

The Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage To Salvation

Lesson 11. Repentance Is The Essential First Step Toward Your Salvation (De-Hellenizing Mental Muck)

Please prayerfully take your time going through each section of this lesson and consider both the information and the questions. Your heartfelt responsiveness and determination matter to our Lord, so don't try to complete an entire lesson at once. Also, you'll reap greater benefit if you go through each lesson with others close to you.

Section 1

Why We Need The Gospel Of The Covenant

*"When the foundations are being destroyed,
what can the righteous do?" (Psalms 11:3).*

Today as those who are living and walking in the righteousness of Jesus witness the spiritual and moral collapse of this nation, it breaks their hearts. But it's not over our society at large that we need to be dismayed. Rather, it's *within Christendom* that we need to look for the cause of our country's downfall.

In 2005 Christian pollster George Barna published his insightful book, *Revolution*. His organization had researched the spiritual lives of 77 million adults who are churched and self-identified as born-again Christians. The results of his research uncovered widespread failure among those who *claim to belong to Jesus* to effectively serve our Lord in proclaiming His work of redeeming mankind.

During the almost-10 years since *Revolution* was published, the spiritual health of believers has deteriorated to an even more alarming extent. Here are several excerpts from Barna's findings, with emphasis added:

Regarding Worship...

- The biweekly attendance at worship services is, by believers' own admission, generally the only time they worship God.
- Only 1 out of every 4 church believers says that when they worship God, they expect Him to be the primary beneficiary of their worship. (Most people say they expect to get the most from the experience.)

Regarding Faith-based Conversations...

- The typical church believer will die without leading a single person to a life-saving knowledge of and relationship with Jesus Christ.
- At any given time a majority of believers do not have a specific person in mind for whom they are praying in the hope that the person will be saved.

Regarding Intentional Spiritual Growth...

- Only 9% of all born-again adults have a biblical worldview... Those beliefs include a certainty that the Bible is accurate in its teachings; Jesus lived a sinless life on earth; Satan is real, not symbolic; all believers are responsible for sharing their faith in Christ with others; the only means to salvation is through God's grace; and God is the all-knowing and all-powerful Creator of the universe who still rules it today. The other 91% of born-again adults possess a patchwork of theological views and rarely rely upon those perspectives to inform their daily decisions.
- When asked what constitutes success in life, few believers defined success in spiritual terms. Most describe outcomes related to professional achievement, family solidarity, physical accomplishments, or resource acquisition.
- When given the opportunity to state how they want to be known by others, fewer than 1 out of 10 believers mentioned descriptions that reflect their relationship with God.

Regarding servanthood...

- In a typical week, only 1 out of every 4 believers will allocate some time to serving other people. Most of that time is dedicated to volunteering in church programs that serve congregants; little effort is invested in serving needy people outside the congregation.

Regarding Spiritual Friendships...

- Fewer than 1 out of every 6 churched believers has a relationship with another believer through which spiritual accountability is provided.

- The most significant influence on the choices of church believers is neither the teachings from the pulpit nor advice gleaned from fellow congregants; it is messages absorbed from the media, the law, and family members.

Regarding Family Faith...

- A large majority of church members rely upon their church, rather than their family, to train their children to become spiritually mature.
- In an average month, fewer than 1 out of every 10 church families worships together outside of the church service; just a few pray together, other than at meal times; and the same minimal numbers study the Bible together at home.
- The likelihood of a married couple who are born again churchgoers getting divorced is the same as couples who were not disciples of Jesus.
- Apart from church-based programs, the typical Christian family spends less than 3 hours per month in endeavors designed to jointly develop or apply their faith.
- Most Christian parents do not believe they are doing a good job at facilitating the spiritual development of their children.

Do any of the above data or behaviors describe you? These are only a sampling of what Barna's research discovered. We contend that at the core of these deplorable statistics is an *all-essential missing element*: the authentic Gospel of love-grounded obedient trust in Jesus as *LORD of their lives* that produces Spirit-empowered, Kingdom-minded servants of our Lord! These lessons aren't for unbelievers; they are for those of you who need *personal renewal and recommitment* to Jesus as LORD.

