

Real Repentance



Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Luke 3:8

Real Repentance (2 Samuel 12:1-13)

See [Psalms 32 & 51](#)

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Introduction

At the end of my first year of seminary, I had a unique summer job. I was hired to teach high school history and psychology at the medium security prison in my hometown. My uncle worked there as a guard, and a number of the prison teaching faculty and staff had once been my teachers when I was a high school student (even my high school principal was the principle of the prison high school). One of my fellow-teachers told me an interesting and mildly amusing story of one of his experiences while teaching there.



The prison attempted to rehabilitate the inmates by enabling them to complete their high school courses and then receive a high school diploma. The school was held inside the prison in some of the very finest facilities I have ever seen.⁴⁵ Classes were seldom larger than 20 students, and a guard was posted out in the hall, “just in case. . . .” One school rule was that you could not sleep in class. As my colleague showed a movie to his class one day, one of his students was particularly sleepy. He did not even try to stay awake, but put his head down on his desk and slept. As my friend walked around the classroom, he

noticed this sleeping student and made his way around to his desk where he gently tapped him on the shoulder, and then walked on. A little later, he again made his way past this fellow's desk, and he was still sleeping soundly. My teacher friend gently tapped him again. The third time around, my friend grasped the fellow by the shoulder, and gently shook him (my friend was not the aggressive type). This time the young man awoke, jumped to his feet, and then turned to my friend and threatened, “If you ever do that to me again, you're going to get it!” My friend backed away and made his way to the door, where he beckoned for Mr. Look, our faithful guard. (Mr. Look was a sergeant in the Navy, and he knew how to deal with such matters.) Mr. Look escorted the student to the “hole” (solitary confinement).

A month later, the student was released from solitary confinement and returned to his classes. The first day he returned to my friend's class, he made his way up to him to “apologize.” “I'm really sorry about what I said to you,” he explained, “but I think you misunderstood me. What I said to you was, 'If you ever do that again, you *might* get it.'” That, my friend, is not repentance.

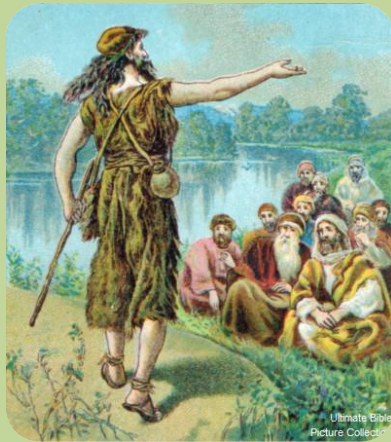
This young man's “repentance” is all too common. True repentance is a rare thing to find, even in the Bible. In our text, David said to Nathan, “**I have sinned. . . .**” These same words (or their equivalent) are found elsewhere in the Scriptures, but not always with the same sincerity. For example, Pharaoh twice told Moses, “**I have sinned . . .**” (see [Exodus 9:27; 10:16-17](#)). It is

obvious to all that his was not a sincere repentance. Balaam was intercepted by the angel of God on his way to Balak, and when he realized he had barely escaped death at the hand of the angel of God, he exclaimed, “**I have sinned . . .**” ([Numbers 22:34](#)). Later biblical texts inform us that his repentance was also false. Judas, who betrayed our Lord, confessed to his sin, but he did not truly repent of it either ([Matthew 27:4](#)). Thus, we must conclude that merely saying, “I have sinned” is not proof of genuine repentance.



This is most certainly the case with the repentance of many of those who came to John the Baptist, seeking to be baptized:

5 Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea and all the district around the Jordan; 6 and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins. 7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 “Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; 9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham” ([Matthew 3:5-9](#)).



John the Baptist raised the issue of real repentance, because he saw many whose “repentance” fell far short of the mark. Today the issue of real repentance is very much alive. Some undoubtedly go too far by laying down their own legalistic demands as the only “**fruit in keeping with repentance.**” On the other hand, there are those who teach that repentance is simply a matter of “agreeing with God.” But their definition of repentance results in a mere mouthing of guilt, in a manner that minimizes the guilt and horror of sin and sets one up to repeat that same sin again. To top it all off, we see the teary-eyed confessions of televangelists and other prominent professing Christian leaders and wonder whether their repentance is for real. I believe David's repentance is genuine and that it provides us with an example of repentance that is real.

I know I have restricted our study to a very small portion of our text -- one verse to be precise. Our focus is not really as narrow as it might seem, however. I wish to consider [2 Samuel 12:13](#) in the light of David's life after this confession, as well as his expanded confession in two of his psalms which deal specifically with his sin regarding Uriah and Bathsheba -- [Psalms 32](#) and 51. Let us listen carefully then to see what real repentance looks like.

Common Characteristics of Pseudo-(False) Repentance

I have already mentioned some instances of false repentance in the Bible, but let us pursue this matter a little further, so that David's real repentance can be viewed in contrast to the false repentance of others. Specifically, I would like to draw your attention to Saul, who three times before has uttered these same words, **“I have sinned . . .”** ([1 Samuel 15:24, 30; 26:21](#)). What is it about Saul's “repentance” which falls far short of real repentance? Let us pause to reflect on Saul's “repentance.”

