

Marks of a Disciple / Lesson 1

“The Repentant Life”

INTRODUCTION

1. Welcome to session one of the Marks of a Disciple.

a. Why do this study?

i. When you have a child, you start a cycle of medical appointments called “well Baby checkups.”

1. Your Pediatrician weighs and measures your child.

2. She tells you if your child is hitting certain benchmarks.

ii. Every time you lift weights or step on a scale, you get instant feedback on how you’re doing with your health goals.

iii. At work, you might have a boss that keeps you updated on your performance.

iv. This kind of evaluation is both normal and healthy.

b. But for this study, the question is “how are you doing spiritually?”

i. Do you know?

ii. Do you even have a way of knowing?

iii. Can you evaluate yourself spiritually?

c. In this study, we’re going to equip ourselves with six marks or measurements of faith.

i. These marks of a disciple will give us the ability to know if we're progressing in our faith.

ii. If you are involved in helping others grow spiritually, these marks will help you know if that person is progressing.

2. The first mark we're going to start with is a **repentant life**.

a. Can you remember the context of the first time you heard the word "repentance?"

- b. I was thinking about how I have often limited the word repentance to theological discussions.
 - i. In daily life, I talked with my sons about apologies and forgiveness when they were arguing with each other.
 - ii. But I'm not sure how often I talked about repentance.
- 3. The word repentance **is** closely associated with the gospel and a posture of repentance toward our sin.
 - a. While that's part of it, growing Christians live lives that are marked by repentance.
 - b. Repentance is not a milestone you reach or a destination that you accomplish and then check off your list.
- 4. Growing Christians are repentant Christians.
- 5. Let's look at that a little more closely.

INITIAL REPENTANCE

- 1. One important starting point in this discussion is that repentance is part of the entry into the Christian life.
 - a. When God gives a sinner the faith to believe the gospel, and that man repents of his sin and responds in faith, the entirety of the Christian life flows from one initial act.
 - i. What does it mean?
 - b. The Westminster Shorter Catechism answers the question "What is repentance?" this way:
 - i. Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of an endeavor after new obedience.
 - ii. That language is a little lofty, so let's break it down simply:
Repentance is turning from your sins to God.
- 2. I think it's important that we understand how God brings about this repentance in our hearts.
 - a. This might surprise some of you.

b. Paul ends Romans chapter 1 talking about sin and sinners. Then he says this:

Romans 2:1-4 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (ESV)

c. That's really significant. Paul wrote that repentance is a response to God's kindness.

- i. Many people think that repentance is a response to God's anger over your sin.
- ii. Repentance is not God calling you to a life of trying to artfully dodge his spanking spoon.

d. God calls you to a relationship of kindness with Himself.

- i. According to Paul, God invites you to enjoy His kindness, patience, and restraint.
- ii. He invites you to enter into a relationship with Him.
- iii. God's kindness is what leads us to repentance.

e. When we think about repentance this way, it becomes an invitation to experience God's character.

3. Here's the point: to refuse repentance is to reject the gospel and the kindness God offers us.

a. Our need for repentance mirrors what happened in the Garden of Eden and the lies Adam believed.

- i. Lie 1: There is more to be gained by disobeying God.
- ii. Lie 2: We need to look to the world, instead of to God, for satisfaction.

b. If repentance feels like a burden or something that is bad or negative, that's evidence that we need to grow in our faith.

c. The more you come to know God's kindness toward you, the more your life will be marked by repentance.

d. What we do, then, is...

Respond to God's Invitation

1. Now, of course, God's kindness comes with a warning and a call to respond. Look at what Paul said next in Romans 2:5-8.

Romans 2:5-8 [5] But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. (ESV)

- a. To know God is to know God's mercy.
 - i. Even people who don't follow God want God to be kind to them.
 - ii. But if you deny your need to repent you are "despising" the mercy of God.
 - b. Once a man truly understands the depth of his need, the response is to run to God's mercy.
2. Repentance unleashes God's kindness in our lives.
 - a. Based upon these verses, it's clear that repentance is necessary.
 - i. If we despise God's kindness and continue to live without seeking repentance,
 - ii. Paul says that what awaits us is wrath and fury.
 - b. Our sin deserves judgment and we desperately need God's mercy.
 - i. The mercy we need can only be found in Jesus.
 - ii. He is the only One who never needed to repent because He perfectly kept God's law.
 - iii. In His kindness, God shelters us from the judgment we deserved by placing it on Jesus.
 - iv. He offers us forgiveness if we turn from our sins and place our trust in Him.
 3. But I want to emphasize the fact that God's kindness, is what is meant to lead us to repentance.

Repentance allows us to...