“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”
(1Thessalonians 5:9).

Contemporary Christianity is made up of millions of people whose views of how to attain salvation are entirely differ-

ent and frequently oppose one another. However, the indisputable factor is this. We'll all eventually stand before the Judgment Throne (see Revelation 20:11, 12). Will our Lord Jesus accept these many diverse and contrary and often *unbiblical* approaches which humanity has formulated to gain entry to heaven? Or, according to His unchanging Word, is there only *one acceptable way* to be welcomed by Him Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life? (See John 14:6.)

Here's an opening question to answer for yourself and to discuss with others:

- There are currently over 38,000 denominations and sects throughout Christendom, all believing they represent the true way to get to heaven. What is your personal stance about our Lord's verdict at the Judgment if someone *embraced a lie* about how to receive a heavenly welcome and eternal life?

Maybe you were born into a “Christian” family and think you're a Christian because of that. Perhaps your parents made sure you underwent certain religious rituals in your infancy and/or childhood to satisfy themselves that you were acceptable to God. Or, you may have embraced any one of the many *false gospels* of today. Most avoid offending a potential convert by *eliminating repentance altogether* as a condition to being born again. Consider your own situation:

- Did anyone hold you accountable to repent of your sins as necessary to being born again?

Please weigh this distressing possibility. Whether you were born into a Christian home or even had a “conversion experience” and have spent a while in westernized, man-centered Christendom, you may be *inoculated against* the truth of our Father's perspective and parameters of being **born again** and of

salvation. Ask the Holy Spirit to make clear to you if this describes your own spiritual situation.

- What event in your life occurred that proves our Father *knows you* as His own child?

Being Born Again Opens The Way Toward Your Salvation

“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again”

(John 3:3).

In biblical terms, being **born again** is called *regeneration*. Think of this like stepping through a doorway of *becoming a new creation* (2Corinthians 5:17) so you are adopted as the Father’s child. Then by grace you can receive and experience *your ultimate salvation* at the end of your life’s journey.

Underlying the Newer Testament and undergirded by the Older Testament is a framework of *five heartfelt essentials* you need in order to be born again, that is, experience a *spiritual rebirth*. In our Hebraic Article, *The Gospel of the Covenant Is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*, we discussed the five stipulations of becoming reconciled with our Father through the shed blood of His Son Jesus:

1. Being born again both begins and continues with your **repentance**.
2. Being born again both begins and continues with your **love**.
3. Being born again both begins and continues with your **obedient trust**.
4. Being born again both begins and continues with your forceful **conviction** and **determination**.
5. Being born again both begins and continues with you **forgiving others**.

Beginning with this lesson and in several to follow, we want to approach each of these stipulations more thoroughly in

a way that will *stir your heart and soul* to live passionately as your Father’s child. Although it appears that each of these stipulations stands alone, in fact they are really intermingled as a *unified heart attitude borne on His grace and governing your life and your relationships*. The heartfelt fusion of all five are foundational to both establishing and maintaining a relationship with your heavenly Father as His loving and obedient child. (See John 14:21-24.)

Our focus in this lesson is to help you understand the *wholehearted conviction* the Bible calls for so you might embrace our Father’s requirement to live repentantly as Christ’s own (see 1John 3:6-10.)

To *repent* means literally that you change your mind and heart and go in another direction.

Section 2

The Reason You Need To Repent: God’s Holiness and Your Sinfulness

The starting point to your need for repentance is recognizing that the One True God is holy. He is the very definition of absolute purity, perfection, and righteousness in Who He is and in all He does, and is personified to humanity in Jesus. And He calls for holiness among those He has chosen and set apart from the *unholiness* of the world’s ways at large as well as our sin nature within.

“I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy” (Leviticus 11:45).

“Worship the LORD in the splendor of His holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth” (Psalms 96:9).

Holiness is God’s inherent character quality. But it’s not yours. And this is the core reason *why* you need to repent. You

were born with a **desire to sin**, thanks to the willful decision by humankind's first parents, Adam and Eve, to rebel against the righteous command of the God Who loved and provided for them:

*“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and in this way **death came to all men, because all sinned...** just as **the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men...** For just as through the **disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners**”* (Romans 5:12,18,19).

