



LESSON 2 // POINTS OF REPENTANCE

The coming of spring reminds us of the fresh growth God wants to bring to our lives. It also calls us to prepare for this growth so we are ready to receive and respond to the Lord as He works.

Luke 3:1-15 provides us with instructions concerning proper spiritual preparation. From the ministry of John the Baptist, we learn that repentance is the key to this preparation. When we grow insensitive to God's work of conviction and stop repenting, our spiritual progress ceases and regression or stagnation set in.

According to Luke 3:3-6, this preparation work of repentance involves making "straight paths for the Lord" in our lives.

Luke 3:3-6 (NIV) *He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁴ 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.' ⁵ Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. ⁶ And all people will see God's salvation."*

How do we make these straight paths for the Lord? We do this by:

1. Filling the low points.

The word "valley" describes a low place in the terrain. In this case, it refers to a low place in the terrain of our heart and character. These low places can be:

- *A depressed point in our spiritual lives.*
- *A place where there is a deficiency, an absence or insufficiency of the right "filling."*
- *Points where we are missing essential spiritual elements in our character, commitments and practices.*

We are called by God to respond in repentance to the valleys in our lives. These are places where the right things the Lord expects should be at work in our lives are not there. This happens for several reasons: lack of attention to the right things; refusal to put them into practice; ignorance of the right things we are missing; or failing to hold on to what's right. Filling in the valleys requires spiritual addition! It's time to add godly qualities to our character through repentance.

2. Leveling the high points.

There are sometimes ungodly behaviors and attitudes—"mountains and hills"—in our hearts that we must be willing to deal with forcefully and ruthlessly through repentance. What are some of these high points that need to be removed?

- *Idolatry*. Idols of our heart must put to death (Colossians 3:5-8).
- *Pride and rebellion*. God opposes the proud, so we need to reject pride (James 4:6-10).
- *Blatant disobedience to God's Word*. Love for God leads to obedience (John 14:15).
- *Immaturity*. Becoming more mature is essential for growth in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-15).

3. Straightening the crooked places.

A “crooked place” is a twisted and distorted dimension of our character. It’s something that was originally right and good and became crooked and perverted. This happens when we allow ungodliness to distort our thinking, judgment, decisions and behavior (Ephesians 4:17-24).

God says, “Acknowledge the crooked places and straighten them out in a spirit of repentance. Get them right! Get them straight!” Hebrews 12:12-13 speaks of our need to do this: “So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong” (NLT).

4. Smoothing the rough ways.

We all have “rough ways” in our lives—points where we’re in desperate need of some refinement. These are not areas of awful sin, but aspects of our personality and character that weaken our effectiveness for God.

Our tendency can be to excuse these by saying, “That’s just who I am,” and we don’t always take them seriously. It’s important to understand that there are some rough ways in us that are offensive to God. He doesn’t like these areas in us because they hinder the expression of His nature and glory through us. If we don’t have anything else to repent of, we certainly have some rough ways to bring to God in repentance!

What does the Lord want to do with our rough ways? He wants to smooth them. He wants to send us to “finishing school”—His finishing school. What happens at finishing school? People learn grace, refinement and suave. How does this occur? Submitting to correction knocks off the rough, jagged edges.

There are many believers who are much less effective than they could be simply because of rough edges they have not been willing to acknowledge and bring to God in repentance. Hebrews 12:2 speaks to us about the necessity of this spiritual finishing process: “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter [or “finisher”] of our faith.”

Preparing for spiritual growth requires a serious response of repentance to the low, high, crooked and rough points in our lives!

Discussion questions

1. How does repentance help you level “high points” like idolatry, pride and rebellion?
2. How can “crooked places” work their way into your heart and keep you from God’s best?
3. What “rough (or jagged) edges” do you think God may want to smooth out in your life? What are some practical ways you can cooperate with this process?