(1) Saul's first response to a prophetic rebuke is silence. I must point out that while Saul may appear to repent in [1 Samuel 15](#), and again in chapter 26, this “repentance” is both too little and too late. The place repentance should first be found is in chapter 13. There, the Philistines have invaded Israel in force. Saul has but a handful of men, and they are quickly deserting. Although Saul was instructed to wait for Samuel, who would offer the sacrifices ([1 Samuel 10:8](#)), he felt time was short and that he could wait no longer. And so Saul offered the burnt offering himself, only to see Samuel arrive just after he had done so. When Samuel rebuked Saul for this act of rebellion against God, Saul sought to defend himself, claiming that he had acted appropriately, given the circumstances. Samuel did not accept Saul's excuse and rebuked him for his foolishness and disobedience, informing him that it would cost him his kingdom. Saul's response was silence. Here was a man who had just been told his days as Israel's king were numbered, but rather than confess his sin, he parted company with Samuel in silence.

(2) Saul's second response to Samuel's prophetic rebuke is met with resistance, and then with a reluctant confession. In [1 Samuel 15](#), Saul is commanded by God through Samuel to annihilate the Amalekites and their cattle as the outworking of divine judgment (15:1-3). Saul partially obeys, keeping back some of the best cattle and sparing the life of Agag, the Amalekite king. When Samuel arrives, Saul approaches him boldly, pronouncing God's blessing on him, and claiming that he has carried out God's command (15:13). Hearing the bleating of the sheep that have been spared, Samuel is not impressed by Saul's greeting. Sensing Samuel's displeasure, Saul quickly begins to make excuses, laying the blame for his sin off on the people and insisting that the cattle were only kept alive as sacrificial animals.⁴⁶ Even after Samuel's rebuke (one which sounds very similar to God's two-fold rebuke of David in [2 Samuel 7:8-9](#) and 12:7-8), Saul still denies his guilt, maintaining that he really did **“obey the voice of the Lord”** ([1 Samuel 15:20](#)). Only after Samuel persistently refused to accept his excuses did Saul finally confess that he had sinned in verses 24 and 30. I can only call this “repentance” reluctant repentance.



(3) Saul's "repentance" fails to take personal responsibility for his sin and seeks to pass off his guilt to others. Like Adam and Eve, Saul sought to pass off the responsibility for his own sin to someone else (compare [Genesis 3:11-13](#)). Even as late as verse 24, Saul is still hedging. He tries to convince Samuel that even though he had sinned, he did so under pressure from the people (15:15, 21, 24).

(4) Saul "repents" in an effort to minimize the consequences of his sin. Saul seems to have no interest in the cause of his sin, or in its cure. He is only concerned that his suffering be minimized. He asks Samuel to quickly forgive him, and then to go on (with worship!) as though nothing has happened. He wants Samuel to accompany him and thereby to honor him, so that he does not lose face with the people (15:30). Saul's "repentance" would better be labeled "damage control."

(5) Saul's "repentance" is short-lived. For Saul there is no **"fruit worthy of repentance,"** no change in attitude or action which lasts. Saul's "repentance" does not last any longer than a breath mint. As soon as the pressure is off, and the danger seems to have abated, Saul is back to his sin, if not in the same form, in another. In [1 Samuel 26:21](#), Saul confessed to David that he had sinned in seeking his life, but had his life not been taken in battle, we have little doubt as to what he would have done to David if given the opportunity. (You will remember that David did not "return" with Saul as he asked here. He knew better!) Saul's repentance was temporary.

Let us now summarize the sequence of events that resulted in Saul's pseudo-repentance in 1 Samuel:

- Saul seeks to justify his disobedience as though his actions were dictated by the circumstances (a kind of moral "martial law" -- 13:11-12).
- Saul is silent when it is apparent that God will not accept his excuses (13:15).
- Saul seeks to re-define his sin of disobedience, as though it were righteous obedience (15:13).
- Saul seeks to put the blame for his sin on the people, seeking also to excuse their "sin" as a desire to worship (15:15).
- Saul claims he was seeking to obey God, but was unable to control the people who sinned by keeping some of the animals (while neglecting any mention of his responsibility to kill Agag -- 15:20-21).
- Saul reluctantly admits to his sin, but still insists that others share in his guilt (15:24).
- Saul sought to quickly "repent" and be forgiven, so that he could **"worship"** (15:25).
- Saul sought desperately to minimize the consequences of his sin, so that he would not need to suffer greatly for his sin (15:25-31).

Saul and David

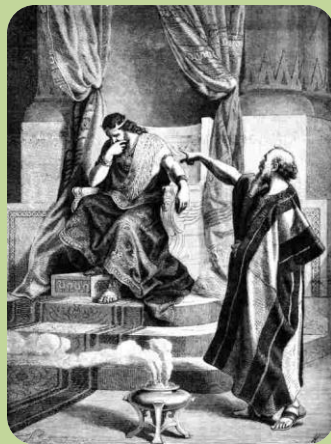
Before we turn to David's *real* repentance, let me pause momentarily to make some comparisons between Saul and David. In many ways, I have painted a pretty dismal picture of Saul, which is probably distorted. Regardless of his failures and sins, the author of 1 and 2 Samuel gives us a fairly decent overall report of Saul's administration:

47 Now when Saul had taken the kingdom over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, the sons of Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines; and wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment. 48 He acted valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them ([1 Samuel 14:47-48](#)).

Earlier comparisons of Saul and David (e.g., in their response to Goliath) made Saul look very bad and David look good. In the light of the sins of David described in [2 Samuel 11](#) and 12, Saul no longer looks quite so bad. Nowhere do we see Saul taking another man's wife and killing her husband. While Saul does seek to kill David, this was out in the open, rather than done in secret (as David had Uriah killed by Joab). David's sins make Saul look a lot better than he once did. There is, however, something that distinguishes these two men dramatically: David genuinely repented of his sins; Saul did not. David was a man after God's heart. This did not exempt him from the fallenness of man, nor keep him from sinning, but it did result in his genuine repentance for his sin. As we now turn to the subject of David's *real* repentance, let us seek to identify what *real* repentance looks like.