Within each person is a malignant DNA of the soul, so to speak, a sin nature that **desires to rebel against God**. This tendency to do life our own way rather than God's is an age-old propensity:

- *“The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that **every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time**”* (Genesis 6:5).
- *“Surely I was **sinful at birth**, sinful from the time my mother conceived me”* (Psalm 51:5).
- *“I know that **nothing good lives in me**, that is, in **my sinful nature**. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out”* (Romans 7:18).

Because of God's perfect holiness, He cannot abide the presence of sin, the violation of His Person and His standards. Therefore God's penalty for the sin which the people He has created practice so readily is eternity in hell (Revelation 20:14; 21:8). It may be hard for you to accept this, but it's true. You were born destined for a Christ-less eternity separated from God because of both the sin nature you inherited from Adam and Eve and your own choices to continually violate God — unless you respond in trust to His offer of grace and make a determined choice to receive the substitution of Jesus on your

behalf (see Mark 16:16).

When you took your first breath:

- **You were born already inclined to sin.**
- **You were born already heading for hell.**

Since you don't remember what your inner nature was really like when you were a cute and cuddly baby, it's all the more difficult to appreciate that prenatally the **desire to sin** was already implanted in you. And with every decision you make, it's not that you *have* to sin, but rather that you are *motivated* to sin.

God gave you **free will**—the freedom to make choices. But your desire to *want* to sin, which you inherited from Adam and Eve, has subverted your free will into a **power of self-will**. The free will which God gave as good became evil. [*In the Bible the power of self-will is frequently called “stubbornness” or “stubbornness of heart.” It refers to the sinful nature wanting to resist God's will and His commands.*]

This sinful tendency to exercise the **power of self-will** has been observed in babies as early as two months old. Even by two years of age, if you put one toy between two toddlers, they'll demonstrate their innate **power of self-will** as they fight over who gets the toy. They're acting that way because of their inherited sin nature, a force in the soul which prompts each of us to do whatever's necessary to satisfy our desires.

Your sinful **power of self-will** is your inner desire to want to be in charge of your own life and have it your own way, even if your thoughts, actions, or attitudes violate God's will and commands (see Paul's struggle in Romans 7:12-25).

- How do you personally *feel* about being born with a desire to sin?
- Do you recognize this tendency in yourself?
- How do you *feel* about the fact that you were

born destined for eternity in hell apart from the saving grace of our Lord?

- In your inner being, do you consider yourself basically a “good person,” certainly no worse than people around you?

Maybe when you look inside yourself, you just can’t accept that you’re *sinful and totally undeserving* of God’s kindness. Or perhaps you really do think you’re a “good person.” Either way, you’re eliminating any heartfelt need you have for Jesus *as your Savior*. You don’t have a grasp on what He came to *save you from*, so His death on your behalf is just a spiritual concept to you rather than grateful appreciation in which His death becomes *your death*, and His life becomes *your life* (see Galatians 2:20).

Do you have even the slightest doubt that you were born with a sin nature and therefore subject to eternal separation from a holy and righteous God? If so, then the Bible’s command to *confess* your wrong attitudes and actions (that is, agree with God that you’ve violated His ways), and *repent* of these (turn away from them and turn toward God’s ways) will have little significance for you. Yet whether you face hell for eternity *or* heaven with our Lord depends first on the pivotal step of repentance.

[For more about the sin nature you were born with, see: 1. Jesus In Your Home Video, Segment 19. *Children Born With A Sin Nature, Destined For Eternity* <<http://www.restorationministries.org/JIYHVideo/3.19.TheHome.mov>>.

2. Or, for a written version, see Discussing How To Restore The Early Church, Lesson 42. *Children Born With A Sin Nature, Destined For Eternity* <<http://www.restorationministries.org/pdf/RTEClasess/42.Lesson42.pdf>>.

