
*ARE YOU
READY TO
REPENT
(AGAIN)?*

A TEEN'S GUIDE TO
UNDERSTANDING
REPENTANCE AND
RECOMMITMENT
TO CHRIST



Bethel Grove Publications

Are You Ready to Repent (Again)?: A Teen's Guide to Understanding Repentance and Recommitment to Christ (Ch. 1 Excerpt)

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[Note: The page numbers reflect the PDF version only, not the print version]

Introduction

Like many kids that grew up in church, one of my favorite parts of my summers growing up was church camp. There were several lessons, events, and activities that I still remember many years later, like one that we did during my last year of elementary cabin camp. Before we left for evening chapel to go to campfire, we were all given brown paper bags. We were told that there would be ten adults with a bag of marbles that would be waiting along a path that led to the campfire. Each of the adults was assigned one of the Ten Commandments and was instructed to ask elementary-aged children if they had broken the commandment they were assigned. If we did, we had to take a marble and put it in our brown paper bag. I didn't think I had broken that many of the commandments, but unfortunately, some of the adults were a little strict and overzealous in their interpretation of them (like when I was told that squashing a bug broke "You shall not murder" or breaking a promise broke "You shall not commit adultery"). Not to mention the awkwardness of the moment when my dad was stationed at "Honor your father and mother." In the end, I think I ended up with 7 marbles, representing the camp leaders' opinion that I had broken 7 out of 10 commandments, all before I was 12 years old.

Did you just laugh when you read that? In hindsight, I laugh at this story now too. But back then, in my young mind, it led me to believe that I was never going to be good enough, no matter how hard I tried. And if I'm being honest, I'm pretty sure I was not the only kid from that camp who came to this conclusion.

Fast-forward a few summers, and I was at high school camp. By then, most of the kids at camp have been going to camp, church, and youth group for years. However, I started noticing a pattern. On the last night of camp, there was an invitation for those who were convicted by the messages they had been hearing that week. They could either decide to follow Christ into the waters of baptism, or they could recommit their life to Christ if they felt like they had strayed. While it was great to see some students commit for the first time and even get baptized at the end of camp, there were also quite a few students that felt they needed to recommit to Christ. At first, this seemed like a good thing, until I noticed the same students doing it every year at camp or youth conferences. And even many years later, I see the same thing happening as a youth leader – many students who are already baptized feel like they needed to recommit over and over again.

For years, I have wondered why so many students do this. But as I thought about it, I realized that these students had fallen into the trap of believing that if they struggled with sin after they chose to follow Jesus, God couldn't forgive them, and they were back to where they started before they were saved. Maybe you have struggled with believing the same thing or have a friend who does. If that's the case, you need to know that you are not alone, and that there is a biblical concept that can help you overcome your guilt without having to completely start over: repentance.

I am so grateful that you are reading this book, because it means that you are serious about wanting to understand repentance or if you need to recommit to Christ after you fall short. Maybe

you have a friend struggling with this same mindset and you want to help. Either way, if you are like most young people, you have a lot of questions about repentance, what the Bible says about it, and when is the right time to do it. So this book is designed to answer your questions so you or your friend can make the best decision. My hope is that you will discover that you already have the tools you need to change your course through repentance.

Regardless of where you started or where you end up, I am so excited to take you on this journey.

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A Few Things to Note

Throughout this book, there will be several underlined verse references, sometimes in parentheses (Genesis 1:1). You should look these up on your own if you want to read more about the stories or truths that are shared. Translations are only marked on exact quotations. Any exact Scripture quotations will be **written in bold italics**.

There are also one or two questions at the end of the sections of Chapter 1 that are **written in gray**. All these questions, as well as a few extra questions for Chapters 2 and 3, are included in the study guide on pg 26. Consider writing down these questions and their answers in a journal or on paper if you want to reflect on them further.

Let's get started!

Chapter 1

Repentance and the Gospel

To fully understand repentance, we need to take a look at the message of the gospel and how repentance came to be a part of it. This journey will take us through the basic message at the heart of the whole Bible and will explain why Christians believe what they believe. Whether you have been raised in the church and know this by heart or you started attending church last week, it's good for us to review this story so we understand why we believe what we believe. To start this journey, we need to go back to the book of Genesis.

Everything Started Out Great

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1 NIV)

Just like that, the incredible all-powerful God of the universe created the world in six days. After creating light, the sky, the ocean, the land, and every animal according to their kind, God saved His best creation for last. He created the first man, Adam, from the dust of the earth (Genesis 1:26 and 2:7). Then, He created the first woman, Eve, from one of Adam's ribs (Genesis 1:27 and 2:21-22). When this was done, God saw His creation was “very good” and truly complete (Genesis 1:31).

It's hard for us today to imagine the perfect world that Adam and Eve got to live in. Aside from the beauty of the garden and the harmony they had with the creatures all around them, the best part was that they got to live in complete harmony with God. They walked beside him in the garden like you would walk with your best friend in a local park.

