

# What Is True Repentance?

by Steve Gallagher

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*True repentance involves confessing and forsaking sin, and experiencing godly sorrow and remorse, leading to freedom and liberty in Christ.*

**Duration:** 45:34

**Scripture:** Acts 3:19

**Topics:** "True Repentance", "Spiritual Transformation"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the transformative power of repentance and the importance of yielding to God's work in our hearts. The speaker shares a personal testimony of a life marked by sin and rebellion, leading to a powerful encounter with God that brought about lasting change and victory over habitual sin. The message highlights the need for genuine repentance, the sorrow that leads to transformation, and the fruit of a changed life that reflects God's work within.

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## Transcript

What God can do with a person who's willing to yield to his great and mighty hand, amen? Would you open your Bibles to Galatians chapter 5? Galatians chapter 5, and while you're opening there, I just want to share my own story. I was raised in a Southern Baptist church in Sacramento by a godly mother, but I also had a father who was deep in sin, and one day when I was a young boy, I discovered pornography under his bed, and I'd never be the same again after that. As I entered my teen years, I rebelled against my family and against God, and I became like the prodigal son and got involved in the whole drug subculture out in California in the late 60s, early 70s, and during that period of my life, I just, you know, I totally gave over to crime and just that whole, just rebellion that was out in California.

I guess it was everywhere, too, you know, but it was really out in California. And also during that period of my life, I discovered girls, and I started on a course of seducing girls one after another, you know, getting into relationships, using girls for what I could get, and dumping them and going on to another, and just went on, girl after girl, and just went on that way for several years. Well, people knew me as a womanizer, and that's not such a bad thing in our culture, you know, in fact, you can almost be kind of proud of that, but what people didn't realize was that I had a secret problem with pornography that was growing worse.

You know, it just started when I was a young teenager, of course, I found that pornography as a kid, but then as a young teenager, I got involved in, oh, you know, the so-called harmless magazines, Playboy and Penthouse, but how many of you know, sin is never satisfied? And as I continued on, you know, in my 20s,

my problems with pornography grew worse. One day I entered an adult bookstore in Sacramento, kind of snuck in, scared to death that someone that knew me might see me go in there, but I became so enthralled with what I found in that place that it wasn't long before I was boldly walking in, not caring who saw me, and the more I filled my mind with the filth of pornography, the more my life became driven by lust. Jesus said, where your treasure is, there will your heart be also, and my treasure was sexual pleasure, and my heart was permeated with lust, but you know something, dear ones, the more I pursued this lifestyle of pleasure, and the more I pursued these fantasies that I had built up in my mind and in my heart, the emptier my life became.

I mean, you would think it would be just the opposite, wouldn't you? You would think that the more you try to get satisfaction, the more satisfied you'd become, but it's really just the opposite of that, because the more involved with sin you become, the more hollowed out you become as a human being, and the more the need grows greater for more of that sin. Well, in 1979, I met and married my wife, Kathy, and I thought that getting married to a Christian girl would help me to get my life right with God, but pretty soon I was back to the adult bookstores, and now instead of doing better, I was doing worse, because I started dating prostitutes, because it was too hard to, you know, go out with girls and maintain that whole lifestyle, so I needed to have a hidden life, and so I used prostitutes and massage parlors, entered that whole seedy lifestyle out there in California. In 1981, I joined the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, and I thought the great pressure placed on us cadets in the Sheriff's Academy there would give me the incentive to quit the secret lifestyle I had going, but how many of you know that human resolution cannot change a man's heart? It didn't go away, and in fact, the pressures of being a cop in Los Angeles and all of that actually drove me into my sin all the more, and after I graduated from the Sheriff's Academy, I was assigned to a maximum security jail facility there in Los Angeles, and I just became a violent dispenser of vigilante justice there in the jail, and on the job, I thrived on the violence, and off the job, I was insanely pursuing my obsessions with sex.

