Repentance: A Genuine Pursuit of God

A LENT DEVOTIONAL BY

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Luke 15:18-19 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”

“God has promised forgiveness to your repentance, but He has not promised tomorrow to your procrastination.”—Augustine

J.I. Packer said, “Repentance is more than just sorrow for the past; repentance is a change of mind and heart, a new life of denying self and serving the Savior as King in self's place.” If repentance is truly a change of mind and heart with a denial of self, why do we tend to settle for only sorrow? Is it because we think just acknowledging our sin is enough or that time will bring us restoration and reconciliation with God despite not changing our ways? According to Martin Luther, “to do so no more is the truest of repentance.” This means a change of our ways is required for a genuine pursuit of God. God desires that we quickly repent and pursue Him purposefully for a full and purpose driven life. Oftentimes we think we can pursue God while pursuing our own selfish desires, but that just leaves us with a divided heart. It is far too easy to forget because the world teaches us all you need to do is live your best life and that time heals every wound, which means pursue whatever makes you happy despite the consequences because time will take care of it all. However, God desires that we live a purpose driven life that denies selfish desires and genuinely pursues Him in humility. Repentance does include sorrow, acknowledging our wrong and selfish desires, but it also requires a humble change of direction from the way we are living to a genuine pursuit of God. So, in this season of Lent, let’s be reminded that just having sorrow is not enough, we need to purposefully change our minds and hearts to genuinely pursue God in humility.

Luke’s Gospel clearly shows that the son repented by humbly changing his way of living to genuinely pursue his father with purpose. He had been wandering through life with no intent or purpose except whatever satisfied his desires. The son had hit rock bottom and was lost. In his sorrow he realized his sin, which was against his earthly father, but also realized this meant that he had sinned against God, his heavenly Father. However, he did not just remain in sorrow, but in genuine humility rose and went with purpose to pursue his father for restoration and reconciliation. Tony Evans said, “When you repent and operate on God's standards, now you have restoration and reconciliation.” This means true restoration and reconciliation is only possible when we are humble and genuinely pursue God. Feeling sorrow and acknowledging our sin is good because we see our sin like God sees our sin and it causes us to come to our senses from pursuing selfish desires. Yet, we must also change! Just as the son acknowledged his sin was also against his heavenly Father and changed his way of living, we must acknowledge and commit to change as well. J.C. Ryle said, “True repentance is not a light matter. It is a thorough change of heart about sin, a change showing itself in godly sorrow and humiliation--in heartfelt confession before the throne of grace--in a complete breaking off from sinful habits, and an abiding hatred of all sin. Such repentance is the inseparable companion of saving faith in Christ.” The son was lost pursuing his own selfish desires, but now he is found because He is genuinely pursuing his heavenly father with purpose, resulting in a purpose driven life. The time apart did not heal their relationship, but the changing of his ways and his genuine pursuit with purpose allows for true restoration and reconciliation. God made true restoration and reconciliation possible for us through the death, burial, and resurrection of His son, Jesus Christ. He did this for believers and nonbelievers alike, so that all have a chance to purposefully change their ways to genuinely pursue God for a purpose driven life. However, their sin has to be acknowledged in humility and genuinely pursue Him with purpose.
As I truthfully answer that question, I am realizing I don’t always repent because it’s easier to only acknowledge and feel sorrow for my sin than it is to repent and change my way of living. Also, at times I find myself succumbing to the lie that time will resolve my sins. C.S. Lewis said, “We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sin. But mere time does nothing either to the fact or to the guilt of sin.” My selfishness and prideful desires get the best of me and I struggle to deny and humble myself to genuinely pursue God with purpose. Even though I feel sorrow for my sins, oftentimes I fail to truly understand how much my sin actually affects my relationship with God, which makes it hard to change my direction and my ways. However, I myself and all of us need to be reminded that God has given us His Spirit, Who has the power to help us properly understand and change our ways, so that we can genuinely pursue God with purpose in humility to give us true restoration and reconciliation with Him. Let us be challenged and encouraged with the words of John Calvin, who said, “Repentance is the true turning of our life to God, a turning that arises from a pure and earnest fear of Him; and it consists in the mortification of the flesh and the renewing of the Spirit.”