

Relief Society Lesson #5, *Principles of True Repentance* References:

Repentance, Bible Dictionary: "The Greek word of which this is the translation denotes a change of mind, i.e., a fresh view about God, about oneself and about the world...repentance comes to mean a turning of the heart and will to God"

Romans 3:23

D&C 58:42-43

Isaiah 1:18

The account of David: Psalms 86:1-5

The account of Nephi: 2 Nephi 4:17-35

The account of Alma the Younger: Mosiah 27:24-29

Sister Neill F. Marriott, General Conference October 2014: "Some years ago our family encountered a major challenge. I went to the temple and there prayed earnestly for help. I was given a moment of truth. I received a clear impression of my weaknesses, and I was shocked. In that spiritually instructive moment, I saw a prideful woman doing things her own way, not necessarily the Lord's way, and privately taking credit for any so-called accomplishment. I knew I was looking at myself. I cried out in my heart to Heavenly Father and said, "I don't want to be that woman, but how do I change? Through the pure spirit of revelation in the temple, I was taught of my utter need for a Redeemer. I turned immediately to the Savior Jesus Christ in my thoughts and felt my anguish melt away and a great hope spring up in my heart. He was my only hope, and I longed to cling only to Him. It was clear to me that a self-absorbed natural woman "is an enemy to God"² and to people in her sphere of influence. In the temple that day I learned it was only through the Atonement of Jesus Christ that my prideful nature could change and that I would be enabled to do good. I felt His love keenly, and I knew He would teach me by the Spirit and change me if I gave my heart to Him, holding back nothing.

I still fight my weaknesses, but I trust in the divine help of the Atonement. This pure instruction came because I entered the holy temple, seeking relief and answers. I entered the temple burdened, and I left knowing I had an all-powerful and all-loving Savior. I was lighter and joyful because I had received His light and accepted His plan for me."

Sister Linda S. Reeves, General Conference October 2013 "This past year I have needed and wanted to feel the love of the Lord more deeply, to receive personal revelation, to better understand my temple covenants, and to have my burdens lightened. As I have prayed specifically for these blessings, I have felt the Spirit directing me to go to the temple and listen more closely to each word of the blessings pronounced upon me. I testify that as I have listened more intently and tried to exercise my faith, the Lord has been merciful to me and has helped make my burdens light. He has helped me to feel great peace about prayers that have not yet been answered."

Sister Anne C. Pingree, General Conference October 2006. "Like you, I know what it means to make essential course corrections. I remember a time when, without any intent to do so, I offended a sister in my ward. I needed to reconcile this issue, but I must admit that my pride kept me from going to her and asking for her forgiveness. Family, other commitments, on and on—I found ways to postpone my repentance. I was sure things would work out on their own. But they didn't.

In the stillness of not one night but several, I awoke with a clear realization that I was not taking the course the Lord would want me to take. I was not acting on my faith that His arm of mercy was truly extended towards me—if I would act aright. I prayed for strength and courage, humbled myself, and went to the sister's home and asked for her forgiveness. For us both, it proved to be a sweet, healing experience."

Introduction

As the teacher, be sensitive to the variety of unspoken feelings your class may have regarding repentance – some may have very negative experiences with repentance or church discipline. Others may be going through difficult private circumstances with serious sin. One objective of this lesson is to frame the power of repentance as a positive, life-improving state of being, a change of heart that brings one closer to God, rather than the punishment for sin. The punishment for sin is the separation from God it brings. Repentance is not a process of punishment for committing sin, but the merciful arrangement from God that can bring us back into his grace after committing sin. Repentance, therefore, is a blessing from God by which we receive His forgiveness, forgive ourselves and move forward with a peaceful conscience and fresh outlook on ourselves and the world around us, not to be plagued by guilt or regret.

I.

Begin by inviting the class participants to listen to the following questions and mentally record the answers that come first into their mind without responding out loud. Ask the questions slowly, with ample space between to allow participants to follow their thoughts.

