indifference)

Have I spoken or thought unkindly of anyone? Am I justifying myself by caricaturing (in my mind) someone else?

Have I been impatient and irritable? Have I been self-absorbed and indifferent and inattentive to people?

- Repent like this: Consider the free grace of Jesus until there is a) no coldness or unkindness (think of the sacrificial love of Christ for you), b) no impatience (think of his patience with you), and c) no indifference. Consider free grace until I show warmth and affection. God was infinitely patient and attentive to me, out of grace.

Wise courage (vs. anxiety)

Have I avoided people or tasks that I know I should face? Have I been anxious and worried? Have I failed to be circumspect or have I been rash and impulsive?

- Repent like this: Consider the free grace of Jesus until there is a) no cowardly avoidance of hard things (since Jesus faced evil for me), b) no anxious or rash behavior (since Jesus' death proves God cares and will watch over me). It takes pride to be anxious - I am not wise enough to know how my life should go. Consider free grace until I experience calm thoughtfulness and strategic boldness.

Godly motivations (a 'single eye')

Am I doing what I am doing for God's glory and the good of others or am I being driven by fears, need for approval, love of comfort and ease, need for control, hunger for acclaim and power, or the 'fear of man?' Am I looking at anyone with envy? Am I giving in to any of even the first motions of lust or gluttony? Am I spending my time on urgent things rather than important things because of these inordinate desires?

- Repent like this: How does Jesus provide for me what I am looking for in these other things? Pray: "O Lord Jesus, make me happy enough in you to avoid sin and wise enough in you to avoid danger, that I may always do what is right in your sight, in your name I pray, Amen."