

FULL FAITH PART 3  
**BEGIN HERE,  
REMAIN HERE**



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*Begin Here, Remain Here*

Begin Here, Remain Here  
Full Faith Part 3  
A *ReVision* Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe  
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## Welcome to *Begin Here, Remain Here*

Welcome to *Begin Here, Remain Here*, a brief study investigating the role of repentance in the life of faith. *Begin Here, Remain Here* is Part 3 of a 10-part series entitled, *Full Faith*, and is one of our *ReVision* series of studies in Kingdom living.

Full faith not only begins in repentance; it continues in it as well. Since we will always be sinners, this side of glory, we will always need to practice the discipline of repentance. As we do, we both give evidence of full faith and grow in it, since repentance leads us away from faith's hindrances into faith's fruit.

Repentance is a work of God's Spirit, so we need to seek Him, listen for Him, submit to Him, and walk with Him in every aspect of our lives. Then we will know His convicting grace, leading us to repent of sins and to press on into greater realization of full faith.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

Take one lesson at a time. Read through the study and reflect on the questions provided. Be sure to do the *Next steps* assignment each day, as this will help you put your learning into practice. Use the questions at the end of the study to reflect on what you have learned.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your understanding of the Christian faith, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God, and life in His Kingdom.

If you have not already, we invite you to subscribe to *ReVision* so that you can receive it daily on your computer, tablet, or smart phone. Visit our website, [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org), where you can subscribe to *ReVision* and our other newsletters.

Our prayer is that this study will enlarge your vision of Christ and His Kingdom, and encourage you to greater faith, boldness, and consistency in living for Him.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 The Imperative of Repentance

*“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.” Acts 26.19, 20*

### *The deepest need*

Many Christians today believe that saving faith – *full* faith – consists of hearing, responding, and continuing in the hope of the Good News of Jesus Christ. “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved,” they explain. Just believe, and keep believing in the hope of forgiveness and eternal life.

From this perspective, all we have to do in trying to reach others for Christ is put Jesus before them in a way that scratches their itch – whatever that might be – and some of them will come to Him and find a home in our midst. Are they lonely? Jesus is a friend and comforter. Do they lack a purpose in life? He is their guide. Are they filled with guilt and shame? He forgives and renews.

You just have to find out where people are hurting, then show them Jesus accordingly. Not everyone will believe, of course, but some will, and these are the folks we’re trying to reach.

The Gospel, in such a scenario, is all about making Jesus appealing so that anyone looking for “something more” in life might find in Him the satisfaction of their deepest needs.

But what if people don’t know what their deepest need is? Or what if their deepest need is something they refuse to consider? Or don’t even understand? What if their deepest need is just the kind of thing that churches today seem increasingly reluctant to talk about?

What if their deepest need has to do with *sin*?

### *The heart of the Gospel*

Deliverance from sin – its presence, power, and eternal consequences – is the heart of the Gospel of the Kingdom. But to be delivered from sin, one must first *recognize* sin for what it is and then be willing to *turn away* from it. If, in presenting the Gospel, we do not confront people with their sin, then they’ll never truly come to Jesus as Savior and Lord, but only as a kind of Helper in troubled times.

This is why Jesus consistently called those who heard Him to “Repent!” All the apostles also understood that the starting-point for saving faith is not in identifying any merely superficial needs we may imagine that Jesus will satisfy. The starting-point of saving faith, *full* faith, is in facing up to, admitting, confessing, and turning away from our sins.

Full and saving faith begins here, in repentance. And full and saving faith remains here for as long as we are in this life.

### *Repentance*

Repentance involves a change of thinking about a particular practice or practices, a change so dramatic that it leads us to renounce and forsake those practices. What we formerly accepted as normal – or, at least, agreeable, if only to us – we have now come to see in the light of God’s truth, as shameful, embarrassing, and even despicable – in other words, sinful (Rom. 3.20). In the face of Jesus’ holiness, we realize we could never be acceptable to Him as long as these practices continue unchecked. And in the light of His sacrificial suffering and death – occasioned by our wicked practices – we want nothing more than to be done with these

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disgusting and disgraceful ways and to find a new path for our lives.

When such a mindset settles in, we are ready to begin thinking differently about our lives and how we ought to live them in order to be most pleasing to God. We are ready, that is, to repent.

