

OBJECTIVE

Each young man will understand that repentance allows him to eliminate attitudes and behaviors that hinder his progress and inner peace.

PREPARATION

1. Prayerfully study Isaiah 1:18; Acts 9:1–22; Mosiah 5:2; Alma 22:15–18; 36:6–26; Helaman 3:35; and Doctrine and Covenants 58:42–43.
2. Materials needed:
 - a. Copies of the scriptures (each young man should bring his own).
 - b. Two pencils.
 - c. Pencils for marking scriptures.
3. Make two copies of the scripture exercise in the lesson. Do not include the words in parentheses that follow each question.
4. Prepare to show “Repentance: It’s Never Too Late,” on *Family Home Evening Supplement 2* (53277), or “The Gift of Repentance,” on *Family Home Evening Video Supplement* (53276), if they are available in your area.

SUGGESTED LESSON DEVELOPMENT

Scripture and discussion

God Will Forgive

Read Isaiah 1:18 with the young men, and have them mark it.

- What does this scripture teach about the forgiveness of sins? (Though our sins be great, they can be overcome.)

Tell the young men that sometimes after people commit serious sins they think they cannot be forgiven. Explain that although the way is very difficult, there is a way for people to be forgiven for serious sin.

Group scripture activity

Explain that the scriptures relate some remarkable stories about the principle of repentance. Divide the young men into two groups, and appoint a scribe to take notes for each group. Give the scribe in each group a pencil and a copy of the scripture exercise. Have group one complete parts one and three, and have group two complete parts two and three of the exercise. Have the scribes record the correct answers. Suggest that each young man mark these scriptures in his own copy of the scriptures.

1. Have group one read Alma 36:6–26.
 - a. What was Alma doing before the angel came? (Actively fighting against the Church.)
 - b. What feelings did Alma have as he acknowledged his wrongdoing? (Pain, anguish, and torment.)
 - c. What was the key to Alma’s change of feeling? (He remembered the atonement of Jesus Christ as taught by his father and asked Jesus to have mercy on him.)
 - d. What feelings did he have after he accepted the Atonement? (Joy as exquisite as was his pain.)
 - e. To make up for his wrongdoings, what did Alma do during the months and years following the appearance of the angel? (He took the gospel to many souls and became a great missionary [see verses 24–26]. The best way to make restitution for our wrongdoing is to actively do good.)

2. Have group two read Acts 9:1–22.
 - a. What was Saul (later known as Paul) involved in at first? (Persecuting the Saints.)
 - b. What was Paul's (Saul's) attitude immediately after the angel spoke to him? (He was sorry and wanted to know what he should do.)
 - c. How willing was the Savior to grant Paul forgiveness?
 - d. After Paul recognized his wrongdoing and repented, what did he become? (A great preacher for Christ and an Apostle.)
3. Have both groups read Doctrine and Covenants 58:42–43.
 - a. What does it mean to repent? (To confess our sins and forsake them.)
 - b. What does the Lord do after we forsake and repent of our sins? (He remembers them no more.)

Activity and discussion

Have the members of each group report their findings. Discuss the three scriptures, helping the young men understand the hope of repentance and giving them greater insight into the process of repentance.

Principles of Repentance

Quotation and discussion

Have a young man read the following statement by Elder Spencer W. Kimball:

“The mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to call people everywhere to repentance. Those who heed the call, whether members or nonmembers of the Church, can be partakers of the miracle of forgiveness. God will wipe away from their eyes the tears of anguish, and remorse, and consternation, and fear, and guilt. Dry eyes will replace the wet ones, and smiles of satisfaction will replace the worried, anxious look.

“What relief! What comfort! What joy! Those laden with transgressions and sorrows and sin may be forgiven and cleansed and purified if they will return to their Lord, learn of him, and keep his commandments. And all of us needing to repent of day-to-day follies and weaknesses can likewise share in this miracle” (*The Miracle of Forgiveness* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969], pp. 367–68).

- What does it mean to turn away from sin and turn to Christ?

Emphasize that repentance is more than overcoming particular sins. It involves turning away from all sin. It involves reaching the point where we no longer have any desire for sin. Through repentance we stop sinning completely.

Scripture and discussion

Read and discuss Alma 22:15–18. The young men may want to mark parts of these verses.

Point out that the proper attitude toward repentance of sin was demonstrated by Lamoni's father, who said, “I will give away all my sins.” When the Lord commands us to repent, he is asking us to give up our sins.

Explain that the scriptures and the prophets have emphasized that repentance is a process. Ask the young men what repentance involves. Help them see that the process of repentance requires us to—

1. Acknowledge the sin honestly.
2. Confess the sin humbly.
3. Make restitution if possible.
4. Forsake the sin.
5. Accept the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

True Repentance Is a Change of Heart

Scripture and discussion

Have the young men read Mosiah 5:2.

Explain that having a change of heart and losing all desire to do evil comes as a gift from the Lord through the power of his Spirit. Such a change can occur suddenly, as it did with

King Benjamin's people, or it can come gradually as we keep the commandments more and more diligently.

- What made it possible for the Holy Ghost to purify the hearts of King Benjamin's people?

Emphasize that the people's willingness to believe and turn to the Lord was the key to changing their hearts. The same is true for us.

Have a young man read Helaman 3:35.

