

# Repentance Is Always Positive

## October 2017 General Conference

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The moment we set foot on the path of repentance, we invite the Savior's redeeming power into our lives.

Several years ago, President Gordon B. Hinckley attended a college football game. He was there to announce that the stadium would be named after the team's longtime, beloved coach, who was about to retire. The team desperately wanted to win the game to honor their coach. President Hinckley was invited to visit the locker room and share some encouraging words. Inspired by his words, that team on that day went on to win that game and ended the season with a winning record.

Today, I would like to speak to those who may worry that they are not winning in life. The truth is, of course, that we "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."<sup>1</sup> While there may be undefeated seasons in sports, there aren't any in life. But I testify that the Savior Jesus Christ worked out a perfect Atonement and gave us the gift of repentance—our path back to a perfect brightness of hope and a winning life.

### Repentance Brings Happiness

Too often we think of repentance as something miserable and depressing. But God's plan is the plan of happiness, not the plan of misery! Repentance is uplifting and ennobling. It's sin that brings unhappiness.<sup>2</sup> Repentance is our escape route! As Elder D. Todd Christofferson explained: "Without repentance, there is no real progress or improvement in life. ... Only through repentance do we gain access to the atoning grace of Jesus Christ and salvation. Repentance ... points us to freedom, confidence, and peace."<sup>3</sup> My message to all—especially to the youth—is that repentance is always positive.

When we speak of repentance, we aren't just talking about self-improvement efforts. True repentance is more than that—it is inspired by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His power to forgive our sins. As Elder Dale G. Renlund has taught us, "Without the Redeemer, ... repentance becomes simply miserable behavior modification."<sup>4</sup> We can try to change our behavior on our own, but only the Savior can remove our stains and lift our burdens, enabling us to pursue the path of obedience with confidence and strength. The joy of repentance is more than the joy of living a decent life. It's the joy of

forgiveness, of being clean again, and of drawing closer to God. Once you've experienced that joy, no lesser substitute will do.

True repentance inspires us to make our obedience a commitment—a covenant, beginning with baptism and renewed each week at the Lord's Supper, the sacrament. There we receive the promise that we can "always have his Spirit to be with [us],"<sup>5</sup> with all of the joy and peace that come from His constant companionship. This is the fruit of repentance, and this is what makes repentance joyful!

## Repentance Requires Persistence

I love the parable of the prodigal son.<sup>6</sup> There's something poignant about that pivotal moment when the prodigal "came to himself." Sitting in a pigsty, wishing he could "have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat," he finally realized that he had wasted not only his father's inheritance but also his own life. With faith that his father might accept him back—if not as a son then at least as a servant—he determined to put his rebellious past behind him and go home.

I've often wondered about the son's long walk home. Were there times when he hesitated and wondered, "How will I be received by my father?" Perhaps he even took a few steps back toward the swine. Imagine how the story would be different if he had given up. But faith kept him moving, and faith kept his father watching and waiting patiently, until finally:

"When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

"And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

"But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: ...

"For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

## Repentance Is for Everyone

Brothers and sisters, we are all prodigals. We all have to "come to ourselves"—usually more than once—and choose the path that leads back home. It's a choice we make daily, throughout our lives.

We often associate repentance with grievous sins that require "a mighty change."<sup>7</sup> But repentance is for everyone—those who are wandering in "forbidden paths and [are] lost"<sup>8</sup> as well as those who "have gotten into [the] strait and narrow path" and now need to "press forward."<sup>9</sup> Repentance both puts us on the right path and keeps us on

the right path. It is for those who are just beginning to believe, those who have believed all along, and those who need to begin again to believe. As Elder David A. Bednar taught: "Most of us clearly understand that the Atonement is for sinners. I am not so sure, however, that we know and understand that the Atonement is also for saints—for good men and women who are obedient, worthy, and ... striving to become better."<sup>10</sup>

Recently I visited a missionary training center when a group of brand-new missionaries arrived. I was deeply moved as I watched them and observed the light in their eyes. They seemed so bright and happy and enthusiastic. Then a thought came to me: "They have experienced faith unto repentance. This is why they are filled with joy and hope."

I don't think that means they all had serious transgressions in their past, but I do think they knew how to repent; they had learned that repentance is positive; and they were ready and eager to share this joyful message with the world.

This is what happens when we feel the joy of repentance. Consider the example of Enos. He had his own "coming to himself" moment, and after his "guilt was swept away," his heart turned immediately to the welfare of others. Enos spent the rest of his life inviting all people to repent and "rejoiced in it above that of the world."<sup>11</sup> Repentance does that; it turns our hearts toward our fellowman because we know that the joy we feel is meant for everyone.

## Repentance Is a Lifelong Pursuit

I have a friend who grew up in a less-active Latter-day Saint family. When he was a young adult, he too "came to himself" and decided to prepare for a mission.

He became an excellent missionary. On his last day before returning home, the mission president interviewed him and asked him to bear his testimony. He did so, and after a tearful embrace, the president said, "Elder, you could forget or deny everything you have just testified of in a matter of months if you do not continue to do the things that built your testimony in the first place."

My friend later told me that he has prayed and read the scriptures daily since he returned from his mission. Being constantly "nourished by the good word of God" has kept him "in the right way."<sup>12</sup>

You who are preparing for full-time missions and you who are returning, take note! It is not enough just to gain a testimony; you have to maintain it and strengthen it. As every missionary knows, if you stop pedaling a bicycle, it will fall, and if you stop feeding your testimony, it will weaken. This same principle applies to repentance—it is a lifelong pursuit, not a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

To all who seek forgiveness—the youth, young single adults, parents, grandparents, and yes, even great-grandparents—I invite you to come home. Now is the time to

begin. Do not procrastinate your day of repentance.<sup>13</sup>

Then, once you have made that decision, keep following the path. Our Father is waiting, longing to receive you. His arms are outstretched “all the day long” for you.<sup>14</sup> The reward is worth the effort.

Remember these words from Nephi: “Ye must press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life.”<sup>15</sup>

Sometimes the journey will seem long—after all, it is the journey toward eternal life. But it can be a joyous journey if we pursue it with faith in Jesus Christ and hope in His Atonement. I testify that the moment we set foot on the path of repentance, we invite the Savior’s redeeming power into our lives. That power will steady our feet, expand our vision, and deepen our resolve to keep moving forward, step by step, until that glorious day when we finally return to our heavenly home and hear our Father in Heaven say to us, “Well done.”<sup>16</sup> In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

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