There is no saving faith, no full faith, without repentance. Saving faith, as Paul indicates in our text, is accompanied by repentance and leads to good works of righteousness which are in keeping with ongoing repentance. But if there is no repentance, how can there be any good works in keeping with repentance? And if there are no good works, then, as James explains, our “faith” is dead, since it does not bring forth evidence in the form of good works in keeping with repentance (Jms. 2.14-26).

Repentance is not much discussed, let alone practiced, among Christians these days. And without repentance, there won't be many good works bearing evidence of full faith in our lives. This helps to explain why our good works, such as they may be, have not been sufficiently conspicuous or powerful to stem the tide of immorality that threatens to inundate all aspects of our society.

Without repentance, there can be no good works in keeping with repentance. And without repentance – without you and me repenting of our sins – there may not be much real saving faith in the churches of the land.

Full faith begins here, in repentance. And it doesn't just begin here, but it continues here throughout the course of our lives.

*For reflection*

1. What do you understand by “repentance”? Why is it important?
2. Can we have true and saving faith – full faith – without repentance? Explain.
3. Why do you suppose we don't hear much about sin and repentance in our churches these days?

*Next steps: What is involved in repenting from sin? Talk with some Christian friends about this question.*

*Prayer:*

## 2 Conditions for Repentance

*“I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”* Luke 13.5

### *Repentance defined*

The best definition of repentance I know comes from *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, that great 17<sup>th</sup>-century document which sets forth the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. Chapter XV of *The Confession* deals with repentance, calling it “an evangelical grace” which should be preached along with faith in Christ by every minister of the Gospel.

*The Confession* declares of repentance, “By it, a sinner, out of the sight and sense not only of the danger, but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins, as contrary to the holy nature, and righteous law of God; and upon the apprehension of His mercy in Christ to such as are penitent, so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all unto God, purposing and endeavouring to walk with Him in all the ways of His commandments.”

Let’s observe the following conditions for repentance as they are set out here.

### *Conditions*

First, in order to repent one must first *acknowledge that he is a sinner*, that is, that there are in his life things which offend against the holy character of God and the requirement of loving our neighbors as ourselves. Repenting is what sinners do, and we’re certainly not going to make much headway in this “evangelical grace” until we identify, confess, and begin to have a changed mind about the sin in our lives.

Second, we recognize, as Jesus indicated, that the presence of sin in our lives *puts us in danger of the judgment of God*. God hates sin so much that He moves to eradicate and destroy it; if we happen to be harboring sin in our lives, therefore, it’s quite possible that we may find ourselves in the divine sights unless we repent.

Repentance, in other words, has a fear motive back of it – fear of the judgment of God, or, if we are believers and therefore delivered from eternal judgment, of His discipline against us for our sin (Heb. 12.3-11). It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God, and we must not minimize the enormity of God’s indignation against sin.

Now in order to acknowledge our sin we will need to see it *as such*. This requires exposure to the Law of God, for anything that is contrary to the Law of God is sin, and the Law of God is able to help us see the sin that we have heretofore been ignoring (Rom. 3.20; 7.7-9). Where there is no Law, the apostle explains, there is no guilt for sin. But once we begin to bring the Law of God into our preaching, conversation, and Christian lives, then soon enough, sin will become evident all around. Exposure to the Law of God – and all His Word – is therefore essential if we are to recognize and repent of our sin.

Third, we will not repent until we *apprehend the mercy of God*, shown to us in the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we see ourselves as responsible for His suffering, we will grieve that our sin could do this to Him, and we will begin to hate sin like we never have before (Ps. 97.10).

Finally, real repentance *seeks another path to walk*, one that follows “all the ways of His commandments.” Here again we must stress the importance of gaining increasing familiarity with the Law and Word of God.

We will not repent of our sins until all these conditions are met. And, as often as they are met, we will repent, and thus discover again the starting-point of saving faith.

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*No salvation without it*

Repentance does not earn salvation; however, there is no salvation without it.

Moreover, as *The Confession* goes on to say, “As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation; so there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent.” Repentance is thus an avenue for great hope, relief, and joy, and a new beginning each day for knowing the salvation of the Lord.

And so, *The Confession* continues, “Men ought not to content themselves with a general repentance, but it is every man’s duty to endeavour to repent of his particular sins, particularly.” Full faith not only begins in repentance, it is sustained and nurtured by it as well.

