

Warning Signs You're Not Following God's Direction

"Repent" is not a term most people feel all warm and fuzzy about. It was John the Baptist's favorite word, though. He used it a lot. But what does it really mean? Hint: it means a whole lot more than sorry.

Human Definition

Repent is a little-used word today. We seem to think it's synonymous with saying, "I'm sorry." The minute we get caught, we feel sad about what we did for about half a second. The dictionary defines repent as to "feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin."

That's our humanity speaking. We're sorry that we did something wrong, like speeding, cheating on our taxes or eating brownies.

We have this mistaken idea that because no one else on earth knows what we did, it's OK. We just won't do it again, but because we think no one knows it, we continue to do whatever "it" is. Thinking this way leaves someone important out of the equation. He always knows what we have done. We may live in denial, but in the end, it won't do us any good because we aren't hiding anything from God.

It can be a comfort or a fear to know that God knows us completely, sees us completely and still loves us and longs for us to return to Him. "O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I get up; You understand my thought from far off. You search my path and my lying down and are aware of all my ways" (Ps. 139:1-3).

God's Definition

Here's the biblical definition of "repent": "To turn from evil and turn to the good. To turn about or turn away from." This definition includes not just saying words, though confessing what we've done is the first step. Repentance includes action.

Paul said it this way, "Are you actually unaware or ignorant of the fact that God's kindness leads you to repentance, that is, to change your inner self, your old way of thinking—seek His purpose for your life?" (Rom. 2:4, AMP).

Or what about these words from Jesus? "Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, change your inner self—your old way of thinking, regret past sins, live your life in a way that proves repentance; seek God's purpose for your life, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 3:2).

How to Repent

I live about a mile away from Interstate 70, halfway between Kansas City and St. Louis. If I go out to I-70 and say I am going to St. Louis, but head west instead of east, I will go by several familiar mile markers, which tell me long before I arrive in the wrong city that I'm not heading to St. Louis. I'm going in the opposite direction. When I enter the downtown Kansas City area and see no gateway arch, I finally get it. I've gone two hours in the wrong direction.

I will be really upset with myself. I'm really sorry I went the wrong way. I can even tell myself I'm sorry and admit my failure. I have confessed my wrong. However, I haven't repented until I turn around and go back down I-70, pass by Columbia and continue on to St. Louis. I have to do this, even though it will take me an extra four hours of my time.

This is the true meaning of repentance. We are headed in one direction. God sends us hints and clues, road signs all along the way. When the final major indicator sinks in, we know we have to do something different. Continuing in this direction is not getting us where we want to go.

It doesn't just involve admission of guilt. It involves a total 180-degree turnaround. We were going one way, and now we must act. We must turn around. Repentance will be proven by what we do next. God's actually watching to see if we live our lives in a way that indicates we have repented and aren't just sorry we're such a mess. There is such a big difference.

Just for Salvation?

Repentance is not just necessary for salvation. Although that's the main way John the Baptist was using it. It is also necessary when we find ourselves far from God or we are doing something we know God would not approve of such as eating ourselves into oblivion. To continue on that path is only going to bring us a disaster of our own choosing. It's not God's fault. He has plans for our good, not our disaster (see Jer. 29:11).

We must turn around. That may or may not involve going down the aisle to talk to the pastor. What is required is that it must involve stopping the thing that we know is wrong and starting what we know is right.

We stop the offending action and start walking in the ways of God. It's a simple process I call stop-start and I teach it in Sweet Change Christian Weight Loss Coaching Group.

Stop-Start

The whole concept of stop-start is based around putting firm boundaries around the thing you want to stop and focusing on what you want to start. For instance, if you want to stop eating sugar and start exercising. Take the thought of eating sugar captive. Put a fence around it in your mind of course, but that's where the change must first take place. Make that fence electric! And focus on exercise. Write statements telling yourself when, where and how you will exercise. Focus on how good it will make you feel. Rehearse how much you desire to be obedient to God in doing this. Think, rehearse

and then act—and continue to act. {eoa}

Teresa Shields Parker is a wife, mother, Christian weight loss coach, speaker and author of *Sweet Grace: How I Lost 250 Pounds and Stopped Trying to Earn God's Favor*, *Sweet Freedom: Losing Weight and Keeping It Off with God's Help* and *Sweet Change: True Stories of Transformation*. Get a free chapter of all her books, plus many other free resources on her blog at [Teresa Shields](#) . Connect with her there or on her Facebook page, [Twitter](#), [Pinterest](#) or [Instagram](#).