Real Repentance

Two short sentences sum up much of chapter 12. The first is that spoken by Nathan: **“You are the man!”** (verse 7). The second is spoken by David: **“I have sinned against the Lord”** (verse 13). It is this second statement and its outworking which I wish to explore. Consider the following characteristics of David's repentance, simply stated here, and more fully expounded in [Psalms 32](#) and 51, and evidenced in David's life.



(1) David's repentance was the culmination of a painful process, climaxing in the confrontation of David by Nathan. In our text, David's confession follows shortly after the account of his sin. But the text itself indicates that David's sin took place over a considerable period of time, slightly more than nine months by normal estimates. While our text only informs us of the time and events that have elapsed, [Psalm 32](#) gives us some very pertinent insight into God's work in David's heart during this time:

3 When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away *as with the fever heat of summer*. 5 I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”; And

You forgave the guilt of my sin ([Psalm 32:3-5](#)).

In this psalm, David informs us that he was silent about his sin. David knew what he did was wrong, but he chose to persist for a time. He did not confess his sin, and the result was “pure hell.” It is an amazing thing, but while sin has its momentary pleasures (see [Hebrews 11:25](#)), they are not as pleasurable for the saint as they are for the heathen. *The reason is that God's Spirit indwells the saint. As sin grieves the Spirit who indwells us, our spirit cannot take great pleasure in the sin either.* I am not saying there is no pleasure; I am saying that the pleasure is minimized by that which gives us joy in obeying God and enjoying fellowship with Him. The agony David describes finally brought him to cease his silence and confess his sins. His repentance was the result of a painful process, most of which took place privately.

This seems often to be the case. I am thinking of the “repentance” of Joseph's brothers, which Joseph brings about through the events described in [Genesis 42-45](#). They clearly sinned against Joseph by selling him into slavery. (They may have salved their consciences by thinking that at least they didn't kill him as they had first conspired to do.) When Joseph rose to the second highest position in Egypt, he had the power to deal with his brothers any way he chose. When they came down to Egypt to buy grain, he could have easily gotten his revenge, but instead he chose to bring them to repentance.⁴⁷ He did this by disguising his identity. (If he had wanted to get even with them, he would have told them who he was.) Joseph orchestrated events so that his brothers had to make a decision almost identical to the one they had made years before. He put his brothers in a situation where they could hand over Benjamin, abandoning him as a slave in Egypt, or they could all stick together and seek to save him. Judah, who had recommended the sale of Joseph as a slave, now offers himself as a slave so that Benjamin may return to Jacob, his elderly father. This is real repentance. *Real repentance not only regrets having done what is wrong* (Joseph's brothers regretted the evil they did to Joseph earlier in the story -- 42:21-22), *it will not repeat the same sin if given the chance to do so.* Joseph gave his brothers the chance, and this time they chose to do what was right. Real repentance is often the result of a long and painful process.

(2) David's repentance was expressed by an unqualified confession of His guilt before God.

The brevity and simplicity of David's confession is most impressive. Saul's confessions were not simple, straightforward. Today, he would have had a lawyer (and a press agent) draft his words for him. David takes full responsibility for his sins; Saul seeks to place the blame on others, or at least to share it with others. David confesses his sin as sin, without any excuses, without any finger pointing toward others. He sees his sin as against God.

(3) David took his sin very seriously. Saul constantly sought to minimize his sin, to make it appear less sinful than it was. David did the opposite. [Psalms 32](#) and 51 indicate to us that David gave his sin a great deal of thought, and the more he reflected on it, the more heinous it was. Since these psalms were preserved for worship and for posterity, David's sin and his confession became public knowledge. Ultimately, his sin was against God, God alone. This is not to diminish the evil he had done to Uriah and Bathsheba. *Sin is the breaking of God's law, and in this sense, all sin is against God, for it breaks His laws.* Crimes are offenses against people, but sin (in this highly specific sense) is only against God, in that it breaks His laws. David had

broken at least three laws. He coveted his neighbor's wife, he committed adultery, and he committed murder ([Exodus 20:13, 14, 17](#)).

(4) David did not expect any of his good works to offset or reduce the guilt of his sin. We come now to one of the great errors of all time -- the false assumption that God grades on the curve. It is commonly thought (or, more accurately *assumed*) that men need only outnumber their sins with their good deeds. If they do more “good” than “evil,” then they believe that, on the whole, they are more good than bad, and thus qualified to be accepted by God. They do not understand that the kind of righteousness God requires of men is perfect obedience to His Word. One failure is all it takes to make us unrighteous, and thus worthy of death:

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one *point*, he has become guilty of all ([James 2:10](#); see also [Matthew 5:19](#); [Galatians 5:3](#)).

David was a man after God's own heart. He loved God's law. The hand of God was upon him in nearly all he did. Overall, David's life was an example for us to follow, setting a standard for which we should strive. His sin regarding Uriah and Bathsheba was clearly the exception, rather than the rule:

Because David did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the case of Uriah the Hittite ([1 Kings 15:5](#)).

If there was ever a man who could have pointed out that his good deeds outweighed his sins, it would have to be David. But instead, we find David confessing his sin, avoiding all reference to anything good he had done, knowing he deserved God's wrath.