When we practice repentance like this, then the salvation we have in Jesus Christ will begin to flourish, we will feel ourselves increasingly drawn and motivated by the expectations of full faith which Jesus holds out to us, and our full faith in Him will result in both inward assurance and outward evidence of a life that is being truly transformed.

Repentance is the first step on the path of such full faith, and by it we daily sustain momentum and direction in walking with the Lord.

*For reflection*

1. Why can we not practice repentance without a growing familiarity with the Law and Word of God?
2. Why does a life of repentance bring us hope, relief, and renewed faith?
3. How can repentance become daily an ongoing discipline in your life?

*Next steps: How can believers help one another to take up repentance as an ongoing discipline? Talk with some Christian friends about this question.*

*Prayer:*



### 3 A Work of God's Spirit

*"And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment..."* John 16.8

#### *It begins with God*

As we have seen, repentance is a work of *grace*. That means it begins with God, is accomplished by God, and bears the fruit God intends. It also means that it is a work of God's love and shepherding care, and so we should welcome it and seek it as often as we may.

Whenever God is at work in our lives, it's a good thing. We should rejoice to repent, therefore, as this is a sure indication that God is at work within us, willing and doing of His good pleasure to transform us increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2.13; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

Repentance is a work of God, and more specifically, of the Holy Spirit. Certainly we are commanded to repent, and to practice repentance from our sins every day of our lives. But we cannot do this apart from the work of God's Spirit in our lives. What does this mean? How does God's Spirit work to bring us to repentance?

#### *The Law of God*

First, the Spirit must teach us the Law of God (Ezek. 36.26, 27). Unless the Spirit opens our hearts and minds to the truth of God's Law, we'll never be able to appreciate the standards of holiness and justice God has declared for us, or the depths of our sin and need for His grace and power. This means we must enroll in the Spirit's classroom and make reading, meditating on, and studying God's Law an important part of our daily spiritual life.

The Law of God – the first five books of Scripture including the commandments and statutes of God – begin the Word of God, and inform and shape it throughout. The Word of God, in turn, teaches us how to read and understand the Law of God, so that love for God and neighbor flow through us by the Spirit (Matt. 22.34-40; Jn. 7.37-39).

The more we turn to the Law of God, meditating on it day by day (Ps. 1), the greater will be the likelihood that the Spirit will use the Law to reveal some heretofore unacknowledged sin in our lives. We gain the mind of the Spirit for life in the Spirit as we read and meditate in the Law of God (Rom. 8.5-9). For the Spirit to do His work of teaching us the Law of God, we must position ourselves before it regularly.

#### *Conviction*

In such a situation, the Spirit, having shown us the Law of God, can *convict* us of any situations, sentiments, thoughts, or practices in our lives that are contrary to the holiness of the Law of God. We will know that we have been convicted of something when, like a defendant hearing the judge read the jury's guilty verdict, we are suddenly hot with shame, embarrassment, fear, and dread. We've been discovered. The facts are known, and we are found wanting before the Lord.

The feeling of conviction is unpleasant and unmistakable, and the Spirit of God has been given precisely to bring us to this point. It should bring us to a point of godly sorrow.

Immediately, however, the Spirit takes up another work in us. He begins to make us willing to do what God wants, to live as He desires, to make ourselves pleasing to Him Who loved us so much that He gave His Son for our redemption (Phil. 2.13).

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We cannot will ourselves to desire God's way; only the Spirit can do that in us, and He will only do it when, having convicted us of our sins, He sees that, in the depths of our souls, we are grieving and ready to follow a different path.

*Declaring repentance*

Finally, the Spirit of God enables us to declare our repentance to God. This involves, first, confessing our sin – agreeing, as it were, with the Spirit concerning what He has made known to us about our transgressions of God's Law. If we say that we have no sin, we're deceiving ourselves and making God a liar (1 Jn. 1.8-10). With confession then must come a declaration of repentance: "Lord, I repent of this sin, and I desire to follow a different path." Confession and repentance are acts of obedient faith, wrought within us by the Spirit of God. As often as sin is discovered within us, confession and repentance are in order.

Without repentance there is no full faith; in a believer, where there is no repentance, there will be no growth in the good works that characterize true repentance. And without that growth – growth in holiness – we may not expect to see the Lord, to know the righteousness, peace, and joy of His Kingdom, or to be a blessing to others as God intends.

Repentance is a work of grace, a work of God's Spirit. We must establish ourselves in the conditions where repentance can occur, and seek the Spirit of God to work within us that conviction, grief, willingness, and resolve that lead us through repentance into the fuller enjoyment of our full faith walk with Jesus Christ.

