



LESSON 3 // PRACTICAL EXPRESSIONS OF REPENTANCE

Spring is a time of growth. Coming out of the winter months, fresh buds appear and vibrant colors begin to emerge across the landscape. The promise of new life is all around us!

God also wants to produce fresh life and growth in our lives—and we need to be ready to grow. Luke 3:1-15 tells us, through the ministry of John the Baptist, that repentance is a critical part of our preparation for growth. Verses 7-14 help us understand specific, practical expressions of repentance.

Luke 3:7-14 (NIV) John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?”⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.⁹ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”¹⁰ “What should we do then?” the crowd asked.¹¹ John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”¹² Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”¹³ “Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.¹⁴ Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?” He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

To live daily in repentance that brings real change, we must:

1. Recognize the source of sin.

John began his message by starkly addressing the crowd as “you brood of vipers.” The terms “serpent” or “viper” refer in Scripture to the devil. John was calling attention to the fact that these individuals were being influenced and controlled by dark, satanic forces.

Disobedience to God is the result of the influence of a “serpent spirit” and repentance drives the serpent out of our lives. This is the spirit of Satan himself who is called “that ancient serpent ... who leads the whole world astray” (Revelation 12:9b). Until we come to grips with the fact that our disobedience is born of this spirit that insists on its own will and way instead of God’s, we will not take it seriously. We must repent of satanic pride and rebellion whenever it shows itself.

2. Refuse to run.

John declared that the people he was warning were ready to “flee from the coming wrath.” They were not interested in making changes that pleased God, but only wanted to avoid His judgment.

They were actually running away from God and their spiritual problems instead of addressing them. The reality of God’s holiness and the fact that we will one day give a full accounting to Him concerning the way we have lived should drive home to us the need for genuine repentance now.

3. Resist excuses.

After charging the crowd to “produce fruit in keeping with repentance,” John then told them “and do not begin to say to yourselves” He understood that these folks would immediately find a way to discount his message and its application to their lives.

Their reasoning would be something like: “This repentance stuff really doesn’t apply to us. After all, we’re God’s chosen people. Abraham is our spiritual father. Certainly, we’re not sinners!”

What are some excuses we might use—reasons why we think we don’t need to repent and change? Maybe our Christian heritage or level of spiritual knowledge. Or we might think we’re “not as bad” as others. Some of us might have a “victim” mentality or an orientation of helplessness. Others don’t want to be too fanatical. Preparation for the Lord through repentance and change will never happen until we get rid of our excuses!

4. Choose to change.

Three groups of people who heard John’s message all asked the same basic question, “What should we *do* then?” (Luke 3:10). John called for a change in behavior. A tree produces observable fruit and John made it clear that real repentance is also proven by its fruit of change.

His response to each of these groups addressed core issues in their lives: selfish living (the crowd), greed and deceitfulness (the tax collectors), exploitation and discontentment (the soldiers).

John says, “Show me your repentance by radical, drastic changes in the way you think, act and talk!” People who genuinely repent demonstrate their sincerity through:

- *Confession*—“Own up!”
- *Restitution*—“Pay back!”
- *Reconciliation*—“Make peace!”
- *Transformation*—“Do right!”

Our question, having heard this message, must be the same as those who heard John preach: “What should we *do*?” We need to ask God to speak to us and show us what our practical response should be to His message of repentance.

Discussion questions

1. Why is it important that you run to God and address your spiritual problems instead of running away from Him?
2. What kind of excuses might keep you from turning away from sin in repentance? How can you overcome these excuses?
3. What are some practical steps of change that would demonstrate real fruit of repentance in your life?