3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me. 4 Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, **So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge** ([Psalm 51:3-4](#), emphasis mine).

(5) David did not presume upon God's grace, expecting to be forgiven and to have his life spared. There are those who plan and purpose to sin, believing that God is obligated to forgive them, no matter what. They think that going through some ritual, through repeating some formula, they will then automatically be forgiven, and that life can go on, just as it was. Those who presume upon God's grace in forgiveness confess their sins on the one hand, while planning to repeat them on the other. David confesses his sin against God, and then asks for nothing. He knows what he deserves, and he does not ask to escape it.

In this way, David is like the prodigal son of the New Testament:

17 “But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer

worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.” 20 “So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 “And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 “But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate ([Luke 15:17-24](#)).



This son “messed up” completely, and he knew it. He had deserted his family and spent his inheritance. He had no claim to his forsaken sonship. But this son knew his father, and that being his slave was better than being a slave to his heathen employer in that distant country. And so he returned home, confessing his sin and hoping for nothing more than to become a hired servant. The father's response was gracious, for he gave to this young man what he did not deserve. David, like the prodigal, knew he did not deserve God's forgiveness or His blessings, and so he did not even ask. He only confessed his sin.

(6) David's repentance resulted in a renewed joy in the presence and service of God, and a commitment to teach others to turn from sin. From [Psalm 51](#), we know that David prayed for a renewal of his joy in the Lord (51:8, 12). We have every reason to believe that he was granted this request. In addition, David now desired to teach others:

Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners will be converted to You ([Psalm 51:13](#)).

David will now be teaching sinners as a repentant sinner. His teaching will seek to turn sinners from their sin. How different this is from the wicked, who seek to entice others to follow them in their sin:

And although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them ([Romans 1:32](#)).

I am reminded of Simon Peter, whose denial our Lord foretold, along with these words of hope:

31 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; 32 but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, **when once you have turned again**, strengthen your brothers” ([Luke 22:31-32](#)).

Peter was cocky, impatient, and impulsive before the cross and before his denial of our Lord. Having failed miserably and received the grace of God, Peter was restored. It was then that

Peter's ministry truly began. There is a sense in which God uses our sin to instruct others. This may be as others observe the painful outcome of our sin ([Proverbs 19:25](#)), or by observing the restoration and deepened sense of God's grace that is produced in the life of a repentant and restored sinner.

(7) *David's divinely wrought repentance produced fruit worthy of repentance.* God responded to David's repentance with grace, and thus David responded graciously to those who wronged him and repented. When Absalom rebelled against his father and was about to take over the kingdom, David fled from Jerusalem with those who followed him. As he was leaving the city, a man named Shimei came out to curse David and to throw stones at him ([2 Samuel 16:5-8](#)). Abishai wanted to cut off his head, but David would not allow him to do so. When David returned to Jerusalem, one of those there to meet and welcome him was Shimei, who confessed to David that he had sinned in what he had done earlier ([2 Samuel 19:16-20](#)).

Abishai once again wanted to execute Shimei, and this time he had a biblical reason. He called attention to the fact that Shimei had cursed David, the King of Israel. The Law of Moses forbade cursing a ruler of the people ([Exodus 22:28](#)). Technically -- or should I say *legally* -- Shimei should have been put to death, but David forgave him and granted him his life. In so doing, David dealt with Shimei in the same gracious manner God had dealt with him. This incident reminds us of the story our Lord told about the unforgiving slave (see [Matthew 18:23-35](#)), whose great debt had been forgiven by the king but who refused to forgive the smaller debt of his fellow-slave. Those who have truly experienced God's grace manifest this same grace toward others. The grace David received as a result of his repentance he showed to a "repentant" Shimei.⁴⁸

(8) *David's repentance produced enduring fruit: David forsook his sin and did not repeat it.* There are those, like Pharaoh and like Saul, who seem to repent, but their repentance is short-lived. It certainly did not take Saul long to take up his efforts to kill David, or Pharaoh to again resist Israel's departure from Egypt. This is because their repentance was not real. Indeed, their repentance was simply the path of least resistance, the way to stop the pain of the moment. Stuart Briscoe differentiates between false repentance and real repentance:

"I remember a friend of mine in England who said something to me long ago. 'Baby repentance is *sorry* for what it has done. Adult repentance is *regretful* for what it is. If I am merely sorry for what I have done. . . I will go out and do it again.'⁴⁹

David manifested "adult repentance." He saw his sin for what it was, and he was genuinely regretful. As a result, he did not repeat the sin.

Forgiveness Granted (12:13b)

And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.

What David did not dare to ask for, he received. What a wave of relief must have swept over David as he heard these words from Nathan, "**The LORD also has taken away your sin; you**

shall not die.” David had condemned himself in his response to Nathan's story of the stolen and slaughtered pet lamb ([2 Samuel 12:1-4](#)):

Then David's anger burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die ([2 Samuel 12:5](#)).

Legally, of course, the Law of Moses would only have required four-fold restitution from the culprit of Nathan's story ([Exodus 22:1](#)). But David should have died, both for his adultery and for the murder of Uriah.



Under the Law of Moses, David had no hope. He was a condemned man. He was a dead man! How, then, is it possible for Nathan to tell David that he will not die? You will notice the promise that David will not die follows this statement: **“The LORD also has taken away your sin.”** David's “salvation” from divine condemnation, like ours, did not come from law-keeping, but by grace. And the reason David's sin could be forgiven was because the Lord had taken it away.

