

DISCOVERING CHRIST

Lesson 6 — What Does It Mean to Repent?

The Big Question

If I believe in Jesus and recognize my sin, what does Jesus want me to do about it?

Purpose of This Study: Our study has been moving toward a very personal place.

Who is Jesus? He is the Son of God, Messiah, Creator, and Lord.

Why did He come? He came to seek and save the lost.

Why do I need Him? Because I have sinned and sin separates me from God.

What does Jesus ask of me? He calls me to follow Him as Lord.

What does it mean to believe? Biblical faith means trusting Jesus in a way that produces a response.

Now we come to that response. The Bible repeatedly calls people to **repent**.

But what does repentance actually mean?

Is it simply feeling sorry?

Is it promising to do better?

Is it changing our behavior?

Or is there something deeper happening?

In this study we will discover that repentance begins with a **change of heart and mind** that produces a **change of direction**.

1. DISCUSSION STARTER

“Wrong Turn”

Have you ever been driving somewhere and suddenly realized you were going the wrong direction? Maybe you missed a turn, got distracted, followed the GPS incorrectly, or simply weren't paying attention. What do you have to do once you realize you're going the wrong way?

Would saying, “I realize I'm going the wrong way,” actually solve the problem? No.

What has to happen? You have to change direction.

That's a simple picture of repentance. Repentance begins when we recognize that we're going the wrong way. But biblical repentance involves more than recognizing it.

We turn around. And when we understand that Jesus is Lord, repentance means turning away from sin and turning toward God.

2. JESUS' FIRST CALL TO REPENT

Read Mark 1:14–15

Discussion Questions

1. What message did Jesus proclaim?
2. What does Jesus mean by “**The time has come**”?
3. What does He mean by “**the kingdom of God has come near**”?
4. What are the two responses Jesus calls for?
5. Why do you think Jesus places **repentance and belief** together?
6. How does this passage connect with our previous study about faith?

Key Observation Notice the order: “**Repent and believe the good news!**”

Repentance isn't an unrelated religious exercise. It is part of responding to the good news of Jesus.

Why would believing the good news cause someone to reconsider the direction of his or her life?

3. WHAT DOES REPENTANCE REALLY MEAN?

Before Reading

Imagine that you are one of the people listening to Peter. He has just spent much of his sermon explaining who Jesus is and what has happened to Him.

Read Acts 2:36–41

Discussion Questions

1. What does Peter declare about Jesus in verse 36?
2. How do the people respond in verse 37?
3. What does the phrase “**cut to the heart**” tell us about their response?
4. What question do they ask Peter and the other apostles?
5. What are the two responses Peter commands in verse 38?
6. What does Peter connect repentance with?
7. What does he say baptism is connected with?
8. According to verse 39, how broad is God's promise?
9. What happens to those who accept Peter's message?

Important Observation: Their response follows the progression we've been studying:
They HEAR

↓

They BELIEVE

↓

They are CUT TO THE HEART

↓

They ask WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

↓

They are told to REPENT

↓

They are told to BE BAPTIZED

This is important because repentance isn't something we invented as one of several "steps." **Peter commanded repentance as a response to the gospel.**

4. REPENTANCE INVOLVES A CHANGE OF MIND

The New Testament word translated **repentance** is *metanoia* (μετάνοια).

It carries the idea of a **change of mind, understanding, or outlook** that results in a changed course.

But be careful here. Repentance isn't simply: "I changed my mind about an opinion."

Biblical repentance involves changing the way I think about **God, sin, myself, and the direction of my life.**

If I once thought, "My life belongs to me and I can live however I want," but now I believe, "Jesus is Lord and I belong to Him," what should that change produce? **A change in direction.**

5. THE PRODIGAL SON — A PICTURE OF REPENTANCE

Read Luke 15:11–24

Discussion Questions

1. What did the younger son want?
2. What did he do with what his father gave him?
3. What happened to him?
4. In verse 17, what happened to the son's thinking?
5. What did he recognize about his situation?
6. What did he decide to do?

