



## LESSON 1 // BEGINNING WITH REPENTANCE

Preparation is an important part of doing well in any area of life. Failure to prepare results in poor performance and missed opportunities. It's sad to think of all the great things that pass us by because we're not properly prepared.

As we look ahead past the cold winter to the coming dawn of spring, we anticipate fresh growth and life all around us. Just as these seasons change in the physical realm, God also has seasons for each of us in our walk with Him. He consistently leads us to new levels of maturity and change. The question is: Are we prepared for a new season in our walk with God?

In Luke 3:1-15, John the Baptist was getting the people ready to encounter Jesus—and John's message is instructive to us about spiritual preparation in our lives. What can we learn from these verses as we get ready to grow?

### 1. The need for spiritual preparation

Luke tells us about John the Baptist's calling and message:

**Luke 3:2-3 (NIV)** *During the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup>He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*

Notice that John was **in the wilderness** (or desert) when God called him. Certain spiritual insights and understanding only come through times in the desert. The dryness of the desert causes us to call out to God and He responds to us through **the word of God**.

John's message from God's Word was simple and clear: **repent**. He proclaimed the need for repentance to prepare the way for Jesus. This is foundational for any spiritual preparation.

### 2. The requirements of spiritual preparation

Repentance involves **understanding** God's righteous ways and **responding** with real changes. It means that we turn from our ways to His ways; from our sinfulness to His righteousness.

Every new season or step in God starts with a new level of repentance in our lives—understanding and responding to Him. And John tells us what this looks like:

**Luke 3:4-5 (NIV)** *As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. <sup>5</sup>Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth.'"*

Spiritual preparation means that we are making “straight paths” for the Lord. This can only happen as we address specific situations, specific points of spiritual need in our hearts: “valleys,” “mountains and hills,” “crooked roads” and “rough ways.”

In our next lesson we will look at what each of these represents in our lives. For now, we need to know that we will not be prepared for the new season God has for us unless we are willing to address these areas of our heart. This is a requirement!

### **3. The results of spiritual preparation**

Luke 3:15 speaks of those who heard and responded to John’s message of preparation: “*The people were waiting expectantly.*” What a powerful statement! The spiritually prepared suddenly had expectations they had never experienced before.

When we follow through with the requirements of spiritual preparation, the result will be fresh spiritual expectation—God’s vision and hope for what is to come. God wants to impart new spiritual vision, energy, hope, direction, passion, zeal, fruitfulness and life to us!

Luke 3:6 (quoting from the prophet Isaiah) tells us that “all people will see God’s salvation.” Spiritual preparation through repentance paves the way for a revelation of God’s saving work (2 Corinthians 7:10). In salvation we experience God’s:

- *Forgiveness.* John taught that repentance was “for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3). Salvation is about the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Repentance prepares us to believe and receive this good news (Mark 1:15)!
- *Grace.* Salvation is a gift of God’s grace, and humble repentance opens the way for this gift in our lives (Ephesians 2:8-9; James 4:6).
- *Power.* In salvation we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (John says that Jesus baptizes us with “the Holy Spirit and fire”) who empowers us to live as a new person in Christ.

Are you willing to commit yourself to some spiritual preparations? Are you willing to allow repentance in your heart to lay a foundation for the work God wants to do in your life?

We are on the brink of a new season and God wants to bring you into a new season with Him. John’s message to his generation, a group of people on the brink of Christ’s earthly ministry, is equally relevant to us. It’s time to get ready for a new season in the Lord!

### **Discussion questions**

1. Why is it important for you to be spiritually prepared when God wants to do something new in your life?
2. What is repentance? In what ways does repentance prepare you for God’s work in your heart and life?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 7:10. What does this verse tell you about repentance? What can you expect as you repent with “godly sorrow” and a desire for real change?