

## **Good Grief!**

*2 Corinthians 7:2-16*

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My wife learned very quickly in our marriage I am a bit of an absent-minded professor. After our honeymoon in Arizona, we landed safely back in St. Louis. We had four hours to make it back up to central Illinois for a family Christmas gathering. As I drove through St. Louis and into Illinois, Kimberly and I engaged in a very stimulating discussion. We talked and talked and talked. I did not discover anything was amiss until I we passed a sign that read, "Welcome to Indiana". Now as most of you know, Indiana is not near the road between St. Louis and Canton, IL. My mind was so occupied with our conversation that I completely disengaged from the road that we were supposed to travel.

So what do you suppose we did? Do you think that we said, "Well, we made it this far in this direction, let's keep going and see where the road takes us!" No. We wanted to join our family for a joyful Christmas. So we "repented". We turned the car around and with the help of our Atlas, we headed in the right direction to my Uncle's house. We arrived late to the party, but we eventually arrived to the place where we wanted to go.

### **Let me ask you two questions:**

1. **Where do you want to go in life?** Most people want to arrive at a place of joy, of meaning, of deep satisfaction, of real relationships, of freedom. We want to avoid a life that ends in disaster. **Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly."** Jesus alone offers us the life that we really want. Every other offer of life is like a waterless cloud, a hidden reef, a fruitless tree. They promise to satisfy, but deliver vanity and suffering. **Where do you want to go in life?**
2. **Are you convinced that you are on the road that will take you there?** Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus alone offers life that is truly life. No one else can promise sight to see God all through this life. No one else can offer you adoption into God's family. No one else can free you from the guilt of your sin. No one else can deliver you from the power of death. No one else can guarantee you a room in the Father's house when you die. **Are**

**you convinced that you are on the road that will take you where you want to go?**

We open our Bibles to 2 Corinthians 7, where we learn a simple truth: The road to go where we really want to be is a road marked, “Repentance”.

**Main Idea: Repentance is a gift from God to His people. Repentance is our road back to spiritual joy.**

Context: Remember that in 2 Corinthians 2, Paul tells us that he had written a severe letter to the Corinthian church.

*“For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.” (2 Corinthians 2:4 [ESV](#))*

This church that Paul had planted and labored to help repaid his love for them with disloyalty. Some false apostles slandered Paul and were effective in driving the church members away from Paul and the Gospel. One of the members led in this attack upon Paul and his character. **Paul wrote the whole church to rebuke them for listening to slander and turning against him and against the Gospel.** After he wrote this letter, Paul was very anxious about how the church responded to it. **Did the letter make the matter worse? Did the letter bring the church to repentance?** He did not know.

He finally met up with Titus who told Paul that the church had received Paul’s letter and that they had repented of their sins against him. He was overjoyed! Yet he knows that a broken relationship that has only recently been restored is on shaky ground. He writes this letter to seal their bonds of love tighter.

With this background, let us read 7:2-9:

*Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one. 3 I do not say this to condemn you, for I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. 4 I am acting with great boldness toward you; I have great pride in you; I am filled with comfort. In all our affliction, I am overflowing with joy.” (2 Corinthians 7:2–4 [ESV](#))*

**Now that we are past this difficult chapter in our relationship, let us move forward!**

Sometimes we rush too fast to restore relationships. We look at each other after some really hard words have been said, some really sinful actions have been committed, some really embarrassing failures have been made . . . and we want to put it behind us without the pain of even acknowledging it.

Paul is not asking for long conversations. He does not ask them to write out a confession that is precise and thorough to every letter and comma. But he also wants to BE REAL.

