

Walking Away From God - Part 3

by Charles Stanley

Repentance is essential for believers and non-believers, and God forgives sinners before they even ask, but forgiveness does not erase the scars of sin.

Duration: 8:58

Scripture: Acts 3:19

Topics: "Repentance", "Forgiveness"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of true repentance in the life of believers and those seeking to get right with God. It highlights the need for a genuine change of heart and direction, not just a decision without action. The story of the prodigal son is used to illustrate God's compassionate and forgiving nature towards those who repent and turn back to Him, emphasizing that God eagerly awaits our return and is ready to forgive and restore us.

Transcript

So let me ask you a question. How many times have you made a decision? You know, I gotta get right with God. I gotta get my life straightened out.

That's what I'm gonna do. You get out and pray, and I gotta change things. You talk, you go to a counselor.

Yeah, you're right. I'm gonna change things. Have you changed? In other words, what changed? You made a decision to, but why didn't you change? I'll tell you why.

Because you did not repent of sin. And you see, this is the deception. The deception is, well, if I make a decision, then God will understand that, and I'm okay.

No. God understands when I make a decision, and then I turn from the way I was living and head in the direction that He's chosen for my life. And as long as I'm making decisions and going the same way, God doesn't honor that.

Repentance is a word we don't hear much about. But repentance is absolutely essential in the life of the believer and the life of the person who is an unbeliever who wants to get right with God. There's got to be a willingness for God to change them.

There has to be a change. And so he got up and went, and what you have in the rest of this passage is how God responded. And once in a while somebody will say, well, you know, I know I need to change my life, but I've been, I've done so many things that are so bad for so long.

I don't believe God could possibly help me. Well, listen carefully, because here is a perfect example, and Jesus described this in a way you could never forget it. What is God's attitude toward you? You've chosen to walk away from Him.

You've lived in sin. You've done all kind of things. Your guilt, your rebellion, all the things that have gone in your life.

Well, what's God's attitude now? Here is God's attitude. Listen to this passage. So the scripture says, so he got up, came to his father, and I can hardly read this, came to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, the father saw him and felt compassion for him and ran and embraced him and kissed him. Now, here's the significant thing about that that Jesus put it in. I'm glad he did.

When he said his father saw him and he ran, fell on his neck and kissed him, you know why he put that in there? Because in those days, no, no dignified man ever ran in public. And here he is running toward this sinful boy whose clothes had to be smelly, who was dirty as he could be. He had to look like a hippie, probably, back in our earlier days.

In other words, he had to look like somebody who just didn't care anymore. Because what happened? His face showed the wear and tear, probably a little humped over, dirty, filthy, smelly, and his father just loved him. Now, you say, well, maybe his father had to give him a lecture.

There's nothing here about lecturing, because you see, watch this, and this is true of you and me. His father, are you listening? Say amen. His father had forgiven him before we ever saw him.

He'd been waiting for him, hoping and praying that one day he'd come back. You say, well, but you don't know what I've done. Let me ask you a question.

Have you ever gotten so low down you slopped hogs? No. Have you ever gotten to the place in your life where you just messed it all up, and there's nothing left, and you're at the end of yourself? I hope that's where you've been. So I want you to notice what happens here in just maybe four or five words, and the first one is this.

His father's response was he forgave him. He accepted him just the way he was, because he heard his repentant heart. He knew that something had happened.

And so he restored him. He said, my son has come back. And the Bible says they were rejoicing over it.

Now watch these words. He forgave him. He accepted him.

He restored him, and they rejoiced over him. But the scars of his sin were still there, and they'd never be erased. And what I want you to see is this.

Will God forgive you? Yes. So the person who says, well, I can just sin all I want to, and one of these days before I die, I'll get saved. There are probably a lot of people in hell who thought the same thing.

What I want you to see is this. There are scars to sin that nothing erases. Forgiveness, yes.

Saved by the grace of God, yes. But what I want you to see is how dangerous it is to live in disobedience to God. Once you're saved by the grace of God, and you choose to walk away, that forgiveness will not erase the scars.

There's some sins that so impact the human body and the mind and a person's whole emotional being, that being saved will not change. It's a dangerous thing to walk away from God, because listen, it never is like it was before you did, because you got scars to live with. Probably all of us could find some scar.

I remember still, I'll never forget, stepping on a big piece of glass one day in my backyard and cut a big spot in my foot, and sometimes when I'm putting on my socks, I think, boy, I remember that, and that's been a long time ago. But you know what? A little foot scar is one thing, but an emotional scar weighs very heavy in the human heart. And I want to encourage you, whoever you are, wherever you are, we're not talking about church.

We're talking about you getting right with God and asking Him, listen, making a decision to turn around from where you've been going, turn from the life that you've been living, asking Him to forgive you of your sins. Repenting of it means you make a decision, a deliberate, definite, willful, serious decision, to turn your life over to God and let Him guide your life. And when you do, He will forgive you of your sins, and He will change your life.

He will, listen, if you're saved and you've been living in rebellion, He will change your life as radical almost as it was when you were saved. And sometimes more radical for this reason. I was saved when I was 12 years of age, so I didn't have a whole lot to confess and repent of at 12.

But I think about people who saved early in life, then when they get to be 50 or 60 and they've lived in sin, it's a lot more radical for them. To be restored and accepted and forgiven than when they were 12 or 15 years of age. My plea to you is this, don't wreck your life believing the lie that there are no consequences to sin.

Listen, remember this, that sometimes those consequences to sin are not only consequences in our life, in the life of our children, our husband, our wife, our friends. Sin is a destroyer and Christ is the one who can make it right. And Father, how grateful we are for the precious blood of Jesus that you described so beautifully in your Word.

The death of the Savior, Christ's crucifixion, all of that is about you paying the price for our sin and making it possible for us to be acceptable in your sight. I pray today for every person who hears this message that there will be honest evaluation. Am I living a godly life? Or am I living a life of disobedience to God? And remind them again and again, Father, there are consequences they don't really want to pay, but they must.

I pray, Father, for those who have never trusted Jesus as their Savior, to remember and to realize apart from Jesus Christ, there is no hope. Give people the courage to make the decision to repent, to ask for forgiveness of their sin, and to make a definite decision about their relationship with you. And we pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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