

Small Group Preparation:: Week Six

Remember

- It is about you experiencing the gospel first. So take time to walk through this stuff ahead of time, spending time thinking through it, answering the questions for your life, being gut level honest.
- After that, pray for the group members that you and they will be transformed by the gospel.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you through the material and listen as you go.
- It is not about getting through the material or about having the right answers. Groups work best when you facilitate discussion and people feel free to participate and learn from each other. Think through questions that will facilitate discussion.
- As we are experiencing more and more of the transforming power of the gospel, our hearts will want to share it. Being on mission will be a natural overflow of the work of the gospel.

Read through and complete all of the small group material and activities before the group meets.

Thrive Small Groups:: Week Six

Connect

1. Take time to relationally connect with and engage your group members.
2. Review and ask some of these questions:
 - What did you **learn** last week about the gospel?
 - How did you **experience** the gospel this week? How are you seeing God transform your life?
 - What opportunities did you have to **live** the gospel with or **give** the gospel to someone this week?
 - Make sure you as a leader also share.
 - *Note: Some may choose to share the ways they have been minimizing sin. Some may choose how they are living as orphans. Some may share ways they are seeing supernatural victories in their lives. Some may share about ways they are being able to share this with others.*

Pray

Take a moment and have the group pray (if they feel comfortable) and honestly bring the specific ways they need the gospel before God and asking the Holy Spirit to speak through His Word and this study to make the gospel real in everyone's hearts. Take time also to thank God for the transformation he is bringing in group members' lives.

Transition

Over the past several weeks in our journey to experience more of the gospel, God has been exposing deeper levels of our sin. We have seen the ways we minimize sin, the ways we perform to earn God's righteousness, the ways we act as orphans, and the ways we use/abuse the law to make us better. After sitting in it long enough, you may be feeling like Paul, "Oh wretched man that I am, who will save me from this body of death?" This week and next we will be looking at what to do now that the sin has been exposed. It all goes back to what Christ spoke often in the

gospels: Repent and believe. This week we will look at what it means to repent and next week we will look at transforming faith.

Scripture

We will be looking at the difference between false repentance and true repentance through the lives of Saul and David and Judas and Peter.

- Have the group together read **1 Samuel 15** and **2 Samuel 12:1-25** contrasting the ways that Saul and David responded to their sin. If time remains, have the group read and answer the same questions based on the story of Judas in **Matthew 27:1-5** and Peter in **John 21:1-19**.
- Answer these questions:
 - What was the sin?
 - How did each one respond to being confronted with that sin?
 - What were the results of the confrontation?
 - What can you learn about false repentance and true repentance from these examples?

Note: *You will notice that God searched their hearts and looked at motives. False repentance is really remorse or being sorry that you sinned. Saul was sorry for getting caught for his sin and looking bad in the eyes of the people because of his sin. He was not broken over it like David. Judas was sorry for his sin, but he looked to himself to pay for it. He never returned to Christ like Peter did. The word repent literally means “to turn.” True repentance is the process of turning back to God and exposing your sin, especially your sin against Him, and looking to Him to deliver you from it. It is not about cleaning yourself up or making promises to do better.*

Read the Article Together

- Discussion Questions:
 - What stood out to you the most in this article?
 - How would you explain the difference between true and false repentance in your own words?
 - What do you think are some of the marks of true repentance?

Exercise

- Look at the second page of the article at the bulleted list of excuses we use in false repentance.
- Beginning with the leaders, have group members share which excuses they most identify with.
- Beginning with the group leaders, have group members also share a recent example when they used the excuse instead of truly being broken and repentant over sin.
- Have group members share what true repentance would look like in those situations.
- Beginning with group leaders, have group members share if they have ever experienced a time of true repentance in their own life or have seen it modeled in someone else’s life.

Wrap-up

- Does anyone have any additional questions or comments about what we learned today?
- How has what you learned impacted you?
- Have a group member close in prayer.

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EXERCISE: “COUNTERFEIT REPENTANCE” (20 minutes)

Setup: *“I want to go around the room and have each of us share which of these excuses we most identify with. I also want you to share a recent example when you used this excuse instead of truly being broken and repentant over your sin. So take a moment to look at the list and to think of a recent example. Then we’ll talk about it. I’ll go first.”*

Sharing Questions:

- *“Which of these “excuses” is your personal favorite?”*
- *“What recent example can you think of?”*
- *“What would true repentance look like in that situation?”* (I would pose this question to the rest of the group. That is, after someone shares their example, I would say, “Okay, let me ask the rest of you: ‘What would true repentance look like in that situation?’”)
- Repeat this series of questions as much as you can in the time allotted.