*“Hey, let us agree that this past chapter was not great. **Because you believed slander, you closed your heart to me. I appeal to you. Would you open your hearts again to me?** We did not wrong you. We did not take advantage of you. We did not slander you. **I am not going over this because I want you to feel guilty!! I love you!!** You are constantly in our hearts. We want to tie our lives to you from now to the day that we die! I am writing so boldly because I have great confidence in your hearts before Jesus. When I think of you, I have joy!”*

*5 For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. 6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more.” (2 Corinthians 7:5–7 [ESV](#))*

*“**I want you to know that after I wrote the hard letter to you, I could not sleep.** I actually became very depressed thinking about you. But then I found Titus. **Titus told me that you read my letter and that you realized that you had been duped by the slander of the false apostles.** He said that most of you expressed a renewed love and loyalty to me. **You became convicted that your treatment of me was a sin against God and that you repented before the Lord!** This brought such comfort to my soul! It was like a huge weight lifted off of my heart!!”*

We learn SO much about repentance from this chapter! Before we dig in to the doctrine of repentance, I want to note for those of you ministering the Gospel to others . . . ministry can be VERY MESSY and VERY PAINFUL. Do you feel Paul’s personal distress in these words? Those who minister the Gospel to others must expect this kind of pain . . . it is not something abnormal, but common.

**Phillips Brooks, the peerless preacher and one-time bishop of Boston, said:**

*“To be a true minister to men is always to accept new happiness and new distress.... The man who gives himself to other men can never be a wholly sad man; but no more can he be a man of unclouded gladness. To him shall come with every deeper consecration a before untasted joy, but in the same cup shall be mixed a sorrow that it was beyond his power to feel before.”*

### **The Necessity of Repentance**

*8 For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. 9 As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you **were grieved into repenting**. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.” (2 Corinthians 7:8–9 [ESV](#))*

*“When I wrote the letter, I did not write because I was angry with you and wanted to give you a piece of my mind. **I wanted you to be right with God. I wanted to our relationship restored.** I knew that you would have to turn from your sinful attitudes in order for reconciliation to happen. I knew that some of my words would sting you. **But I knew that if you received my words as true then any sting you would feel would lead you to repentance and joy.** Out of love, I took the risk.”*

Paul knew that repentance was necessary in Corinth in order for the church keep from sliding away from Jesus, away from the Gospel, away from spiritual life.

**Truth: Repentance is the first step every person must take to become God’s child.** Jesus and the apostles tie repentance as a condition of entrance into God’s kingdom.

*“No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”” (Luke 13:5 [ESV](#))*

*Peter likewise “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord,” (Acts 3:19–20 [ESV](#))*

**Definition: Repentance is simply turning from our own sin and self-will and turning toward God in humble dependence.**

**Repentance causes us to see our OWN sin as dirty and wicked.** Repentance makes us realize that we deserve God's wrath. Repentance casts our lives at the feet of Jesus to receive mercy!

Repentance is not an apology or an admission of guilt. Repentance is not remorse and regret over one's own sin. Repentance is not a feeling of shame for our sin. Repentance is not restitution. Repentance usually includes all these elements, but a person may have all these responses and still not repent. Repentance is a 180 degree turn of our lives from the whole of our sin to Jesus in faith.

We are all born moving in the wrong direction. . . away from God's glory and toward self-glory . . . away from the life of God and toward the death of sin. Repentance is central to the Gospel message. Repentance is the path to God's blessings.

*"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6 [ESV](#))*

If we do not "turn around" we will never arrive at the destination that we were created to enjoy. We are like sheep who will never find green pastures. We will not lie beside refreshing waters.

God Himself is the destination that satisfies our every yearning. Yet connecting to God is never a matter of moving a little farther down the path we are presently traveling. Finding God is not about "personal growth" or "personal discovery" or "gaining confidence in ourselves" as we continue down our life's path. Finding God requires repentance. . . a turning away from sin and a turning toward God . . . a turning from self as Savior and a turning to Jesus as Savior.