7. Did he simply feel sorry while remaining in the distant country?
8. What does verse 20 say he actually did?
9. How did the father respond when the son returned?
10. What does this story teach us about the relationship between repentance and returning to God?

Key Observation: Look carefully at the progression:

He came to his senses

↓

He recognized his condition

↓

He changed his mind

↓

He decided to return

↓

He got up and went to his father

That's repentance.

At what point did repentance become more than simply feeling sorry?

6. REPENTANCE IS MORE THAN FEELING BAD

Read 2 Corinthians 7:9–10

Discussion Questions

1. What kind of sorrow does Paul describe?
2. What does godly sorrow produce?
3. What is the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow?
4. Can someone feel terrible about sin without truly repenting?
5. What does Paul say godly sorrow produces?
6. Why is sorrow by itself not enough?

Illustration

You might say: Imagine a person who gets caught speeding. He feels terrible because he received a ticket. He is embarrassed. He is frustrated about the money. He says, “I’ll never do that again.”

But the next day he continues driving exactly the same way. Has anything really changed?

What would demonstrate genuine change?

Key Thought: Feeling sorry may begin repentance, but repentance does not end with feeling sorry.

7. REPENTANCE MEANS TURNING TOWARD GOD

Read Acts 3:17–21

Discussion Questions

1. What does Peter tell the people to do?
2. What does he say will happen when they repent and turn to God?
3. What does the phrase “**times of refreshing**” suggest?
4. According to verse 20, who is Jesus?
5. How does this passage connect repentance with restoration?

Notice the Language - Peter doesn't simply say: Stop doing bad things. He says: “**Repent, then, and turn to God.**”

Repentance has both: **A turning away from sin** and **A turning toward God**.

That is an important distinction.

8. GOD COMMANDS EVERYONE TO REPENT

Read Acts 17:22–31

Discussion Questions

1. What does Paul teach about God as Creator?
2. What does Paul say about humanity's relationship to God?
3. Why does Paul say God commands people to repent?
4. Who does God command to repent?
5. What future event does Paul identify as a reason for repentance?
6. What does verse 31 say about Jesus?

Key Observation - Notice the scope: “**Now he commands all people everywhere to repent.**”

Repentance isn't just for people who have committed particularly terrible sins. It is God's call to **everyone**. Why? Because **everyone has sinned**.

9. WHAT DOES REPENTANCE LOOK LIKE IN REAL LIFE?

Read Luke 3:7–14

John the Baptist speaks very directly to people who were asking what repentance should look like.

Discussion Questions

1. What does John tell the people to do?
2. What does he mean by “**produce fruit in keeping with repentance**”?
3. What does he tell the crowd to do?
4. What does he tell the tax collectors to do?
5. What does he tell the soldiers to do?
6. Notice that John gives different instructions to different people. What does that tell us about repentance?
7. Does repentance merely change what we say, or does it change how we live?

Important Thought:

Repentance isn't necessarily identical for every person. For one person it may mean giving up dishonesty. For another it may mean ending an immoral relationship. For another it may mean forgiving someone. For another it may mean abandoning bitterness. For another it may mean surrendering pride. For another it may mean putting Christ above career, possessions, reputation, or personal desires. The common element is: **I recognize that my way is wrong, and I am willing to turn toward God's way.**

10. WHAT REPENTANCE IS NOT

Is repentance... Simply feeling guilty?

Simply saying “I'm sorry”?

Promising never to sin again?

Trying harder to be a good person?

Changing one's behavior without changing one's heart?

Then what is it? (Answer before looking below this line)

Repentance is a genuine change of heart and mind concerning sin and God that results in turning away from sin and turning toward God.

11. REPENTANCE AND GOD'S GRACE

Read Romans 2:4

Discussion Questions

1. What does Paul say leads us toward repentance?
2. Does God's kindness mean sin doesn't matter?
3. What does God's kindness reveal about His desire for us?
4. How does this passage help us understand repentance as something we do in response to God's goodness?