*For reflection*

1. Are you enrolled in the Spirit's school of conviction and repentance?
2. How do you experience repentance? What feelings do you associate with it?
3. Repentance issues in good works characteristic of repentance. How do you experience this?

*Next steps: Repentance requires that we wait on the Lord in prayer (Ps. 139.23, 24). Begin adding time for this in your prayers each day.*

## 4 Knowing Where to Turn

*I thought about my ways,  
And turned my feet to Your testimonies.  
I made haste, and did not delay  
To keep Your commandments. Psalm 119.59, 60*

### *Clueless*

I am not a handyman. Susie will be the first to tell you that.

If it can't be fixed by a screwdriver or a hammer, I'm going for the phone book. Sometimes this clutziness can be a little unnerving. As when, for some reason yet unknown to me, the house alarm once suddenly began to go off, I mean, in spades. Lights started flashing. A horn loud enough to hear on the other side of the neighborhood began to blare. All the key pads by the doors were lit up and screaming at me, "Do something, you idiot!"

But I didn't have a clue. Here I was, joint-owner of this home and its security system, and something I had done had tripped it big time, but I didn't know where to turn to shut off the noise and get things back to normal.

After nearly 30 minutes of casting about for a solution, I finally called the company which installed the system. A very kind person on the other end of the line walked me through what to do and, in just a few minutes, the system was back to normal.

Wouldn't it have been wonderful if, when things suddenly started to go wrong, I'd been prepared by knowing where to turn and what to do to get this system back on track?

### *Seeking relief*

Repentance is like that. Repentance, we recall, is an act of grace, in which the Spirit of God brings us to recognize, acknowledge, grieve for, and turn away from our sins, in order to walk the path of righteousness with Jesus more consistently.

Repentance may be an act of grace, but that doesn't mean it's, you know, fun. Repentance involves conviction, embarrassment, shame, sorrow, grieving – who signs up for that?

But it is precisely by these means that God moves us to seek resolution to this unnerving situation. When we are convicted of sin, if we have been sincerely convicted, we want relief, we want out from under the feeling of guilt or shame, we want to be back into the favor of the Lord and our neighbor as soon as we can.

It would be a good idea, since evidently repentance is something God intends to visit upon us daily, if, when conviction comes, we know right away where to turn for relief.

### *To the Law and the testimony!*

The psalmist knew where to turn: to the testimonies and commandments of God. Whenever he found that he had strayed into an unrighteous path, the solution was simple: find the good path again.

But what if you're not familiar with the Law of God? Or if you barely know your way around the Scriptures? Then you're going to lurch around in panic until you dial up someone who can show you the way back to the right path again. And what if that someone's not in when you call?

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This is why it's so important that each of us as believers feed daily and heartily on the Word of God, finding joy, delight, and true spiritual sustenance in the pages of the whole counsel of God (Jer. 15.16). The psalmist instructs us to hide the Word of God in our hearts (Ps. 119.9-11). The Apostle Paul commands us to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly (Col. 3.16). Jesus said that His Word and Spirit are our life (Jn. 6.63). You will flounder in sin, straining like a turtle on its back to get upright again, as long as you remain ignorant of the path you should be following. It's the path of Jesus, the path of God's commandments, the path of His Word (1 Jn. 2.1-16).

That Word alone can equip us for every good work (2 Tim. 3.15-17). Repentance issues in good works appropriate to it, as both John the Baptist and the Apostle Paul explained (Matt. 3.8; Acts 26.20). The "fruit worthy of repentance" – as John referred to it – is all spelled out for us in the Word of God. We have an easy-to-understand, readily-available manual of righteousness to guide us back into the ways of the Lord.

So before our embarrassment and shame at being convicted of sin turns to depression and despair – or worse, indifference and apathy – we need to turn our feet back to the testimonies and commandments of the Lord. The more we read, study, and meditate on the Word of God, the readier we will be the next time something we do – or fail to do – sets off the alarms in our soul.

*For reflection*

1. Do you find that your time in the Word of God is equipping you for everyday good works? Why or why not?
2. Would you say that the Word of God dwells in you "richly" (Col. 3.16)? How might you improve in this area?
3. How can Christians encourage and assist one another in becoming better grounded in God's Word (Heb. 10.24)?