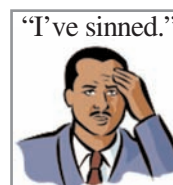
3. See also Certain Of What We Do Not See Video, Segment 8. *The Influence Of Our Sin Nature* <<http://www.restorationministries.org/FIJIVideo/8.SinNature.mov>>].

Section 3

1. Being born again both begins and continues with your repentance.

Our discussion below of confession and repentance is excerpted and updated from the first lesson of our 29-part series, *Repentance Leads to Christ-like Character*:

Repentance entails emotions of awareness that are far different than any other experience in your life. The first step in repentance is recognizing that you disregarded God and committed a sin. This is called “confession.” The Greek word for confess, *homologeō*, means that you’ve become aware that a particular thought, action, or attitude has violated one or more of God’s righteous commands—you’ve sinned *against Him* (see 1John 1:8,9).



Identifying the sin you committed is the first step toward repentance. The Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, means not only that you don’t want to do that sin again, but that you’re also pained over what you did. That grief is the “godly sorrow [that] brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret” (2Corinthians 7:10; see also Acts 2:37-39).

Your pain drives you to seek the forgiveness of your loving and holy Father through trusting that Jesus has made a way for you to do that. Because of His love for you, you desperately want Him to replace your wrongful way with His righteous response through the change only *He* can make in you. This is our Father’s means of transforming you by His Spirit to become more like His Son, Jesus!

Repentance has a wonderful purpose in our Father’s plan for you! Repentance opens the way for His Spirit to develop the character of His Son, Jesus, when you have experienced the new birth and the Spirit dwells in you. In other words, through repentance and

your new birth He intends to *replace* your sinful thought/action/attitude with the righteous character qualities found in His commands and exemplified in Jesus.

Living with a heartfelt desire to repent whenever you realize you've sinned quickens within you a *revulsion* to want to go on sinning. A repentant attitude in your life gives you a resolve to resist your power of SELF-will, your sin nature's desire to rule you. So instead of giving in to a particular sin, you RESIST — *turning*

away from that sin and *turning to Jesus*, asking Him to help you become more like Him through His Spirit at work in you.

That sorrow you experience when you violate your loving and holy Father's ways produces an impassioned appreciation for the sacrifice Jesus endured on the cross as He took the punishment your sins deserved (1John 2:2). He did for you what you couldn't do for yourself: He sacrificed Himself to pay the debt for your sins that you could never pay.

To confess and repent is an interconnected process leading from sin's control to Jesus.

Through repentance you're not trying to clean yourself up from your sin or brokenness.

You come to Jesus with your sinful brokenness to leave it behind as you become changed by Him.

1. You realize that you've sinned against God.



2. Your heart grieves and you confess your sin so that you can be forgiven by Him.



3. Your grief causes you to repent, crying out to our Lord Jesus, eager that His Spirit replace your sinful attitude or action with His character quality.



Repentance is a matter of the heart!

(from the book, *David Wilkerson*, by Gary Wilkerson, 2014)

"That afternoon, for some reason, David broke down in tears as he spoke. He seemed to recognize some older, chronic drug users in the crowd. "How many more times will you have a chance to come to Jesus?" he asked. "What more can I say to you about Christ and His love? You've heard it all before. You still have time today. Don't say 'tomorrow'; come to Him now!" As he shared the gospel, **conviction of sin through the Holy Spirit** could be palpably felt. David asked those wanting to receive Christ to step forward to the small platform. Dozens moved quietly as the band shell area became an outdoor sanctuary for God.

As David asked them to repeat the sinner's prayer, suddenly he thrust the microphone in the face of a **Puerto Rican man who was crying like a baby**. "Repeat after me," David instructed him, "but **say it from your heart!**" What followed was probably the strangest sinner's prayer in the annals of Christianity. David Wilkerson led him along with the others: "God, forgive me of my sin." "I need You, Jesus." "I'm sick of my life." "I put my trust in Jesus." Those were the phrases my friend Dave Wilkerson spoke, **but when the desperate man repeated them, amplified throughout the park, he added all kinds of four-letter adjectives to each sentence. With tears of contrition, he seemed so desperate for God to know he was serious, he fell back on the strongest words and language he knew. Suddenly, the park was filled with the sounds of cursing mixed together with a cry for God's deliverance and salvation! And David never pulled the microphone away from him. It sounded wrong, yet somehow it was absolutely right because it was the only language the man knew...** Dave Wilkerson, with tears rolling down his face, held that microphone in front of a man **thrusting his way into the kingdom of God.**" (pp. 12-13, emphasis added)