Question: Can you imagine what it would be like to be so close to God that you could walk right next to Him?

Until We Sinned

Unfortunately, things didn't stay perfect in paradise. When both Adam and Eve broke the one rule God gave them and ate the forbidden fruit, sin entered the world.

Before we continue, we've got to talk about this word called “sin.” Sin is doing something you know to be wrong (Romans 2:23), especially when you disobey God's greatest commandments of loving God or loving your neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39). Sin can also be avoiding something you know to be right (James 4:17). Either way, it means that you missed the mark of what God wants you to do, just like when an archer misses the bullseye on their target.

When sin entered the picture, everything changed. God is holy and perfect, but our sin makes us unholy and imperfect. God's holiness means that He cannot allow sinful people to be close to Him. So Adam and Eve could no longer walk with God because of their sin. They had to be banished from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23). So just like Adam and Eve, your sin puts a distance between you and God. Something has to be done about your sin for you to get back to Him.

Question: What is sin? What does it do to our relationship with God?

We Think We Can Make It, But We Always Fall Short

When most of us realize we are separated from God, we try to make it back to God on our own. Many people are convinced that if they do more good things than bad, or if most of their sins are “small sins”, they will be good enough to make it back to God by themselves. But the truth is that there is no such thing as a small sin. Every sin separates you from God just as much as breaking all of God’s laws at the same time (James 2:10).

If you try to jump the gap between you and God by yourself, you will always fall short. No one has ever been good enough to do that on their own (Romans 3:23). Anyone who doesn’t have their sin accounted for will have to stand before the Lord and answer for every wrong thing they have done (Romans 14:12). If we don’t find a way to remove our sin, we will be spiritually dead (Colossians 2:13) and the punishment will be going to hell. In this punishment, one would be completely separated from God’s presence, lost in both fire and darkness (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, Matthew 18:9, Matthew 25:30). Something has to be done about our sin to prevent this from happening.

Question: What happens when you try to jump the gap between you and God by yourself?

God Doesn’t Want Us to Be Separated from Him

Some people think that because hell exists, God is angry, hateful, and unloving. But nothing could be further from the truth! The Lord is compassionate, gracious, and slow to anger (Exodus 34:6). However, He is also holy and cannot just ignore the problem of our sin. God didn’t want us to stay lost in our sins and knew that if He didn’t find a way to help us, we would be lost forever. So God started working on a plan, even before Adam and Eve first sinned, to help us find our way back to Him.

Question: What did God do when we became separated from Him by our sins?

God Gave His People A Way to Be Forgiven of Their Sins

Knowing that it would take many years for His plan to be complete, God knew He needed a way to allow His people to seek forgiveness in the meantime. So after God established a nation of people called the Israelites, He gave them a clear set of instructions about how they could make animal sacrifices to seek forgiveness from their sins. There were offerings they could bring when they intentionally sinned, called sin offerings, as well as offerings for unintentional sins, called guilt offerings. They would offer the appropriate animal for the corresponding offense and the person’s financial situation. These animals were usually young goats, rams, sheep, doves, pigeons, and sometimes bulls. The priests would slaughter the animal and sacrifice it on the altar in the Tabernacle according to the Lord’s instructions as a way of asking for God’s forgiveness.

Over many years and several generations, the people continued to struggle with their sins, even choosing to make sacrifices to other gods. God knew that there would need to be a permanent solution to help His people find their way back to Him.

Question: What were the two types of offerings that people could offer when they did something wrong?

God Sent His Son

Before we move forward in our story, we need to stop and explain the idea of the Trinity. There are three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is all three persons, yet He's still just one God. This can be a little confusing and hard to understand, even for biblical scholars and experts. Father is the person that we normally think of as God, but we need to remember that God is all three persons, not just one. It's important for us to try and understand this as we continue.

Knowing that there was no way that man could get back to God on their own, He decided to send the Son to earth as a human, but the Son would be no ordinary human. He would be born of a virgin (a woman who had never had sex with a man) so that the birth would be a miracle only God could do. As Jesus grew up, He became the only person to live that never sinned, even though He struggled with every temptation we face (Hebrews 4:15).

Question: Which person of the Trinity did God send to earth as a human? Why was He born of a virgin?

John the Baptist Called God's People to Repentance

Not long before Jesus was born, another baby boy was born to a relative of Mary's. This baby was born in his mother's old age under miraculous circumstances (Luke 1:5-25; 2:57-66). This boy was named John, but you probably know him as John the Baptist. John was born to be Jesus' personal prophet and was meant to pave the way for Jesus and His teaching (Matthew 3:3). The heart of John's message was a call to repentance from sin.

There are two parts of the word "repentance" that are important to understand as we move forward. The first part is an acknowledgment of sin or wrongdoing that is often expressed in regret or remorse. You know that you did something wrong and wish you hadn't done it or could undo it. The second part is a change of mind, attitude, or purpose regarding sin. In other words, you are so convinced that what you have done is wrong that you are motivated to turn away and make changes to stop doing it. Of the over 70 times the words "repent" and "repentance" are used in the Bible, seven of those times have the words "turn" or "turn away" in the same sentence. Whether you need to change your thoughts, your actions, or set different goals for your future, you do whatever it takes to stay away from that sinful choice permanently.