Important Thought: Repentance isn't punishment we perform to convince God to love us. Rather: **God's love leads us to recognize our sin and turn back to Him.**

Remember the prodigal son. The father was waiting for him. The son had to **turn around and come home.**

12. PUTTING THE JOURNEY TOGETHER

Now review the first six studies. **What have we learned?**

Who is Jesus? → He is the Son of God and Lord.

Why did He come? → To seek and save the lost.

Why do I need Him? → Because I have sinned.

What does He ask of me? → To follow Him as Lord.

What does it mean to believe? → To trust Him in a way that produces a response.

What does it mean to repent? → To turn away from sin and turn toward God.

Now let's ask: **What question naturally comes next?**

If someone has:

- heard the gospel,
- believes in Jesus,
- recognizes his sin,
- and is ready to turn toward God...

What should that person do? That takes us directly toward the next lesson.

13. PERSONAL REFLECTION

Think About It

1. What does repentance mean to you after studying these passages?

2. Why isn't simply feeling sorry enough?

3. Why is changing direction such an important part of repentance?

4. What is the relationship between faith and repentance?

5. Why do you think God calls everyone to repent?

Then the more personal question:

6. Is there anything in your life that you know needs to be turned away from as you turn toward God?

14. CLOSING THOUGHT

We've come a long way in six studies.

We began with a question: **Who is Jesus?** We discovered that He is the Son of God.

Then we asked: **Why did He come?** He came to seek and save the lost.

We asked: **Why do I need Him?** Because we have all sinned.

We asked: **What does He ask of me?** He calls us to follow Him.

Then: **What does it mean to believe?** Genuine faith trusts Jesus enough to respond to Him.

And in this study: **What does it mean to repent?**

Repentance means recognizing that my way is wrong, changing my heart and mind about sin, and turning toward God.

The prodigal son didn't simply sit in the far country wishing things were different.

He got up and went home. That's the picture of repentance.

And now we are getting very close to the heart of the response to the gospel.

A person has heard about Jesus.

A person has come to believe in Jesus.

A person recognizes sin.

A person is ready to turn toward God.

What does that person say about Jesus?

What does it mean to openly acknowledge Him as Lord?

That will be our next study: **What Does It Mean to Confess Jesus?**

LESSON 6 AT A GLANCE

Main Truth

Repentance is a change of heart and mind about sin and God that leads us to turn away from sin and turn toward God.

Key Text

Acts 2:38

“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”

Supporting Passages

- Mark 1:14–15
- Acts 2:36–41
- Luke 15:11–24
- 2 Corinthians 7:9–10
- Acts 3:17–21
- Acts 17:22–31
- Luke 3:7–14
- Romans 2:4

The Progression So Far

Lesson 1 — Who Is Jesus?

Jesus is the Son of God, Messiah, Creator and Lord.

↓

Lesson 2 — Why Did Jesus Come?

Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

↓

Lesson 3 — Why Do I Need Jesus?

Everyone has sinned and needs a Savior.

↓

Lesson 4 — What Does Jesus Ask of Me?

Jesus calls me to surrender and follow Him as Lord.

↓

Lesson 5 — What Does It Mean to Believe?

Faith means trusting Jesus in a way that produces a response.

↓

Lesson 6 — What Does It Mean to Repent?

I turn away from sin and turn toward God.

↓

Lesson 7 — What Does It Mean to Confess Jesus?

If I believe Jesus is Lord, am I willing to acknowledge Him as Lord?

I think the **Acts 2:36–41** passage is especially valuable here because it begins bringing the various pieces together organically. Peter doesn't give the crowd an abstract definition of repentance. He preaches **Jesus**, they are **cut to the heart**, they ask **what they should do**, and Peter tells them to **repent and be baptized**. That will make the transition into Lessons 7–9 much more natural.