"Everybody thinks of revival as a nice time with people getting saved, but there was an element to revival that was revealed in David's ministry. That is a **gut-level, wrenching discovery that you are really screwed. It's when you discover how deeply wrong you are**, and it lasts for hours. I saw kids sobbing their guts out, and these were the toughest kids. **Then the incredible joy comes**, and it's from nowhere in your life — not your experience, not your circumstances, but **from God. It's something only He can give you.** You can't pretend to have it. If you haven't got it, you don't — it's as simple as that." (p. 103, emphasis added)

So your grieved heart compels you to not want to sin against Him again, and to repent immediately when you do because Jesus will speak to the Father in your defense. (See 1John 2:1.)

- Do you live with a repentant attitude, quick to confess a sin when the Holy Spirit *convicts* you, that is, lets you know you've violated God in some way?
- Are your sins more evident through actions others can observe, or in attitudes and motivations that others may not be aware of?
- When you're convicted about a sin, do you feel sorrowful that you hurt your relationship with God? Or, do you only experience regret that you got caught in your wrong?
- Does thinking of Jesus agonizing on the cross to pay the penalty your sins deserve inspire any emotions in you? Which ones?

If you *don't* experience any emotional hurt when you sin against God, you're likely to go on giving way to temptation and sin. But mull over this warning:

*"If we **deliberately keep on sinning** after we have received the knowledge of the truth, **no sacrifice for sins is left**, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God"* (Hebrews 10:26,27; see also 1John 3:6,9).

Authentic Repentance Requires Humility in Your Heart
"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up"

(James 4:10; see also James 4:6; 1Peter 5:6)

Besides godly sorrow, another indicator that your heart is repentant is the humility that's entwined with repentance. You begin to perceive your sin nature and your power of SELF-will in a whole new light, despising them and not wanting to give in to their control. When you reflect

on the prophet's description of our Lord Jesus, our God Who became human like we are but without our sinful baggage, you have to marvel over that kind of humility. Not only did He leave heaven's glory to live obscurely among sinful man (see Philippians 2:6-8), but

*"He was **despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not"*** (Isaiah 53:3).

Our Lord suffered in humility, and it's humility that must be the bedrock of your heart. A humble heart enables you to love your Lord with *sincere and profound thankfulness* for what He did on your behalf. And the humility which finds its roots in gratefulness enables you to find your soul's rest as His yoke of ownership lies securely upon you:

*"Take My yoke upon you and **learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls"*** (Matthew 11:29).

It's also through a humility that's fused together with repentance that you experience the *incredible love* which God the Father has for you—a love that impelled His beloved sinless Son, Jesus, to take your place for the death your sinful attitudes, actions, and very nature deserve (see John 3:16-18). That's a debt *you could never pay* to a Father Whose justice and holiness demands sinlessness—and the penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23).

Our Father's holiness demands your repentance. His love accepted Jesus as payment for your sins. Your response is the humility of living repentantly.

- An old adage warns, "When you think you're humble, you're not." The best way to test humility in yourself is this: Do you consider others more important than yourself? (See Philippians 2:1-5). Ask people close to you for their input about your response.

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires”
(James 1:19,20; see also Ephesians 4:26,27).

Another benefit is derived from the humility of living repentantly:

When humility is fused with a repentant life, you diminish the **power of SELF-will** which is often displayed in anger and frustration.

When humility is lodged in a repentant life, you’re able to assess events in your life from your heavenly Father’s perspective. You can be assured that He is Sovereign over everything that happens to you. Often He allows scathing circumstances in your life to test how much you are controlled by your power of SELF-will. And thwarted SELF-will can result in some pretty ugly responses in you IF you don’t see your situation from heaven’s vantage point.

“If you find yourself angry or frustrated, you are trying to exercise a perceived right that your Father doesn’t want you to have.”