This “taking away” of sin is not some magic trick, where God simply takes the sin of David and makes it disappear. It has been “taken away.” I believe Nathan's statement can only have been made on the basis of the sure and certain work of Jesus Christ, on the cross of Calvary, centuries later. On the basis of the work of Christ on Calvary, David is forgiven. His sins were borne by our Lord, and thus God's justice was satisfied.

The expression, **“has taken away,”** in verse 13 of the NASB, would be literally rendered, **“caused your sin to pass away,”** as you can see in the marginal note. It is a common verb, often used with the sense of passing through or passing over, such as when the Israelites passed through the Red Sea. Here, the term is causative (Hifil) in the original text, so that the rendering, **“caused to pass over or away,”** is found. Both the New King James Version and the original King James Version render it **“put away.”** I believe the Hebrew word found in our text is twice employed elsewhere in the Bible in a way that closely approximates the sense of the term in our text.

8 Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth and said, “Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah? Today I show kindness to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hands of David; and yet today you charge me with a guilt concerning the woman. 9 “May God do so to Abner, and more also, if as the LORD has sworn to David, I do not accomplish this for him, 10 **to transfer the kingdom** from the house of Saul and to establish the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba” ([2 Samuel 3:8-10](#), emphasis mine).

The king took off his signet ring which he **had taken away** from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman ([Esther 8:2](#)).

In both these cases above, the same Hebrew term we find in our text is used to describe the “transfer” of something from one person to another.⁵⁰ The kingdom of Israel was transferred from Saul to David ([2 Samuel 3:8-10](#)). The king's ring, giving a subordinate the authority to act on the king's behalf, was taken from Haman and given to Mordecai. The ring was transferred from one person to another. David's sin was forgiven, and he was assured he would not die because God had transferred his sins. This transfer took place centuries later, when David's “son,” the Lord Jesus Christ, died on the cross of Calvary. David's sins were borne by our Lord, and He paid the penalty for what David had done. David would not die for his sin because Christ was destined to die, bearing the penalty for them.

Nathan speaks of this transfer as though it was a past event. Old Testament prophets often used the past tense to speak of a future event. They did this, it would seem, to emphasize the certainty of the prophesied event. When God promises to do something, it is as we say, “as good as done.” When the prophets spoke of God's future promises, they often did so by employing the past tense. Even centuries before the birth and death of Christ, men were granted forgiveness, based upon this event. David was forgiven because Christ died for his sins on the cross of Calvary. This is the only basis for forgiveness. David rightly confessed that he had sinned against God, and now Nathan assures David that his sin against God has been forgiven by God, through the sacrificial and substitutionary death of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. This has always been the only basis for the forgiveness of sins.

Conclusion

Let us conclude this message with several principles and areas of application.

(1) Repentance is a divinely wrought action which employs God's Spirit, God's Word, and God's people, as they are implemented in response to known sin. We cannot change hearts; only God can. In this sense, repentance is the work of God. But God has chosen to employ certain means to bring about His ends, and so it is with repentance. God uses His people, like Nathan, to confront people with their sin. He uses His Word and His Spirit to convict sinners of their sin. Today, as in times past, it is easier to talk to others about sin in someone's life, rather than to talk with that person. The Bible gives us very clear instructions about our obligation toward a brother or sister who appears to have fallen into sin (see [Matthew 7:1-5](#); [18:15-20](#); [1 Corinthians 5:1-13](#); [Galatians 6:1-5](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:14](#); [2 Thessalonians 3:14-15](#); [2 Timothy 2:23-26](#); [Titus 3:9-11](#); [James 5:19-20](#)). No one really wants to be a “Nathan” to a “David,” but this is the normal means God has appointed for dealing with sin, or for encouraging the sinner to repent. Nathan was never a better friend to David than when he pointed out his sin, preparing the way for his repentance.

(2) Repentance is the divinely appointed means of obtaining the forgiveness of sins and enjoying fellowship with God. It is clear from David's psalms that when he sinned and sought to conceal his sin, there was a breach in his fellowship with God. David lost the joy of his salvation and the assurance of God's presence in his life. These returned when David repented. *Repentance is the expression of faith, and thus the means God has appointed for a lost sinner to receive the forgiveness of sins and assurance of eternal life, in fellowship with God.*

1 Now in those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, saying, 2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” ([Matthew 3:1](#)).

From that time Jesus began to preach and say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” ([Matthew 4:17](#)).

And He wondered at their unbelief. And He was going around the villages teaching. 7 And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs . . . 12 They went out and preached that *men* should repent ([Mark 6:6a, 12](#)).

45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, 46 and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, 47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem ([Luke 24:45-47](#)).

38 Peter *said* to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 2:38](#)).

18 When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads* to life” ([Acts 11:18](#)).

18 And when they had come to him, he said to them, “You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, 21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ ([Acts 20:18-21](#)).

Repentance is also required for sinners to forsake their sin and to return to fellowship with God which has been broken by sin. Thus, Paul sought to bring the Corinthian saints to repentance:

9 I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. 10 For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death ([2 Corinthians 7:9-10](#)).

In the Book of Revelation, the letters to the seven churches of Asia contain a call to repentance:

“Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place -- unless you repent ([Revelation 2:5](#)).

“Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth” ([Revelation 2:16](#)).

“So remember what you have received and heard; and keep *it*, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you” ([Revelation 3:3](#)).

“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent” ([Revelation 3:19](#)).