Repentance is something that most Jews knew and several had practiced. Job repented when he realized that it was wrong for him to blame God for His suffering (Job 42:6). Several passages talk about the negative consequences of refusing to repent (Psalms 7:12; Jeremiah 5:3). God instructed Ezekiel twice to tell the people to "repent and turn away" for their sins or their idols (Ezekiel 14:6; 18:30). But now, John was teaching about repentance in ways that were different than before, emphasizing the confession of sins and "***baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins***" (Mark 1:4b NIV).

All of this was meant to set the stage for Jesus, who would soon give those who repented a chance to find their way back to God once and for all.

Question: what is repentance?

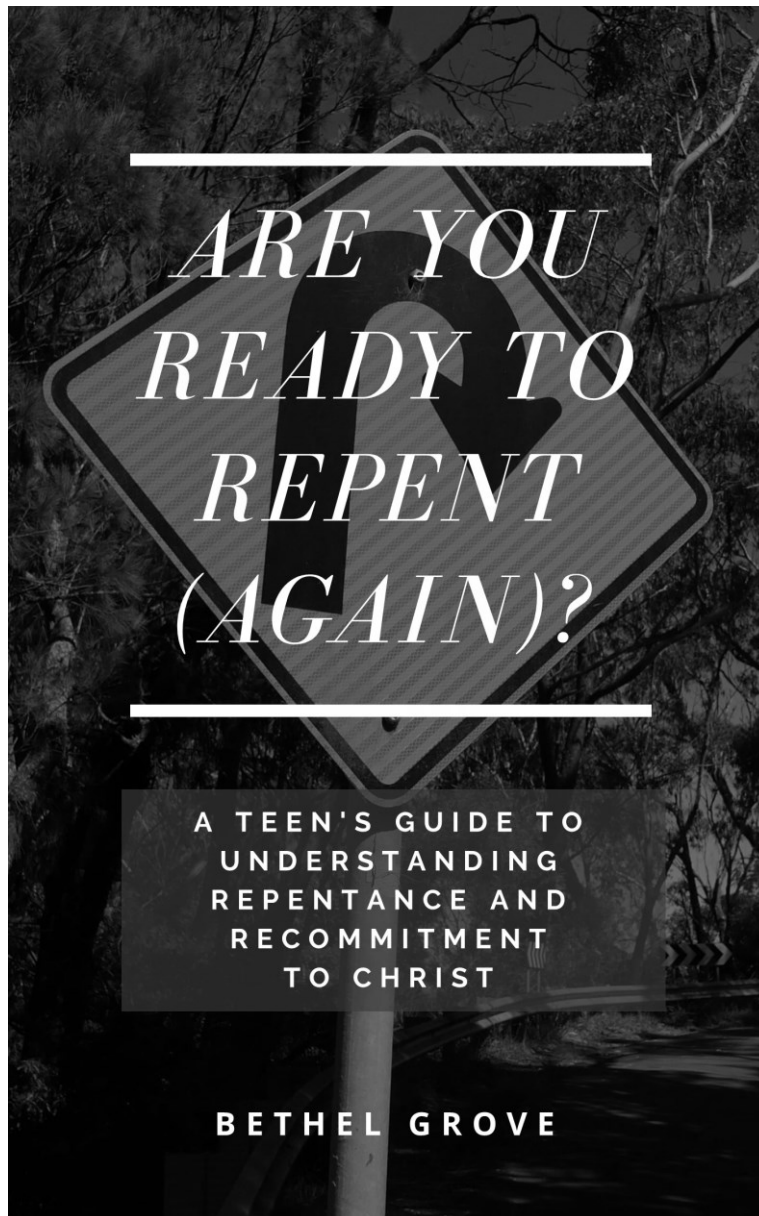
Jesus Died to Take Our Sins Away

Soon after John started preaching, Jesus began His public ministry by teaching the way of the Lord, discipling His followers, and loving the least of these by His example. However, most of what he taught angered the religious leaders of His day, because most of it didn't fit with their "rules over relationship" version of God's law. After a few years, Jesus was betrayed by one of His disciples, who handed Him over to His enemies. Then his enemies wrongfully convicted Him and sentenced Him to be flogged and crucified.

But the death that Jesus endured was not just any execution. It was the most painful and humiliating death in the world at that time. The flogging would have stripped the skin off most of His body. With some additional beatings He endured, He was bleeding so much, that He would have been hardly recognizable as a human ([Isaiah 52:14](#)). Then being nailed to the cross would have required Him to pull His body up and down just to breathe, until He eventually died from suffocation. The blood that Jesus shed paid the price to free us from our sins and gave us a way back to God ([Revelation 1:5](#)). Through His sacrifice, we can be forgiven of all our sins.

To Be Continued

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