*Next steps: What is one thing you might do to begin improving your time in the Word of God? Begin doing it today.*

## 5 Chart a Course

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* Romans 12:21

### *Battling against sin*

Over the years, those Christians who have borne the most fruit for the Kingdom of God have waged a ferocious battle against sin and unrighteousness. This is only what the Apostle Paul told us to expect as we take up our calling as full faith followers of Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:10-20). We can learn from our forebears in the faith how to prevail in the battle that is against us each day.

Consider, for example, the Christians of the Celtic period (ca 430-800 AD).

Beginning in Ireland, with the ministry of Patrick, and spreading from there to Wales, Scotland, and most of Europe, a revival of large proportions brought renewal and awakening to cultures pagan and Christian alike. Celtic Christians were fiercely evangelistic, devoted to community and service, and skilled in the creation of glorious cultural artifacts. At their best, they were devoted to the rule of King Jesus and fervent in pursuit of His righteousness.

Underlying all their fervor and fruitfulness was devotion to a deeply spiritual way of life, including an unwavering earnestness about holiness and repentance.

### *The discipline of penance*

Celtic Christians understood that it is not in the interest of the community or the Kingdom of God to allow sin to continue unchecked among the brethren. Especially in Ireland, Celtic communities were built around monasteries, and the disciplined lives of the men and women in monastic orders frequently spilled out into the surrounding communities as well.

One characteristic of that way of life was the vigorous use of the discipline of *penance* to chart a course for righteousness for those who fell into sin.

Penance is a discipline used to help someone who has departed the path of righteousness, to return to it, leaving his sin behind, and resuming his walk with the Lord accordingly. Once the Spirit of God brought a sense of conviction to a sinner, and confession and repentance had been declared, the penitent would present himself to the local pastor, soul friend in tow, to discover some “remedy” for the sinful condition. Going to one’s pastor to receive a penitential prescription is frequently equated, in the literature of that period, to going to one’s physician to cure some physical ailment.

The idea was that behavior *contrary* to the Law of God and the best interests of the believer and the community was to be corrected by a prescribed regimen of disciplines that would, over time, restore the fallen sinner in the path of righteousness, specifically, by prescribing corrective actions of good, *contrary* to the evil which had been done. As several of the existing penitential handbooks summarized this practice, “contraries are cured by contraries.” To overcome sin and evil in one’s life, one had to take up a contrary pattern of spiritual and righteous behavior. This typically consisted of two components.

### *Components of penance*

First, following the Law of God, some kind of “restorative” behavior was prescribed. A person with a sharp or lying tongue, for example, might be required to recite so many psalms a day for a specified period of time, to bridle his tongue for praise and thanksgiving. One who had become lazy and irresponsible would be given a particular regimen of work to do at some place in the community.

At the same time, a fast was also typically prescribed – not a total abstinence from food, but a selective fast, to be kept for a specified time, often exceeding that of the restorative behavior. The purpose of the fast, begun within but extending beyond the period of penance, was to remind the penitent of his discipline and to reinforce his ability to subdue his body for spiritual purposes.

Penance, as thus practiced, was not a sacrament, and it had nothing to do with earning salvation or merit in the eyes of God. Rather, it was a spiritual discipline that came into play whenever wrong behavior came to light and could not be corrected by confession and repentance alone. Penance was thus an *extension* of repentance, designed to overcome particularly troublesome or besetting sins in a member of the community.

Contrary behaviors were cured by contrary prescriptions of righteous conduct; Celtic Christians thus worked to overcome the evil in their lives with good conduct, based on the Word of God.

Manuals of penance – like counselor’s handbooks – survive from every century of this period, showing just how serious Celtic Christians were about getting their faith right. The blessing of God that accompanied their efforts – and that, as Thomas Cahill put it, saved civilization (*How the Irish Saved Civilization*) – should say to us that there’s something to this practice that could benefit us in our own pursuit of full faith as well.

*For reflection*

1. Do you agree that the practice of penance, as Celtic Christians observed it, sounds like a proper understanding of Romans 12.21? Explain.
2. Penance does not *earn* the believer anything. Rather, it brings discipline to bear on certain aspects of a believer’s life for the purpose of bringing holiness to completion in that area (2 Cor. 7.1). Can you see any ways this might be useful in your own life?
3. In practical terms, what has overcoming evil with good looked like in your walk with and work for the Lord?