Remember, God indeed gave humanity free will. But the power of SELF-will is your corrupt sin nature wanting to control your actions, motives, and attitudes. The more SELF-will is in control, the more frustration and anger you’ll have!

- Are you easily frustrated when things don’t go as you expected?
- Do those who know you well see you as too easily angered?
- Second Corinthians 10:5 tells us to “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” When you begin to get frustrated or angry, do you humbly pray for our Lord

Jesus to give you His attitude on the matter? If you don’t, can you see how the power of SELF-will doesn’t want you to do this?

Section 4

“For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13,14).

Your repentance and turning to your Father through trust in Christ not only brings you forgiveness and new life. It *freed you from Satan’s ownership*. We all were held captive under the evil one’s dominion of darkness (see Romans 6:16). Through the avenue of your sin nature, his demons endeavored through temptation and harassment to keep you out of heaven. Never lose sight of this reality:

Every human belongs either to Satan, the author of sin, or to God through union in His Son, Jesus. There’s no middle ground!

If you repent with a sincere heart, Acts 26:18 depicts what takes place in you: ***“...to open your eyes and turn you from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that you may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by trust in [Jesus].”***

Our Lord Jesus came to *free you* from the devil’s dominance and from a sinful life so that you’re no longer held captive by sin’s power:



“He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God” (1John 3:8,9).

*“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have **crucified the sinful nature** with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24).*

And while you will be tempted and sin at times, out of love for our Lord you won't go on willfully pursuing sin. When you've recognized that you have sinned, acknowledge it through confession and repent, asking our Lord to help you become more like Him by the gracious work of His indwelling Spirit.

“I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and remembers your sins no more”
(Isaiah 43:25).

When you've recognized that you've sinned and you confess it to our Father repenting with a sorrowful heart for what you did, it's important that you internalize His wonderful grace: that your heavenly Father not only forgave you, He forgets your sin. When you repent you have a clean slate with Him. This is why it's so crucial for you to live repentantly, not holding on to any unconfessed sin. Another added blessing comes with your confession:



“If [you] confess [your] sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive [your] sins and purify [you] from all unrighteousness”
(1John 1:9).

A purifying work in your soul, that is, your mind, will, and emotions, takes place. It's as if our Lord is helping you to not want to sin again!

- Did you know that when you confess and repent, your Father forgives and forgets?
- If you weren't aware of this aspect of His grace, how does it make you feel about your Father's compassion?

- Does assurance that He forgives and forgets increase your determination to live repentantly?

You can avert sinning against God by proactively learning and applying His commands to your life. This is one of the most important reasons to be in your Bible daily! King David understood this important truth: “I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You” (Psalms 119:11).

Our Lord's commands



His Spirit will guide your application



“I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in My Name, there am I with them”
(Matthew 18:18-20).

“Don't be deceived...” (James 1:16).

Two major pitfalls rob followers of Christ from remaining repentant. The first is when you begin to feel sorry for yourself. Your Sovereign Father allows certain circumstances and trials to happen to you for your good—to strengthen you and to test that your trust is genuine (see 1Peter 1:6,7). It's when you get down on yourself that you begin find it hard to live repentantly. You may even find yourself compensating for that self-pity by

indulging your sinful nature.

God's Word commands you to weigh every thought that comes to mind and evaluate it according to how Jesus would think (see 2Corinthians 10:5). If a thought doesn't align with His ways, disregard it. Don't allow the enemy to fan negative emotions in you through a lie or deception! The process of taking your thoughts captive prevents you from being discouraged about yourself or events going on around you. And diligently making your thoughts obedient to the ways of our Lord Jesus helps your character become more like His.

- Do you frequently experience bouts of feeling sorry for yourself?
- How do you respond when these feelings come?
- Are you aware that these are times our Lord wants to you trap your thoughts and align them with His way of thinking?

The second pitfall is when you compare your actions or attitudes to others and think, "I'm not as bad as..." The only standard by which you must measure yourself is by the *character of our Lord Jesus* and the *commands of God* found in the Bible. Living repentantly prompts you to make your Father's commands your *way of life*. Don't sit in judgment of others or compare yourself with them!