Well, if you haven't got a sense of it, my life was quickly spiraling out of control, and one day, my wife finally got to where she just could not take it anymore, and she left me, and several weeks went by, and you know, I, at first, I was kind of relieved. I mean, it hurt, and I missed her, but it was kind of nice, because now I had total freedom to give over, you know, and I did give over, and I started dating girls and getting all involved again, and several weeks went by like that, and one day, I woke up in the apartment of one of these girls, and I don't know how to say it, dear ones, but it's like the blinders came off my eyes, and all of a sudden, I could see the reality of my life, and how miserable, and how empty it was, and that night at the jail, a Christian brother who just, God just put me with this man, he showed me what to do to repent, to turn to God, to turn my whole problem over to God, and you know, I can't go into it now, the book tells the whole story about how God dramatically saved me, and restored our marriage, but that didn't, it didn't end there, I wish I could say that, you know, I got saved, and I had this great, tremendous experience, and I never went back to sexual sin again, I wish I could say that, but the truth is, that three weeks later, I went right back into my sexual sin, three weeks, after a powerful conversion, and you know, I struggled for a couple of years, back and forth, and during that time, God started teaching me principles about living in victory, and what it takes to overcome habitual sin, and finally, you know, I just, I mean, after a while, I wasn't really thinking about it, and I noticed one day, you know something, it's been six months since I've been with another woman, and you know, it was like a surprise to me, and then pretty soon, it was nine months, then it was a year, then it was a couple of years, you know, and after a while, I started realizing, God has given me victory, he's given me victory, and that's when he called me into ministry, and we began Pure Life Ministries out in California in 1986, and in 1989, God laid it on my heart to relocate the

ministry to Kentucky, how many of you know you have to be called to move to Kentucky, you don't just move to Kentucky, and so I, you know, moved to Kentucky, trembling all the way, and we opened up our home there to men struggling in sexual sin, and started off the Pure Life Ministries residential facility with six men in our house, and that's how it began, and today, there's 50 men living there, finding God in a powerful way, praise God.

Now, Galatians 5 here describes the life that I led, and I want to just read a couple of verses here, you're familiar with these verses, let's look here, let's just, let's read verse 16, so I say, live by the Spirit, you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature, and then skip down to verse 19, because here he describes what kind of a life, that I'm referring to this morning, the acts of the sinful nature are obvious, look at the first three, sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery, now can I just say, dear ones, without going into a big teaching about what these terms mean, let me just sum it up this way, those three terms describe, I mean, if the first one doesn't get it, the second one doesn't, if the second one doesn't get it, the third one gets it, those three terms

describe every single sexual act outside of a loving relationship between a man and his wife, everything, everything, you all don't believe me, so what I'm going to do is I'm going to pull you in, I want you to say everything with me, everything, I'm not sure they're convinced, pastor, we may have to work on them a little bit, this word idolatry, the first word in verse 20, you know, if you look that up in the Strong's dictionary, it's very interesting, I just noticed this after all these years, I can't believe it, after all these years, I just noticed that this word means, the Strong's defines it as worshipping images, what does that sound like, anyway, idolatry, which really we all know is anything that you put in the place of God, anything that becomes more important to you than your

walk with God, and then he goes down this list, which, you know, usually when you're in some kind of sin, parts of this, some of this is going to be just a part of life for you, you know, witchcraft, which really is the same word as drug use, hatred, discord, jealousy, rage, selfishness, dissensions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and the like, now look at what he says next, dear ones, and please understand that when Paul said these words, tears were streaming down his cheeks, he was speaking to people he loved, people he was giving his life to, he wasn't up, you know, in some self-righteous, pharisaical, you know, holier-than-thou thing, pointing the finger at others, no, he was warning them, look at what he says, I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit

the kingdom of God, alright, now, you're going to help me, you're going to help me on this one this time, right, you don't look too convinced, I want you to repeat these words after me, okay, would you do that, this little phrase here, just, I'm using the NMV, just repeat these words after me, those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God, okay, I'm going to say the whole thing, and then you're going to say the whole thing, those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God, is there anybody in this big room here, this great room, in this sanctuary, is there anybody here who lives above what the word of God says, is there any exceptions here, I want to know, is there someone who can tell me, well, that doesn't apply to me, I can live like I want to live, is there

anybody like that in this place, okay, I just wanted to find out, you know, you never know who you're dealing with, and I may have wandered into the Mormon Cathedral, Pastor, I don't know where, you know, I just go where they tell me to go, I don't know, dear ones, I want to tell you this, that I, just from experience, I've been doing this for 17 and a half years, and I know just from experience, that a group this large, there's going to be people in a group this large, who are bound up in habits of sexual sin, of different

kinds, please, dear ones, please hear my heart, I have given my life, I left everything that was dear to me, I have given the last 17 years of my life to minister to people in sexual sin, because God has put a burden in my heart, and a love in my heart for people who

have this struggle, because that was my life, so anything I say from here forth, you understand, is said in love.