**Question: Have you repented of your sin and believed in Jesus as your King, your Lord, your Savior?**

**Principle: The Christian life begins with repentance and THEN the Christian life is sustained by repentance. There is no season in the life of the Christian where repentance is not necessary.**

*"For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (2 Corinthians 6:16 [ESV](#))*

When we repent of our sin, God gives us a whole new identity. We are His people, His children, His holy Temple. Yet as God's children, we continue to sin while we live in this world in our natural body. **So how can we keep the temple from being overrun by sin . . . from being defiled? Repentance!! We KEEP turning away from our sin and back toward God.**

**Repentance first makes into a Temple and THEN repentance maintains us as a Temple. Without repentance the Temple will be defiled.**

When Martin Luther wrote his famous 95 Thesis, the very first reads, ***"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance."***

Turning from sin and trusting in Jesus is not a ONE TIME event, but a daily discipline. Every day we have opportunity to repent. Every day we discover the necessity of repentance.

**Question: How long has it been since you last repented?**

The Corinthians who had repented when they first heard the Gospel from Paul needed a fresh season of repentance. And God gave them one!!

### **The Source of Repentance**

**Sin deceives us.** Sin first blinds us of its presence and to its poison. **So how can a person who is being deceived by sin come to repent of sin?**

*"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret," (2 Corinthians 7:10 [ESV](#))*

**"Godly grief" is a grief that God gives. God gives us a grief over sin that breaks sins' chains and leads us to repent.**

***"24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, 25 correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will." (2 Timothy 2:24–26 [ESV](#))***

**Truth: Only God can produce repentance in our heart.** Our heart is too hard to want to repent! God uses His Word and His Spirit to bring repentance to our hearts, but HE is the One who does the work. Without His gracious miracle of softening our hard hearts, we would ever repent.

*"Genuine, spiritual mourning for sin is the work of the Spirit of God. Repentance is too rare a flower to grow in nature's garden. Pearls grow naturally in oysters, but penitence never shows up in sinners except when divine grace produces it in them. If you have one particle of real hatred for sin, God must have given it to you, for human nature's thorns never produced a single fig. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh."*  
Charles Spurgeon

**This does not mean we can do nothing to bring about repentance!**

**We can seek the LORD for His mercy. We can call upon Him in prayer!**

*Seek the LORD while he may be found,  
call upon him while he is near;  
let the wicked forsake his way  
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
let him return to the LORD that he may have mercy on him,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (Isa. 55:6–7)*

If you are serious about repenting of sin, I commend calling out to the LORD in prayer. Then open your Bible and listen to Him tell you about your sin and His grace. Ask Him to bring conviction about your sin. Ask Him for grace to turn from your sin.

**PRAYER: Lord, you are my only hope. Let me see my sin the way your see my sin. Open my eyes to see my sin as the wicked, soul-destroying thing that it is. Open my heart to see your kindness and mercy. Lead me back to YOU!**

*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (Psalm 139:23–24 [ESV](#))*

**God is the source of our repentance.**

**The Nature of Repentance**

*“For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.” (2 Corinthians 7:10 [ESV](#))*

**There is a kind of repentance that is “worldly”. We see this kind of repentance all through the Bible.** Pharoah, King Saul, King Ahab, Judas and Simon Magnus are all recorded as acknowledging their sin with sorrow and yet none of these men truly repented.

**For instance, listen to Pharoah’s words of repentance:**

*“Then Pharaoh sent and called Moses and Aaron and said to them, **“This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. Plead with the LORD, for there has been enough of God’s thunder and hail. I will let you go, and you shall stay no longer.”** Moses said to him, **“As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD’s.”** (Exodus 9:27–29 [ESV](#))*

**Do not these words sound like the words of true repentance? Yet shortly after the hail ceased, Pharoah hardened his heart again. He had a worldly sorrow for sin.**

**Symptoms the neither confirm nor deny true repentance:**

1. **A terror of God’s just response.** People in hell do not repent, yet they live in terror over God’s judgment for their sin.
2. **Strong resolutions made against sin.**
3. **Moving away from many sins.**
4. **An attempt to make amends.**
5. **An renewed interest in spiritual disciplines of prayer and Word.**

These symptoms are all part of true repentance, but are also often part of false repentance.