- Do you find that you feel better about yourself when you observe or judge others you think are more sinful?
- Do you have an arrogant attitude toward those whose sins you think are worse than yours?

"Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you trust in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls"

(1Peter 1:8,9).

Just because you belong to our Lord Jesus doesn't mean every day will be paradise on earth for you. The joy to which Peter is referring isn't found in the circumstances of your life but rather in knowing that as you live repentantly in obedient and loving trust in Jesus, you're heading toward your salvation. Life with our Lord Jesus is not always "onward and upward," especially when the world system, your own sin nature, and the devil are conspiring to bring you down. As we mentioned, our Father uses trials and adversity to help you become more like Jesus and to test your trust in Him.

During difficult times people sometimes feel like God has rejected them, and they lose the joy and delight of being His child. If for whatever reason you lose your gratefulness for what our Lord Jesus has done for you, pray as the psalmist did for Him to restore it to you:

"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me"
(Psalms 51:12).

Remember this truth. The joy of your salvation flourishes within a grateful heart. If you've lost your joy, it's because you've lost your gratefulness. Only our Lord Jesus can restore it. Repent of your ungratefulness, and ask your Lord to restore your joy.

How do you know that you have the joy of your salvation? Because you readily speak about your Lord to others with

joyful exuberance. People can see by the Spirit's fruit of love, joy and peace in you that you belong to Jesus. Even when you've lost your joy for some reason, when you repent and call out to Him in trust, our Lord restores it to your heart. Through a grateful yieldedness to the Spirit in you, you can offer our Lord jubilant praise and worship (Hebrews 13:15).

If you live repentantly, you will experience *increasing* gratefulness—not only for what Jesus did to pay the penalty for your sin, but for the joy set before you that one day you'll experience the salvation of living eternally with Him.

- Have you experienced periods in your life in which you've lost the joy of your salvation? If you have, what did you do?
- Would those who know you well describe you as someone who radiates joy when you speak about your Lord? If you don't, why not?

A thought to never forget:

The cherished fruit of living repentantly is that you become more like our Lord Jesus and ever increasingly experience His love for you. Each time you confess a sin to our Father and repent by turning away from it and turning toward His forgiveness and righteous ways, the Spirit of your Lord helps you develop His character qualities and live in such a way that others are drawn to Jesus through your love and testimony and actions.

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit” (2Corinthians 3:17,18; see also 1Thessalonians 5:23; 2Thessalonians 2:13; 1Peter 1:2).

Here's the crux of a born again life:

Repentance is the first step in a life-long pilgrimage toward your salvation. Beginning with repentance and as you continue to live repentantly, you will increasingly mature in love, trust, determination, and willingness to forgive. When you're born again you become a new creation and enter into a life of ongoing *transformation* (also called sanctification). A key way to understand yourself as a born again person is that you've been set apart as a vessel who contains the Spirit of our Lord. Second Corinthians 4:7 offers an accurate description of you:

*“But [you] have this treasure in jars of clay to show that **this all-surpassing power is from God and not from [you].**”*

The lifelong transformation process is our Father's plan to conform you to be like His Son, Jesus:

*“And [you], who with an unveiled face reflect the Lord's glory, **are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory**, which comes from the Lord, Who is the Spirit”* (2Corinthians 3:18).

As a clay pot you're being molded by your heavenly Father, the Potter, to be like Jesus:

*“Yet, O LORD, You are our Father. We are the clay, you are the Potter; **we are all the work of Your hand**”* (Isaiah 64:8). *“Does not the **potter have the right** to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?”* (Romans 9:21).

By His grace as you •obey His commands out of responsive love, •repent when you break them, and •make right choices in the circumstances and trials in your life, your Father will mold you into the character of Jesus on your pilgrimage to your salvation. We often say, “You can do this the easy way or the hard way, but He will accomplish what He intends.” *“Being confident of this, that He who **began a good work** in you [the day you began to repent] will **carry it on to completion** until the day of Christ Jesus [the day of your salvation]”* (Philippians 1:6).