1. **How do I feel about repenting?** (*recognize that some may feel fear, avoidance, shame, guilt and anxiety while still feeling relief, joy, peace, comfort, etc.*)
2. **What is my motivation to repent?** (*compulsion by an outside force, internal guilt, Godly sorrow, necessity, desires to draw closer to God, self-improvement, etc.*)
3. **How often do I repent?** (*as little as possible, as often as possible, when I remember, when I feel bad, when I feel motivated to improve, etc.*)
4. **How do I feel after repenting?** (*relieved, forgiven, still guilty, worried, peaceful, etc.*)

Invite a class member to read the Bible Dictionary reference to “Repentance” (given on handout sheet). Draw their attention to the adjective “Fresh” and have them list all the other things in everyday life described as “fresh” while noticing their own reaction to the words (write on the board if you wish.) e.g. fresh baked bread, fresh flowers, fresh cut grass, fresh air, fresh water, fresh fruit. It will be easy to see smiles and peaceful expressions when you make this list – fresh things make us feel happy! Testify that our Heavenly Parents desire for us to have this same feeling of lightness and freshness about ourselves, about them and the world around us as a result of our sincere repentance.

II.

With compassion, illustrate how some of us may have been raised or taught to believe that the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the process of repentance are mostly there for us in case we screw up – that it’s a good back-up plan in case of sin, but that we’d better not do anything so terrible that we’d ever actually need to use it. As such, we may be conditioned unintentionally to view the necessity of repentance as proof of our recent transgression and be ashamed to undertake the process. Testify that God’s plan for the Atonement of Christ is not our back-up plan – it’s our only plan! The “plan” in which we never sin and never require repentance was the rejected plan put forth by Lucifer.

Read: Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

And

Isaiah 1:18 “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

And

D&C 58:42-43 “Behold, he who has repented of his sins, the same is forgiven, and I, the Lord, remember them no more. By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins – behold he will confess and forsake them”

We can conclude the following: Sin is inevitable, We may be cleansed from sin, God has promised he will not remember our sins, Repentance brings fresh perspective and outlook on life and can be used for more than just the forgiveness of sin.

III.

Invite a member of the class to read the following quote from President Benson's life:

"The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of people, and then they take themselves out of the slums. The world would mold [women] by changing their environment. Christ changes [women], who then change their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature...Yes, Christ changes [women], and changed [women] can change the world."

Without vilifying "The world", testify that it's the enabling power of Jesus Christ who has the power to change minds and hearts, and that women and men with changed hearts can change the world.

IV.

List the ordered principles of repentance as taught by President Benson in the manual:

- Faith in Jesus Christ precedes true repentance
- Repentance involves a mighty change of heart,
- Godly sorrow leads to true repentance,
- Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are anxious to see us change our lives, and They will help us
- We must not lose hope as we become Christlike.

For as much time permits, either as a class or divided into groups, study the accounts of Sister Marriott, Sister Reeves, Sister Pingree, Nephi, David and Alma the Younger. Discuss and analyze how each of them followed the principles outlined by President Benson. Point out that not every case study is an example of repentance being used as a way to seek forgiveness from committed sins, but also for a change of heart and desire to become more like Jesus Christ.

Before reading, ask the class to consider the following questions (may have written on board):

1. What actions led to their repentance?
2. How or why did they experience a change of heart?
3. What was the result?

V. Read the following quote from President Benson and then discuss as a class the variety of experiences repentance can bring, from the most extreme examples of the apostasy of Alma the Younger, to the humble desire for self-improvement of Sister Reeves:

"...we must be careful, as we seek to become more and more godlike, that we do not become discouraged and lose hope. Becoming Christlike is a lifetime pursuit and very often involves growth and change that is slow, almost imperceptible. The scriptures record remarkable accounts of [those] whose lives changed dramatically: Alma the Younger, Paul...Enos...King Lamoni. Such astonishing examples of the power to change even those steeped in sin give confidence that the Atonement can reach even those deepest in despair. But we must be cautious as we discuss these remarkable examples. Though they are real and powerful, they are the exception more than the rule. For every Paul...there are ...people who find the process of repentance much more subtle, much more imperceptible. Day by day they move closer to the Lord, little realizing they are building a godlike life. They live quiet lives of goodness, service and commitment. ...we must not lose hope. The Lord is pleased with every effort, even the tiny, daily ones in which we strive to be more like Him....we must remember that most repentance does not involve sensational or dramatic changes, but rather is a step-by-step, steady, and consistent movement toward godliness."

Close the lesson with whatever remarks, testimony or comments that you or the class wish to make.