**Symptoms that betray a worldly sorrow for sin.**

1. **Diminishing the sin by rationalization or superficial description.**

False repentance diminishes the weight of our sin by insisting that others sympathize with why we were tempted in the first place. False repentance has an



“eagerness” to convince others that we are not as sinful as our actions seem to reveal. It says things like, “I did that sin, but that is not who I really am!!”

2. **Becoming angry at the people who bring correction.** Proverbs 9:7-8

A sure sign of false repentance is when godly people who seek to restore a sinning person receive abuse, insults and hatred for their efforts. “Whoever corrects a scoffer gets himself abuse, and he who reproves a wicked man incurs injury. Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you.” (Proverbs 9:7–8 ESV).

3. **Cutting ties to some of our sin, but holding on to other parts.** False repentance still loves the sin and wants to preserve as much of it as possible. It pursues recovery without complete cleansing.
4. **Believing in oneself.** False repentance places complete confidence in our own personal ability to change. It makes quick promises to stop sinning without a realization of the power that sin has over us. False repentance does not desperately embrace Jesus and His cross as our only hope for freedom.
5. **Shifting blame from self to others.** False repentance focuses on what other people did to bring temptation into our life. It criticizes what other people should do after the sin is discovered. (Adam and Eve)
6. **Feeling sorry for the pain that sin brought into one’s own life while possessing little awareness for the breadth and depth of the hurt sin caused others.** Self-pity over the cost of our own sin dominates one’s thoughts.
7. **Resisting, resenting and despairing over the consequences of sin.** False repentance brings no hope. It does not enjoy the promise of a renewed righteousness.
8. **Demanding forgiveness.** False repentance often points one’s own apology as the reason that forgiveness should be granted. “Hey, I apologized! Now YOU are the problem!” False repentance values the words of repentance more than the heart of repentance.

**But what are the marks of godly sorrow that brings true repentance?**

*For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. 12 So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God.” (2 Corinthians 7:11–12 [ESV](#))*

## **Seven qualities that Paul identifies as consistent with true repentance.**

### **1. Earnestness** *For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you*

**True repentance is earnest for righteousness to rule one's life.** "Earnestness" is a determination to see something through to completion. Earnestness means we do not procrastinate, but we deal with sin willingly, quickly and thoroughly. **Earnestness means we become impassioned about changing our orientation to God and to sin.**

When someone we love becomes ill with a concerning disease, we become earnest in our care for her. We take them to the doctor. We check in on them many times throughout the day. I go to the store to purchase food and medicine. We do not think to ourselves, "I will deal with this tomorrow." **True repentance produces demonstrable evidence that we are earnest about entering into God's righteousness today.**

### **2. Eagerness** *but also what eagerness to clear yourselves*

When Paul writes the words, "eagerness to clear yourselves," he is not suggesting that true repentance is eager to prove oneself blameless. **But this "eagerness" yearns to demonstrate that our repentance is genuine.** True repentance is eager to do whatever it takes to show others that real repentance is our heart's commitment. It is humble and patient with people who are slow to forgive us.

**When we sin, others may ask, "How do I know if you have truly repented?" Worldly sorrow becomes frustrated with that question. "HOW DARE YOU QUESTION MY INTEGRITY?"** True repentance rejoices in the opportunity to prove itself. It wants to demonstrate that real change has really happened. **For instance, if a husband who has sinned by viewing pornography**

truly repents, he will act humbly to prove the genuineness of his repentance. He will become an open book to his wife and others. True repentance willingly gives more information than asked, not less. He will offer freely access to his computer. He will offer full disclosure of credit card purchases. He will pursue regular accountability. "Eagerness" makes him willing to do whatever is necessary!! His heart communicates, *"I want to present all the information that others need to show that I have changed. I am an open book now."* Eagerness welcomes uncomfortable probing by those who have been wronged and those who are part of the restoration process.