Explain that it is by our willingness to yield our hearts to Heavenly Father that he is able to change and purify our hearts. If worldly concerns, personal self-interests, or anything else is more important than turning to Christ, he will not be able to purify us. True repentance involves having a change of heart: turning away from sin and turning to the Lord.

Quotation

The following story told by Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone illustrates the necessity of changing our hearts and attitudes during true repentance:

"As I invited the young man into my office, after his having been cleared by his bishop and stake president [as a missionary candidate], I said to him: 'Apparently there has been a major transgression in your life. That's why I am involved in this interview. Would you mind being very frank and open and telling me what that transgression was?'

"With head held high and in a haughty manner he responded, 'There isn't *anything* I haven't done.'

"I responded: 'Well, then, let's be more specific. Have you been involved in fornication?'

"Very sarcastically, he said, 'I told you I've done *everything*.'

"I asked, 'Was it a single experience, or did it happen with more than one girl and more than once?'

"And he said again, sarcastically, 'Many girls and so many times I could not number them.'

"I said, 'I would to God your transgression was not so serious.'

" 'Well, it is,' he replied.

" 'How about drugs?'

" 'I told you I've done *everything*.'

"Then I said, 'What makes you think you're going on a mission?'

" 'Because I have repented,' he replied. 'I haven't done any of these things for a year. I know I'm going on a mission because my patriarchal blessing says I'm going on a mission. I've been ordained an elder, I've lived the way I should this past year, and I know that I'm going on a mission.'

"I looked at the young man sitting across the desk: twenty-one years old, laughing, sarcastic, haughty, with an attitude far removed from sincere repentance. And I said to him: 'My dear young friend, I'm sorry to tell you this, but you are *not* going on a mission. Do you suppose we could send you out with your braggadocio attitude about this past life of yours, boasting of your escapades? Do you think we could send you out with the fine, clean young men who have never violated the moral code, who have kept their lives clean and pure and worthy so that they might go on missions?'

"I repeated: 'You're not going on a mission. In fact,' I said, 'you shouldn't have been ordained an elder and you really should have been tried for your membership in the Church.'

" 'What you have committed is a series of monumental transgressions,' I continued. 'You haven't repented; you've just stopped doing something. Someday after you have been to Gethsemane and back, you'll understand what true repentance is.'

"At this the young man started to cry. He cried for about five minutes, and during that time I didn't say a word. . . . I just sat and waited as this young man cried.

"Finally he looked up and said, 'I guess I haven't cried like that since I was five years old.'

"I told him: 'If you had cried like that the first time you were tempted to violate the moral code, you may well have been going on a mission today. Now, I'm sorry, I hate to be the

one to keep you from realizing your goal. I know it will be hard to go back to your friends and tell them you are not going on a mission.

“ ‘After you’ve been to Gethsemane,’ I continued, ‘you’ll understand what I mean when I say that every person who commits a major transgression must also go to Gethsemane and back before he is forgiven.’

“The young man left the office, and I’m sure he wasn’t very pleased; I had stood in his way and kept him from going on a mission.

“About six months later, I was down in Arizona speaking at the institute at Tempe. After my talk many of the institute members came down the aisles to shake hands. As I looked up I saw this young man—the nonrepentant transgressor—coming down the aisle toward me, and at that moment the details of my interview with him came back through my mind. I recalled his braggadocio attitude, his sarcasm, his haughtiness.

“I reached down to shake hands with him, and as he looked up at me I could see that something wonderful had taken place in his life. Tears streamed down his cheeks. An almost holy glow came from his countenance. I said to him, ‘You’ve been there, haven’t you?’

“And through tears he said, ‘Yes, Bishop Featherstone, I’ve been to Gethsemane and back.’

“ ‘I know,’ I said. ‘It shows in your face. I believe now that the Lord has forgiven you.’

“He responded: ‘I’m more grateful to you than you’ll ever know for not letting me go on a mission. It would have been a great disservice to me. Thanks for helping me’ ” (*A Generation of Excellence: A Guide for Parents and Youth Leaders* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975], pp. 156–59).

Discussion

- Although the young man in the story had not committed sin for a year, what did his repentance lack? (He had not changed his attitude. He did not feel remorse. He lacked true humility: he had not yet turned to Christ with a broken heart and a contrite spirit.)
- Why is attitude so important in repentance? (Our attitudes mold our behavior and show our true feelings. The right attitudes make it possible for us to turn to Christ.)
- What did Elder Featherstone mean when he said, “After you have been to Gethsemane and back, you’ll understand what true repentance is”?

Quotation and discussion

President David O. McKay illustrated the need to change our nature when we repent:

“It is not uncommon for people to have remorse for mistakes made, for follies and sins committed, but to have no turning away from such frailties and evils. They may even feel penitent; but ‘penitence,’ we are told, ‘is transient, and may involve no change of character or conduct.’ Repentance, on the other hand, ‘is sorrow for sin with *self-condemnation*, and complete turning away from the sin.’ It is, therefore, more than mere remorse; ‘it comprehends a change of nature’ ” (*Gospel Ideals* [Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953], p. 13).

- What will be the attitude of a truly repentant person?

Conclusion

Challenge and quotation

Challenge each young man to begin today to eliminate those attitudes and behaviors that hinder his progress. Encourage the young men to dispose of the burden of sin, for as President Harold B. Lee said: “If I were to ask you what is the heaviest burden one may have to bear in this life, what would you answer? The heaviest burden that one has to bear in this life is the burden of sin” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1973, p. 177; or *Ensign*, July 1973, p. 122).