Repentance is not a very “in” word, and certainly not a very popular practice. It begins, I believe, with a renewed grasp of the holiness of God, and thus a realization of the immensity of our sin. It leads to a whole new way of looking at life, this time through God's eyes, as conveyed through the Holy Scriptures. *It is a revulsion toward sin, so that we determine not to repeat it. It results in a renewed sense of God's presence, a new joy in our salvation, and a desire to turn others from sin.*

In my opinion, *one of the earmarks of genuine revival is real repentance.* Relationships that seemed irreversibly broken are suddenly reconciled. Dead and dying marriages are revitalized. Lost love is found once again. The bondage of sin which leads to compulsive behavior and an endless cycle of sin is broken. It is sad that in our therapeutic age, we use psychological terms to describe spiritual problems, for which the bible has a description and a prescription. We come to accept the belief that many spiritual problems cannot be dramatically reversed or improved, but that it will take years of therapy and with very gradual change, if any. That is not the way the Bible speaks of our response to sin through repentance. *Real repentance can and does bring radical change. We must first turn back to the Word of God, we must begin calling sin by its biblical name, and we must call for people to respond in a biblical way -- repentance and faith.*

When real repentance takes place, I believe it will be obvious. Our text not only describes real repentance as it relates to our sin, it describes real repentance so that we will be able to recognize it in others. And when there is repentance, we have the obligation to forgive and to receive that individual back into fellowship. Many churches do not practice church discipline, and they do not call for repentance. But those churches which do so also need to be ready and willing to recognize real repentance, and to receive the repentant sinner back into fellowship.

I do not wish to be like one of Job's friends, calling for repentance where it is not appropriate. Not every instance of trial and tribulation is proof of sin on our part. But there are times when our trials are graciously given us by God to call attention to our sin and to call us to repentance. In such times, *let us be quick to take responsibility for our sin, let us confess that sin, and then let us forsake it.* Let us seek to see things clearly again and to once again enjoy the blessings of salvation and of fellowship with God.

45 The food was so good I did not dare tell my wife what I had for lunch. Even so, one of the inmates complained about the way his steak was cooked.

46 It is most interesting to note here that Saul makes no mention of King Agag. He may have sensed pressure from the people to keep some of the spoils, but who among the people would have pled for Saul to spare Agag's life? No one comes to mind. Agag was Saul's personal

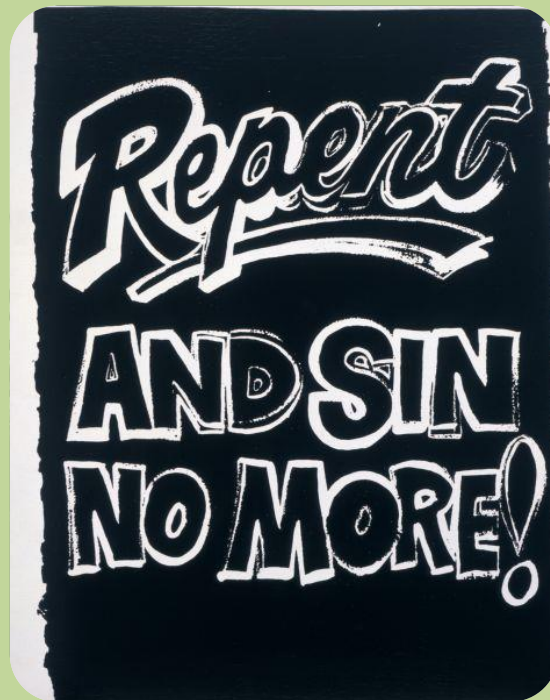
trophy, whom he planned to keep alive for his own self-serving purposes. And so in his excuse to Samuel, he does not mention Agag, for there was no reasonable excuse for keeping him alive.

47 Joseph had already come to realize that God had elevated him to his position of power, so that he understood that all the evil things his brothers had done to him, God had used for good (see [Genesis 41:51-52; 50:20](#)). When he saw his brothers, he remembered his dreams, and now understood that his position of power was given him so that he could minister to his brothers through this authority ([Genesis 42:9](#)).

48 Incidentally, later Scripture may cast some doubt on the sincerity of Shimei's repentance. Nevertheless, David seems to take his confession at face value.

49 D. Stuart Briscoe, *A Heart for God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), p. 141.

50 In [Esther 8:10](#), the form of the verb is exactly the same as in our text. In [2 Samuel 3:10](#), the same verb is employed as a hifil infinitive construct. My point is that the same causative verb is used in these two other texts where the idea of "transferring" is implied by the context.



Etymology

In [Biblical Hebrew](#), the idea of repentance is represented by two verbs: [שׁוּב](#) *shuv* (to return) and [נָחַם](#) *nicham* (to feel sorrow). In the [New Testament](#), the word translated as 'repentance' is the Greek word [μετάνοια](#) (*metanoia*), "after/behind one's [mind](#)", which is a compound word of the preposition 'meta' (after, with), and the verb 'noeo' (to perceive, to think, the result of perceiving or observing). In this compound word the preposition combines the two meanings of time and change, which may be denoted by 'after' and 'different'; so that the whole compound means: 'to think differently after'. *Metanoia* is therefore primarily an after-thought, different from the former thought; a change of mind accompanied by regret and change of conduct, "change of mind and heart", or, "change of consciousness".