*Next steps: What might be some situations in which penance would be appropriate to restore yourself or a fellow believer to the path of righteousness? Talk with a church leader about this question.*

## 6 Set a Guard

*Surely, in vain the net is spread  
In the sight of any bird...* Proverbs 1.17

### *Penance as preparation*

I want to make one more comment about the Celtic Christian practice of penance, which, as we have seen, was frequently employed as a *curative* for besetting or particularly troublesome sins.

During the period of the Celtic revival, this spiritual discipline was used not only as a curative for contrary behavior, but also as a way of preparing oneself against sin. We read about this idea in a penitential written by Columbanus, the greatest of the early Irish missionaries to Europe. Here's how Columbanus put it: "True penance is to refrain from committing deeds for which penance is to be done but when such are committed, to bewail them."

In other words, if we know in advance what constitutes wrong conduct, we'll understand what it looks like when it confronts us along our way in life. So we should make ready in our hearts, minds, and consciences to avoid such conduct, which, if we actually committed it, would require repentance. This is what Solomon had in mind in his proverb: If the bird knows how to recognize the net or the snare, and understands the consequences of straying into it, you can be sure he's going to stay away.

We find similar prescriptions in various places in Scripture. Job "made a covenant" with his eyes, to keep him from lusting (Job 31.1). The psalmist "set a guard" on his tongue, to make sure his speech would be proper among certain people (Ps. 39.1). And Paul counsels us to "take heed" to temptations that may arise in our path, lest we fall through them into sin (1 Cor. 10.12).

### *Preventive penance*

I suppose we might think of this as a kind of "preventive penance," a way of disciplining ourselves *before* we fall into sin so that, when temptation rears its head, we'll be able to recognize and endure through it.

Crucial to this being a successful component in our walk with the Lord is the ability to recognize temptation and to see through temptation to the consequences of obedience or disobedience (cf. Ps. 73). Whenever we find ourselves in temptation, one of two things can happen. Either we will *fall through* temptation into greater depths of sin and shame, or we will *grow through* temptation and thus make progress on the path of righteousness.

Theologian Helmut Thielicke once described temptation as finding ourselves in the place of wanting to be disloyal to God. Temptation itself does not constitute disloyalty, but it invites it. Is this the way we think about temptation? If it is, we can be sure we will regard *every* temptation, or every *possibility* of temptation, with wary eyes, and prepare for it accordingly.

### *Recognizing temptation*

But how do we recognize temptation?

Paul says we will be tempted in many ways, but though we are tempted, we need not fall into sin. A "way of escape" through temptation is there for us to discover and pursue (1 Cor. 10.13). We simply need to know where to look.

Temptation can take many forms, but underlying them all is the Tempter's subtle question to Eve, "Did God

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really say...?” Temptation is anything that challenges the Word, wisdom, or authority of God. The better we know that Word and the more consistently we yield to it, walking in God’s wisdom, the easier it will be for us to recognize the temptations that come our way. Once we identify something as a temptation, we need to think through to its consequences. Asaph explained that sin can lead to real disaster (Ps. 73.18, 19). Through the trap door of temptation lies the slippery slope of rebellion, shame, and even death (Rom. 1.18-32).

But if we *recognize* temptation, and resist it, seeking a way of escape through prayer and the Word of God, we’ll find our relationship with God strengthened and our walk with Him filled with renewed peace and joy (cf. Ps. 73.23-28; Jms. 1.2-4).

Make up your mind, each day, that you’re going to resist temptation with prayer and by resting in the Word of God. Let the Spirit of conviction and repentance be at work within you *before* you come upon the nets and snares of temptation, and you’ll be in a much better position to overcome the evil that threatens to engulf you with the good choices and conduct that please the Lord and honor Him.

This is the way of full faith and repentance.

*For reflection*

1. What kinds of temptations do you expect to encounter today? Are you prepared to deal with them?
2. Why is being grounded in the Word crucial for being able to recognize temptation?
3. How would you counsel a new believer to prepare for and deal with temptation, whenever it arises?

*Next steps: How do the Christians you know deal with temptation? Ask a few of them.*



## 7 It Takes a Friend

*Let the righteous strike me;  
It shall be a kindness.  
And let him rebuke me;  
It shall be as excellent oil;  
Let my head not refuse it.* Psalm 141.5

### *Repentance review*

We've been talking about the importance of repentance, which is a gift of God's grace, accomplished in us by His Spirit, as He convicts us of sin and leads us along the path of restoration to righteousness.