### **3. Indignation.** *what indignation*

This is indignation over our own sin, not the sins of others. True repentance is angry at one's own actions and the reproach that sin has brought to Jesus and His church. Sin becomes revolting when we see it in the light of God's holiness. Repentance views sin as a rejection of God's holiness and sovereign authority. Repentance causes us to agree with God about our sin's severity and seriousness. Repentance makes us vexed not merely by the temporal consequences of our sin, but by the fact that we tried to rob God of His glory!

### **4. Fear.**

Sin always begins with a casual view of God and His justice. Repentance brings us to a fear of God and a deep awe of His holiness. When Isaiah saw the LORD he cried out, *"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!"* (Is 6:5) Repentance brings a person face to face with God's holiness and inspires a godly fear of Him that leads us to humbly seek His mercy and to worship Him. Repentance does not presume upon God's mercy, but it weeps in joy over God's mercy. True repentance changes the way we think about God.

### **5. Longing**

True repentance possesses a longing to see our soul and our sin as God does. We no longer are willing to be blind to the ugliness of our own sin. True repentance longs for reconciliation with God and with the people who our sin has hurt. True repentance longs to be a joy to others, not a pain. It longs to see ALL

**the damage our sin did and to take appropriate action to move toward that end, regardless of the personal cost.** It refuses to take ones eyes off their sin in order to be comfortable. **In true repentance, we embrace the discomfort of repentance in order to love God and others.**

## **6. Zeal**

**True repentance is consumed with a desire to be holy. It is thirsty for God.** It makes us long to be a sheep that hears His voice and follows him. It makes us fervent fans of God. **It produces an energy boiling up inside moving us upward to communion with God.** We no longer see our discipline in the Word and prayer as obligations to fulfill, but as joys to pursue. We want to hear God's voice.

Psa. 19:10 More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey  
and drippings of the honeycomb.

Psa. 19:11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

True repentance does not leave us as a mild-mannered Christian, but as one who pursues holiness with passion and zeal.

## **7. Punishment**

**True repentance is ready to see justice done, even if that requires personal pain and cost.** It is eager to make restitution and to receive the penalty that the law demands for such a sin. It does not seek to protect oneself from the just penalty, but accepts the consequences of one's own sin.

*At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.*

Do you see the marks of true repentance in your soul?

## **The Comfort of Repentance**

*"Therefore we are comforted. And besides our own comfort, we rejoiced still more at the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all." (2 Corinthians 7:13 [ESV](#))*

*14 For whatever boasts I made to him about you, I was not put to shame. But just as everything we said to you was true, so also our boasting before Titus has proved true. 15 And his affection for you is even greater, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling. 16 I rejoice, because I have complete confidence in you.” (2 Corinthians 7:14–16 [ESV](#))*

Repentance is a lovely thing. It is not something to loathe, but something to love. Repentance is the beginning of grace in our lives. Repentance brings us to the foot of the cross where God’s mercy pours over us.

Through repentance we realize our sinful condition, renounce sin before God and run in faith to Christ. Through repentance we are restored to God and to God’s people!!

Conclusion: Illustration: A rock climber noticed his robes were worn. But each day he would come home with no accident. Each day he thought to himself, “I am glad that I did not waste my money on new ropes.” One day, his rope broke and he fell to his death.

Have you repented of your sin and turned to Jesus as Savior?

“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4 [ESV](#))

One of my favorite verses in all of scripture. The knowledge of God’s wrath stings our soul to recognize our peril; the knowledge of God’s kindness draws us nearer to God in genuine repentance.

Brother and sister, is God calling you to repent of something in your life? Something hidden? Something known but unmoved to turn from it?

**Repentance is a lovely thing. Change out the old, worn ropes of your soul!! No one truly repents and then regrets it!!!**

**The Necessity of Repentance**

**The Source of Repentance**

**The Nature of Repentance**

## The Comfort of Repentance

*“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.” (2 Corinthians 7:1 [ESV](#))*

**Principle: The path that leads us into God’s mercy and away from His righteous judgment is the path of humble repentance and sincere faith. Without humble repentance God does not grant anyone His mercy. No other response opens the door to God’s rescue.**