Judaism

Main article: [Repentance in Judaism](#)

[Rabbinic Jewish literature](#) contains extensive discussions on the subject of repentance. Many rabbinic sources state that repentance is of paramount importance to the existence of this world, so that it was one of the seven provisions which God made before the Creation.^[4] "The Holy One, blessed be His name, said to Elijah, 'Behold, the precious gift which I have bestowed on my world: though a man sins again and again, but returns in penitence, I will receive him.' "^[5] "Great is repentance: it brings healing into the world"; "it reaches to the throne of the Lord"; ^[Hosea 14:2,5] "it brings redemption"; ^[Isaiah 59:20] "it prolongs man's life"; ^[Ezekiel 18:21] Talmud Yoma 86a). "Repentance and works of charity are man's intercessors before God's throne".^[6] Sincere repentance is equivalent to the rebuilding of the Temple, the restoration of the altar, and the offering of all the sacrifices.^[7]

Sincere repentance is manifested when the same temptation to sin, under the same conditions, is ever after resolutely resisted.^[8] "He that confesses his sin and still clings to it is likened to a man that holds in his hand a defiling object; though he batheth in all the waters of the world he is not cleansed; but the moment he casteth the defiling object from him a single bath will cleanse him, as it is said: 'Whosoever confesses and forsakes them [his sins] shall have mercy' ".^{[Prov. 28:13][9]}

According to Jewish doctrine, repentance is the prerequisite of [atonement](#).^[10] [Yom Kippur](#), the day of atonement, derives its significance only from the fact that it is the culmination of the ten penitential days with which the Jewish religious year begins; and therefore it is of no avail without repentance.^[11] Though man ought to be penitent every day,^[12] the first ten days of every year are the acceptable time announced by the prophet Isaiah: "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near".^{[Isaiah 55:6][13]}

Repentance and the Day of Atonement only absolve one from sins committed against God; from sins against another person they absolve only when restitution has been made and the pardon of the offended party has been obtained.^[14]

No one need despair on account of his or her sins, for every penitent sinner is graciously received by God.^[Jeremiah 31:9] Jewish doctrine holds that it is never too late, even on the day of death, to

return to God with sincere repentance for "as the sea is always open for every one who wishes to cleanse himself, so are the gates of repentance always open to the sinner".^[15] Jewish doctrine states that the hand of God is continually stretched out to receive a sinner.^[16] One view in the Talmud holds that a repentant sinner attains a more exalted spiritual eminence than one who has never sinned.^[17] It is a sin to taunt a repentant sinner by recalling their former sinful ways.^[18]

Repentance occupies a prominent position in all the ethical writings of the Middle Ages. [Bahya ibn Paquda](#) devotes a special section to it in his 'Hovot ha-Levavot', "Gate of Repentance." [Maimonides](#) devotes the last section of "Sefer ha-Madda" in his [Mishneh Torah](#) to the subject. One of the most significant medieval works on Repentance is "Shaarei Teshuva," the "Gates of Repentance" by [Rabbeinu Yona of Gerona](#).

In the Hebrew Bible, repentance generally leads to salvation. In some cases, individuals or nations repent of their [sins](#) and are spared God's judgment. Sometimes the punishment avoided is destruction in this life, sometimes it is [damnation](#).^[19] In the Book of Jonah, the prophet initially chose to disobey God's command, and then he repented and became obedient. However, Jonah returned to disobedience when he hoped for the destruction of the city of [Nineveh](#). In the [Book of Job](#), Job never repented of any particular sin or activity when he went through his major dilemma. The Hebrew term *teshuvah* (lit. "return") is used to refer to "repentance". This implies that transgression and [sin](#) are the natural and inevitable consequence of man's straying from God and [His laws](#),^[20] and that it is man's destiny and duty to be with God. The Bible states that God's loving-kindness is extended to the returning sinner.

The [Torah](#) (five books of Moses) distinguishes between offenses against God and offenses against man. In the first case, the manifestation of repentance consists in: (1) [Confession](#) of one's sin before God,^{[Lev. 5:5] [Num. 5:7]} the essential part being a solemn promise and firm resolve not to commit the same sin again. (2) Making certain prescribed offerings.^[Lev. 5:1-20] Offenses against man require, in addition to confession and sacrifice, restitution in full of whatever has been wrongfully obtained or withheld from one's fellow man, with one-fifth of its value added thereto.^[Lev. 5:20-26] If the wronged man has died, restitution must be made to his heir; if he has no heir, it must be given to the priest who officiates at the sacrifice made for the remission of the sin.^[Num. 5:7-9]

There are other manifestations of repentance mentioned in the Bible. These include pouring out water,^[21] which symbolizes the pouring out of one's heart before God;^[22] prayer^[23] self-affliction, as fasting; wearing [sackcloth](#); sitting and sleeping on the ground.^[24] However, the Prophets disparaged all such outer manifestations of repentance, insisting rather on a complete change of the sinner's mental and spiritual attitude.^[Hosea 14:1-2] "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy, and repenteth him of the evil".^[Joel 2:13] In [Isaiah 55:7](#), the Bible states that repentance brings pardon and forgiveness of sin. Apart from repentance, no other activities, such as sacrifices or religious ceremonies can secure pardon and forgiveness of sin.