Experience God's Kindness

1. God will judge sin, but He also shows us kindness, restraint, and patience.
 - a. He demonstrates His kindness by encouraging us to come to Him.
 - b. He shows restraint when He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve.
 - c. He shows patience as we experience failures.
 - i. God walks with us, loves us, and He calls us His sons.
 - ii. As believers, God's grace toward us is a defining feature of our lives.
2. Look at Ephesians 2:4-9

Ephesians 2:4-9 [4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—[6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (ESV)

- a. For the disciple, repentance and faith in Jesus are inextricably connected.
 - i. To repent of your sins is to trust in Jesus.
 - ii. They are unified actions.
- b. God's kindness to us, which leads us to repentance, puts us in the position where Ephesians 2:7 becomes true:

[7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

3. As we continue to grow and develop as disciples of Jesus, we're also involved in...

ONGOING REPENTANCE

1. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of All Saints' Church, igniting the Protestant Reformation.
 - a. We've all heard about that event, but you might not be familiar with what the document says.
 - b. Luther's first thesis is translated into English as follows:

“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”

- c. Luther understood an important reality.
 - d. Repentance is not just the entry point into the Christian life, but the whole of the Christian life.
2. Following Jesus means our lives are being consistently transformed by His grace. Therefore, we repent often.
- a. Reflect on your life and think about this: What happened to your faith in the times when you treated repentance as optional and clung to your sin?
 - i. Repentance is not a box to check.
 - ii. It’s not God’s way of spanking us with a wooden spoon when we’re bad.
 - b. Repentance is God’s loving pursuit of a close relationship with you.
 - i. It’s an invitation to change that we must accept over and over again.
 - ii. To decline God’s invitation is to despise and reject the grace of God.
 - c. The Bible helps us see what ongoing repentance looks like in practice.

Repentance is guided by the Scripture

1. David wrote:

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (ESV)

2. Look at the requests given in this psalm.
- a. Search me. Examine my heart! Look into my thoughts!
 - i. I wonder - do we really want God doing that?
 - ii. Well, we do if we’re spiritually mature. That mindset is a mark of a disciple.
 - b. Why is a prayer like Davids a mark of Christian maturity?
 - i. David invited God to search his heart, diagnose his motives, and lead him back into a life pleasing to God.
 - ii. David understood he needed God’s help to see himself clearly.

- c. We sometimes think of Christian maturity as the ability to resist sin.
 - i. Resisting sin is certainly important.
 - ii. But equally important is our response to our sins.
3. While we should certainly try and resist sin, there will be times we ultimately fail.
- a. In those moments, we can choose to go on with our lives or to approach God with repentance and receive His forgiveness.
 - b. Allow him to lead us in the way everlasting.
 - c. If going to God with your sin is a mark of maturity, how might an immature Christian handle their sin?
 - i. The Bible talks about our need to be transformed instead conformed.

Repentance helps us be transformed instead of conformed

- 1. When we embrace repentance as a daily reality, it changes the way we live because it helps us be conformed into the image of Christ.
 - a. Consider Paul's words:

Romans 12:1-2 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (ESV)

- b. The message of the Bible stands in stark contrast to the world.
 - c. What does our culture tell you to do with your sin?
 - i. The world tells us to "follow our hearts." Scripture tells us our hearts are deceitful above all else. (Jeremiah 17:9).
 - ii. The cultural mantra is "embrace your truth." The Bible tells us that truth is found not in us, but in the person and work of Jesus.
 - d. Being conformed to the world means embracing our sin and excusing its entanglements. Paul points us to a better way.
2. This is why a posture of repentance is the mark of a disciple.
- a. A question to be asking of yourself is:

- i. How have my desires changed as I've followed God?
- ii. How have my feelings toward my sin changed?
 - 1. Are there sins that I love, and cling to?
 - 2. Or is my posture one of turning from sin and toward God?
- b. Repentance of our sins is a means of being transformed.
 - i. Instead of being conformed to the world and its desires....
 - ii. We are transformed as our minds are renewed.
- c. A shift begins to take place in our loyalties.
- d. We exchange the desires of this world for new loyalties toward God.

IMPLICATIONS

- 1. Mature, growing Christians are repentant people.
- 2. Repentance is the lifestyle of people who are responding to the goodness and grace of God.
 - a. Sometime today, spend time asking God to examine your heart and motives. Write down what He reveals to you.
 - b. Spend a few more moments receiving God's cleansing and His forgiveness.

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OUTLINE

Introduction

1. Initial Repentance (Romans 2:1-8, Ephesians 2:4-9)
 - a. Respond to God's Invitation
 - b. Experience God's Kindness
2. Ongoing Repentance (Psalm 139:23–24, Romans 12:1–2)
 - a. Repentance is guided by the Scripture
 - b. Repentance helps us be transformed instead of conformed

Implications

DISCUSSION

1. Two lies, dating back to Adam and Eve, keep us from embracing a life of repentance. 1) We gain more by disobeying God than by obeying Him. 2) We have to go around God for the things we want in life. How do these lies keep us from experiencing the grace of God found in repentance?
2. What do you think a lifestyle of repentance looks like in the life of a believer?
3. How is repentance related to God's kindness? How does repentance lead us into a deeper relationship with God?
4. Why is a prayer like David's in Psalm 139 a mark of Christian maturity?
5. If repentance is a mark of spiritual maturity, how might an immature Christian handle his sin?
6. What are some areas where men often delay repentance? Why is that the case?

PERSONAL EVALUATION

- Do you desire to experience God's kindness through repentance? If yes, how did you come to desire this? If not, what is holding you back?
- What areas of your life are you most tempted to work around God to get what you want?
- What areas are you most tempted to reduce repentance to a checklist?
- How often is your prayer life marked by repentance? Do you need to make any changes?
- What do you need to repent of right now?