

How Authentic Repentance Sets the Captives Free

I've never had a post that I was so sure I was supposed to write that has felt as hard to finish as this one. A friend told me two weeks ago I ought to write on this, and I started it then. Yet, I feel like I'm pushing through a thick haze to get it finished. I wondered if the Spirit was hindering me.

Then I remembered the Word of God, because it teaches me that the Spirit is FOR repentance. I recognize now the one who is against it, and I determined today I would overcome whatever barriers that lesser being placed in front of me, because I think the Greater One blesses us when we think on repentance.

I have harped on repentance from time to time. I wrote about not circling the wagons, recognizing the pitfalls of self-justification, recognizing sincere versus insincere confession, and about our need to listen to our critics.

After years of banging my head against the wall wondering if anyone in my spiritual community believed what I did about the beauty of repentance, the flood gates have finally opened. Former and current elders are repenting without defensiveness to those they were supposed to shepherd. One former wounded church member confronted an elder, "You were the worst counselor I've ever had." Yet the elder responded without defensiveness, "I am so sorry I failed you. Will you please forgive me?" I've seen that kind of repentance these last few weeks again and again and again.

Here is what I note about authentic repentance – **a response of true repentance does not depend on the quality of the confrontation.** This has been a mistake I've made over the years. I do personally believe that I have some obligations in how I draw someone toward seeing their sin (see 2 Timothy

2:24-26 for clear teaching in Scripture on how to confront). But it is a serious mistake to believe that real repentance will be squashed if the one in sin is confronted with too much anger or passion or hurt. Because true repentance isn't primarily a transaction between accused and accuser. It's first and foremost a humbling of ourselves before **GOD**. That's the key to authentic repentance. Nathan confronted David about his sin. But David confesses in Psalms 51 that it is against God, and God only, that he has sinned against.

With that foundation in place, authentic repentance begins. The particular confession I have gotten to witness is that of elders recognizing that they "shepherded" sheep with a foundation of pride, fear, and intimidation that caused them ultimately to harm rather than nurture the dear ones God gave them to serve. When someone sees this first and foremost as a sin against God, there are profound results. The primary result I've seen is a humble response by repentant guys that seeks out person after person hurt by their sin and owns it in front of them.

The second thing I note is that **this kind of authentic repentance snowballs**. It's breathtaking to see one guy admit his sin, then to get a phone call from another guy who admits his sin, followed up by a private message from another one, with an email from yet another, and so forth. Multiple former pastors reaching out to multiple former parishioners, with multiple instances of sincere repentance followed by multiple gifts of grace in response.

It's catching. God's kingdom comes. His will is being done. He forgives our debts as we forgive others. God's kingdom does not come without repentance, and Jesus' words, "It is finished!" ring truest in those moments of humbly admitting our sin with God first and those we've hurt in close second.

If you need to confess yet have let fear or pride stop you, may the Spirit move you forward as you see and hear of others

finding freedom and healing by humbling themselves before God.

*Adapted from Practical Theology for Women by **Wendy Alsup**. Wendy has authored three books including By His Wounds You are Healed: How the Message of Ephesians Transforms a Woman's Identity. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.*