Christianity

Main article: [Repentance \(theology\)](#)

Repentance appears prominently in the [Scriptures](#). See the description of repentance in the [Hebrew Bible](#) above for repentance in the [Old Testament](#). In the [New Testament](#), the first command that Jesus gave was to repent. ^{[[Matthew 4:17](#)]} He thus repeated the message of [John the Baptist](#). ^{[[Matthew 3:2](#)][[25](#)]} Jesus sent out disciples who "proclaimed that people should repent". ^{[[Mark 6:12](#)]} In his [Pentecost](#) sermon, [Peter the Apostle](#) called on people to repent, ^{[[Acts 2:38](#)]} an appeal he repeated in his sermon at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple: "Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out". ^{[[Acts 3:19](#)]} [Paul the Apostle](#) likewise testified "both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God" ^{[[Acts 20:21](#)]} and said that "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent". ^{[[Acts 17:30](#)]}

The [Greek](#) word used for repentance in the New Testament is μετάνοια (*metanoia*), ^{[[26](#)][[27](#)]} and the Greek verb for "to repent" is μετανοῶ, contracted from μετανο-έω (*metano-eo*), ^{[[28](#)][[29](#)]} as in [Mark's](#) account of the initial preaching of Jesus: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; *repent*, and believe in the good news."

In English, the prefix *meta* can indicate "beyond, about", as "meta-economics" or "meta-philosophy" (see [meta](#)), inspired by the non-Greek use of the word "metaphysics", which in Greek was just the title of a work of [Aristotle](#), the *Metaphysics*, so named simply because in the customary ordering of the works of Aristotle it was the book following the *Physics*; the Greek word thus meant nothing more than "[the book that comes] after [the book entitled] *Physics*". In Greek, composite words that have μετα- (*meta-*) as the initial element are most frequently used "of *change* of place, condition, plan, etc.", ^{[[30](#)]} as in the English word "[metamorphosis](#)". ^{[[31](#)]} Even in a non-religious context, the Greek word μετάνοια (*metanoia*), in particular, meant "change of mind or heart, repentance, regret" or, in rhetoric, "afterthought, correction". ^{[[32](#)]}

Scriptures

In the [New Testament](#) Jesus told this parable: "There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' I will not," he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. ^{[[Matt. 21:28-29](#)]} The word used here for "repent" means to change one's mind, thought, purpose, views regarding a matter. It is to have another attitude or mindset about something.

This change is well illustrated in the action of the [Prodigal Son](#). ^{[[Luke 15:11-32](#)]} The issue of repentance is also discussed in connection with the will and disposition. One of the Hebrew words for repent means "to turn". The [Prodigal Son](#) said, "I will arise...., and he arose". ^{[[Luke 15:18,20](#)]} The Prodigal said, "I have sinned against heaven". ^{[[Luke 15:21](#)]}

In the well-known story of the Pharisee and the [Publican](#), the Greek word used for repentance means "to be a care to one afterwards", to cause great concern to another. This meaning is

exemplified by the repentant person who not only has profound regret for his or her past, but also the fulfilled hope in the potential of God's grace to continually bear the fruit of healing and true reconciliation within the individual, with others, and most especially with God. The Hebrew equivalent is strong as well, and it means to pant, to sigh, or to moan. So the publican "beat upon his breast, and said, 'God be merciful to me a sinner' ", indicating sorrow of heart. [\[Luke 18:9-14\]](#)

The part played by one's will and disposition in repentance is shown in the confession of sin to God: "I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin". [\[Psa. 38:18\]](#)

There also must be confession to a person also insofar as that persons whom we have wronged in and by our sin. [\[Mt. 5:23-24\]](#) See also [James 5:16](#), [Isa. 55:7](#), and [Prov. 28:13](#). Another clear example pointing out the necessity of confessing one's sins is found in Proverbs: "Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy". [\[Pr. 28:13\]](#)

Acts of repentance do not earn God's forgiveness from one's sin. Rather, forgiveness is given as a gift from God to those who believe in his Son. "...they praised God, saying, 'So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.' " [\[Acts 11:18\]](#) "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." [\[2Tim 2:24-26\]](#) God calls all to repent through the hearing of the Gospel. God grants total repentance as each individual responds to repentance through faith in the expiating sacrifice of Jesus for all sin. "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." [\[Rom. 10:17\]](#) Repentance is given before anything else, by definition.

Individuals cannot show true change in their life before they themselves have changed (repented) to bring about manifestations of that change/repentance. When the people of Nineveh heard the preaching of the word of God by Jonah, [\[Jonah 3:5-10\]](#) they believed the message and turned to God.

The very Gospel which calls for repentance produces it. [\[Acts 2:37,38,41\]](#) The Gospel is the instrument that God uses to bring about this desired end. Furthermore, this message must be preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. [\[1Thes 1:5-10\]\[Rev. 3:19\]](#) [\[Heb. 12:6,10-11\]](#) The chastisements of God are sometimes for the purpose of bringing his wandering children back to repentance. [\[2Tim. 2:24-25\]](#) God often uses the loving, Christian reproof of a fellow believer to be the means of bringing a wayward Christian back to God.

Bible Verses About Repentance-

God calls his people unto repentance and turn from the wicked ways of this world, so it is important to know the Scriptures and his commands for his people.

Use our [Bible verses by topic](#) page to quickly find scriptures about popular topics.

[Matthew 4:17](#)

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

[Matthew 21:32](#)

For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

[Luke 17:3](#)

So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him.

[Luke 24:46-48](#)

He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

[Matthew 3:8](#)

Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

[Isaiah 30:15](#)

This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.

[Luke 5:31-32](#)

Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

[Acts 3:19](#)

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

[Acts 5:31](#)

God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

[Acts 20:21](#)

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

[Romans 2:4](#)

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

[Acts 11:18](#)

When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life."

[Jeremiah 31:19](#)

After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.'

[Luke 17:3-4](#)

So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

[Acts 3:18-19](#)

But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

[2 Corinthians 7:9-10](#)

yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any

way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

Revelation 3:3

Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

Revelation 2:5

Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

Romans 2:5

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

