

DO YOURSELF A GOOD TURN
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Most of us start out in life walking our own paths and charting our own course, neither acknowledging nor heeding our Creator. The results of our piloting often lead us to wonder if perhaps God might have a better plan for our lives. The Bible refers to a deliberate decision to change the direction in which our lives are headed as “repentance.” It is not so much tears, though it may involve these, nor is an apology the same as repentance. An apology is simply an explanation for what occurred. Repentance actually requires a turning away from living for our selves and giving our lives to God. It is a complete change of mind.

No one needed repentance quite like David after he murdered Uriah to cover up adultery. The depth of his repentance paralleled the magnitude of his sin. In Psalms 51:2-3, David began his path to restoration with these words, “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.” No matter how hard, we have to actually say the words. We must admit our error. Romans 10:10 says our mouths are what is used to make the confession necessary for salvation to occur. Unless we acknowledge we have done something requiring forgiveness, grace cannot be applied to our situation. 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” That promise begins with the word “if.”

Every recovery program begins with an honest admission we have a problem. Jesus explained the need for this step in Matthew 9:12. Doctors do not go asking who needs them, but go where they are called on for help. In the fifth chapter of Luke, Jesus indicated He had nothing to offer people who already considered themselves righteous. Under the Law that preceded Him, righteousness was pretty much self determined, but that was coming to an end.

It is always hard to say, “I’m sorry.” Regardless how difficult, Hebrews 12:17 is a warning that we should do so while the opportunity exists. Genesis 6:3 indicates God’s Spirit will not continue to wrestle with ours forever. We ignore God’s call to our hearts at our peril. God is a gentleman and will not remain where unwanted or resisted.

Sometimes though, because He loves us, He will allow us to be hurt. 1 Kings 8:33 indicates God allows trouble in our lives to turn us toward Him. In Colossians, godly sorrow causes repentance leading to salvation. We can cry to God, or we can cry when consequences of our sin bring us grief. Joel 2:13 tells us, “And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God.” Repentance caused by our sorrow for disappointing our Redeemer can result, according to Luke 15:7, in great joy in Heaven.

No one likes it, but change can be very good for us. Repentance starts the process of change Jesus died to make possible. When the keeper of the keys was asked in Acts 2:38 what was required to be saved, he began with step one. “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Jesus also taught repentance as a first step into the kingdom of God in Mark 1:15. Knowing he was filthy inside, David prayed for God to change him in Psalms 51:7 “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” In Psalms 51:10-13, he asked for a new spirit. David was looking for a change from rejection to acceptance and from sorrow to joy.

In Psalms 103:12, David also told us when God forgives our sins; he removes them as far from us as the east is from the west. The distance between east and west can either be the circumference of the Earth, or the space it takes to turn and face the opposite direction. Removing our sins that far from us might only require repentance, or turning around. All it takes is a decision to face and walk a different way. In Ezekiel 18:21-23, God promised, “But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?”

Make no mistake. God gets no pleasure in having His sacrifice on the cross having no effect. He takes no more delight in punishing us for our sins than we do in correcting our own children. In 2 Chronicles 7:14, He promised, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." When we get to the point where we are tired of the hurt in our world, our hearts, and our homes, we will turn away from evil and cry out for help. He explains in Jeremiah 36:3, that we are warned of consequences of disobedience so that when we hear of the evil that will befall us, we will turn from our evil ways. Once we turn, or repent, God will be able to forgive our iniquity and our sin. Since we came from God originally, perhaps verse in the twenty-fourth chapter of the same book sums it up even better, "And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart." Maybe repentance is more of a returning, than even a turning. It is surely God's desire to have us back with Him.