WRAP-UP

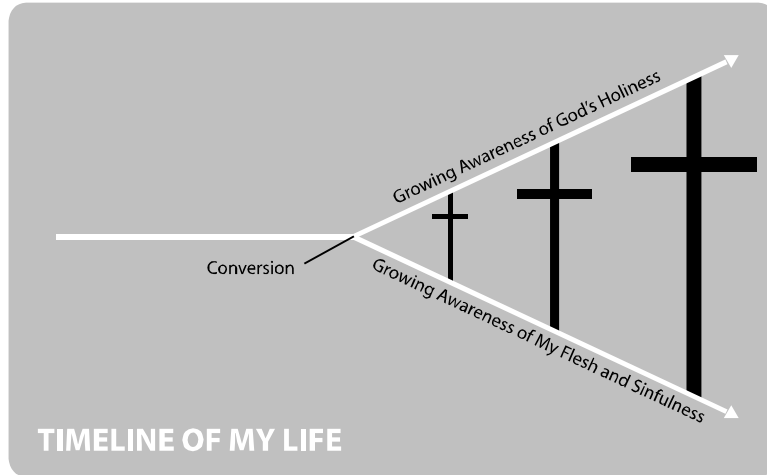
Questions, Comments, Prayer

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True Repentance vs. False Repentance

WEEK FIVE ARTICLE

We have been thinking together about how to consistently live all of life under the influence of the gospel. For the past few weeks, the “cross chart” diagram has served as a visual model to help us understand how the gospel works.



As we have seen, the consistent pattern of the Christian life is repentance and faith. We never stop needing to repent and believe. Jesus’ first words in the Gospel of Mark are: “Repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Martin Luther observed: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent,’ he willed the *entire life* of believers to be one of repentance.” In repentance, we confess our tendency to shrink the cross through performance and dishonesty. We pull our affections away from false Saviors and fraudulent sources of righteousness and turn again to Jesus as our only hope.

On the surface, repentance seems simple and straightforward. But it’s not. Because our hearts are a “factory of idols” (John Calvin), even our repentance can become a vehicle for sin and selfishness. We are skilled practitioners of counterfeit repentance. One of our greatest needs in gospel-centered living is to see the difference between false repentance and true repentance.

As a case study, consider the following passage from the book of Hosea:

Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth. (Hosea 6:1-3, NIV)

At first glance, it seems as though God’s people are truly repentant. They talk about returning to the Lord. They acknowledge God and look to him for healing so they can live in his presence. It sounds as though they are honestly seeking God! But the Bible is clear that this is an example of false repentance. Here is God’s answer to them in verse 4:

What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears.

God is not pleased with their attempt at repentance. He compares their love to the morning mist that soon disappears. A few verses later, God says, “They do not cry out to me from their hearts” (Hosea 7:14).

Quite simply, their repentance is not really repentance – it’s pain relief. They want their pain and suffering removed, and they want it done quickly (“After two days”... “on the third day”). They are not “crying out

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from their hearts.” They are not deeply broken over their sin. They want God to patch things up quickly so they can get on with life.

Sadly, this isn't very different from how most of us repent. For instance, when I say something hurtful to my wife, I often repent by saying, “I'm sorry that I hurt you. I shouldn't have said that. Will you forgive me?” I want her to forgive me *now*, so that we can get things patched up and get our relationship “back to normal.” She, on the other hand, is feeling the impact of the deeper sin that I have not repented of – the resentment, anger, and hatred in my heart which lie behind those hurtful words. Unless I acknowledge those sins as well, my “repentance” is really just a form of pain relief.

Below are some excuses we often use in false repentance – and the inner thoughts they reveal. Which ones can you identify with?

- I was just being honest. (Can't you handle the truth?)
- I'm just saying what I feel. (There's nothing sinful about my feelings.)
- I was only kidding. (Didn't you get the joke?)
- I misunderstood you. (You're not as crazy as I thought you were!)
- You misunderstood me. (I'm not as bad as you think.)
- That's just who I am. (I'm a sinner, so that excuses my behavior.)
- I made a mistake. (Don't we all?)
- I didn't mean to do it. (I didn't mean to get caught.)
- I'm having a bad day. (I deserve better.)

What drives us toward false repentance? And how do we move toward true repentance? To answer these questions, we need to pause and reflect on how we respond to sin.

Our usual response to sin is one of *remorse* and *resolution*. Remorse: “I can't believe I did that!” Resolution: “I promise to do better next time.” Behind this way of living are two great misunderstandings about our hearts. First, we think too highly of ourselves. We do not truly believe the depth of our sin and brokenness (the bottom line of the cross chart). This leads us to react in surprise when sin manifests itself: “I can't believe I just did that!” (In other words: “That's not what I'm really like!”) Second, we think we have the power to change ourselves. We think that if we make resolutions or try harder next time, we'll be able to fix the problem.

These same two misunderstandings taint our attitudes toward other people. Because we think too highly of ourselves, we respond to others' sin with harshness and disapproval. We are extremely lenient toward our own sin, but we resent their sin! And because we think we can change ourselves, we are frustrated that people around us aren't changing *themselves* faster. We become judgmental, impatient, and critical.

The gospel frees us from these sinful patterns. Instead of falling into remorse and resolution, the gospel moves us to *realize* and *repent*. Realize: “I *did* do that.” (“That IS what I'm really like!”) Repent: “Lord, forgive me! You are my only hope.” As we learn to live in light of the gospel, this kind of true repentance should become more and more normal for us. We will stop being surprised by our sin, so we will be able to more honestly admit it. And we will stop believing we can fix ourselves, so we will more quickly turn to Jesus for forgiveness and transformation.

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