Because temptations confront us daily, and we are still affected by the law of sin within us, we'll need to master the practice of repentance as an ongoing component in our walk with the Lord. If we will do so, we can be certain that the Lord will bring growth in grace and in the image of Jesus Christ to our lives.

But, as we've seen, repentance begins with acknowledging our sins and wanting to turn from them. And just here a real obstacle to a life of repentance can arise. It's simply this: we like sin. Oh, not all sin, of course – just those we can indulge without “hurting anyone else.” A particular attitude, a bit of gossip, a lustful thought, a covetous contemplation, an angry notion – we all fall into one or more of these snares. But some of us prefer to languish there, harboring sin in our hearts in ways that can jeopardize our communion with the Lord.

We are prone to wickedness and evil, and this is because we're not yet wholly sanctified. The Christian life is described as warfare, a struggle, a distance race, even a boxing match. There's a struggle for our souls, and, more than we might like to admit, we're sometimes fighting on the wrong side.

### *Reluctant to repent?*

How can we overcome this reluctance to give up the practice of sin?

This can be particularly difficult if the sin we indulge is something known only to us – and, of course, to the Lord. God sets our secret sins before His eyes (Ps. 90.8); but because others don't see them, we may continue to indulge that which can throttle our prayer lives (Ps. 66.18), sear our consciences (1 Tim. 4.2), trip up our feet, and send us hurtling uncontrollably into more and more sin (Ps. 73.18, 19).

How can we prevent this?

One way is by having friends in your life with whom you feel comfortable, because of their love, to share your innermost struggles. If you're married, your spouse is the place to begin and the best place to turn whenever sin is seeking to wrest you from the path of life. Eve's failure to seek counsel from Adam, and his failure to intervene on her behalf – their failure of one another as spouses – brought the calamity of sin into the world. Together, husbands and wives can become powerful forces for Kingdom progress by serving as soul friends and co-laborers against sin. By sharing together and nurturing one another in your walk with the Lord, you'll not only further the work of sanctification in each of your lives, but you'll grow closer to one another as well.

### *Soul friends*

Another place to turn is to a soul friend, someone of the same sex with whom you are willing to share your plans, fears, challenges, and struggles, and with whom you can enjoy a relationship of mutual accountability

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and edification. Think of Jesus and His disciples. He loved them fervently, spent time with them, talked about the Kingdom of God and their role in it, and encouraged them to develop a big vision for the life of faith. But He also confronted them in their sins – as Peter had to learn the hard way. Jesus warned Peter that he would betray Him. When he did, Jesus cast a withering glance at him, and Peter collapsed in tears. Then, after the resurrection, Jesus came to Peter and restored him to his place as His follower and keeper of His sheep.

This is what soul friends do for one another.

You'll need to spend time with your soul friend, and to share from your time with the Lord – what He's teaching you, the temptations you confront each day, how the Lord is helping you to grow, and so forth. Encourage one another through prayer and by serving as judges of one another by the Word of God. Hold one another accountable for specific areas of growth or ministry. And be ready to deal with lapses into sin whenever they become evident.

Soul friends should be free to challenge one another regarding attitudes or behaviors that don't quite fit the profile of a Kingdom citizen. And they should accept one another's challenges and rebukes before the Lord together in prayer.

Find a soul friend to help you in making repentance a way of life. Since repentance is where full faith begins and where it remains, the more help we can get in practicing it consistently, the more our faith in the Lord will grow in the assurance we need and the evidence He expects.

*For reflection*

1. Meditate on Hebrews 10.24. What kinds of things encourage you to take up good works? Can you do that for others?
2. Meditate on Galatians 6.1-10. How many different ways can you see room for a "soul friend" in this passage?
3. Meditate on Hebrews 13.17. Do the elders or pastors or leaders of your church serve the people in this way? Explain.

*Next steps: Download a copy of the PDF of this study for yourself and a friend. Work through it together to encourage one another in your walk with and work for the Lord.*

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*For reflection or discussion*

1. What is repentance? Why is it so important to the life of faith?
2. Explain the conditions for repentance. How can we tell when the evangelical grace of repentance is at work in our lives?
3. How does the Spirit of God work to bring us to repentance? How can we “co-operate” best with Him in this work?
4. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study?
5. How are you planning to incorporate that lesson into your daily walk with and work for the Lord?

*Prayer:*

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## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.

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