Now, you know what they tell you at the end of their own way of, you know, saying things, they, instead of saying, this is going to hurt, they say, you're going to experience a slight bit of discomfort, so I'm going to tell you, this is going to hurt. If there's anybody here that is struggling, and let me just open it up wider, to any kind of sin, and if the same answers apply, I don't care what the struggles may be, maybe you're a chronic gossip, maybe you're filled with envy, maybe you've got a temper, I don't know, you know, it's not just sexual sin, that's what I deal with, that's why pastor brought me in here, but there's all kinds of things people deal with, and I want to tell you that God has given one answer, one primary answer to overcoming habitual sin, repentance, repentance. Now, please understand, when I'm talking about repentance, you know, 17 years, you understand, I have dealt with hundreds or maybe thousands, I suppose thousands of men, how many times I've heard some people say, repentance, I have repented, I've repented time and time again, it don't work, there's no power in that, well then you haven't repented, if you're still in your sin, it's obvious you haven't repented.

No, what you've done is you have made resolutions, honey I swear I'll never go out on you again, because you got caught, or God I promise you, that's the last time, I'll never go back to that again, never again, and then three days later there you are, back in the pig pen, they're getting kind of quiet on me pastor, are they getting mad at me or what? No, when I'm talking about repentance, I'm talking about the power of God, I'm talking about God's transforming resurrection life, coming into your heart and setting you free. Repentance is a predominant theme throughout Scripture, Noah preached it, Moses preached it, the prophets preached it, John the Baptist preached it, the first words out of Jesus' mouth was, repent for the kingdom of God is at hand, the last words out of his mouth to the church of Laodicea in Revelations were, be zealous and repent. How many of you know that repentance is something of extraordinary, enormous importance in Scripture? Now I used to think pastor, I used to think that repentance was something you did just once, you know, you came down to the altar, someone told you about this great church in Memphis, and you come to church and you hear a stirring word from pastor, so you come down to the altar, man that's what I want what they're telling me about, and then that's it.

But that's not it, because you see dear ones, repentance is a lifestyle, it's an ongoing thing for the believer, it's not supposed to be just a one time act. And I thank God for repentance, because it's given me freedom and liberty in Christ. It's not only the way out of habitual sin, it's the pathway into God.

Yeah, they should be falling out of their pews, what's the matter with them pastor? Alright, I'm going to describe to you, I'm going to dissect what repentance looks like, okay? I'm going to dissect it. The process starts when the all-seeing eye of the almighty zeroes into your inner man. Do you know that nothing is hidden from his sight? He sees inside your heart right now dear ones, he sees the motives, he knows what you're thinking, he knows what goes on in your life, he knows what you're doing from Monday to Saturday, he knows the whole thing.

And when he comes in and the Holy Spirit moves in, then there's a sensation you feel inside, it's called conviction. The psalmist talked about it as being arrows that sink into the heart, and the book of Hebrews

described it as the double edged sword that pierces and penetrates between the soul and the spirit. And then when God's word goes into your heart, let's say pastor preaches a powerful message and you're sitting there in the pew and God's word goes into your heart, then your heart is filleted.

How many of you know what the word filleted means? Those from Mississippi, that means the heart's cut open, you know. I better watch what I'm saying, I could get in real trouble here pastor. So as the heart is laid open by the word of God, and laid exposed before God's all seeing eyes, something happens.

We respond. We respond. We respond one way or another, you can even ignore it, but that is a response to God.

Now what a lot of people do is they immediately go into damage control, they quickly start trying to cover the wound, because they don't want to acknowledge the sin. They don't want to acknowledge the selfishness. They don't want to acknowledge the pride and the lack of love for other people.

They don't want to admit fault. You know the bottom line is, people that don't respond to the Holy Spirit, they just don't really care about changing. Solomon said, he who conceals his sins will not prosper.

Can I get you to repeat that? He who conceals his sins will not prosper. But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion. The apostle John said, if we say that we have no sin, we're deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But if we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. See, confess means that you're in agreement. That's really what the word literally means in the Greek.

It means to agree with someone. So what it is, when it comes to terms of sin and God dealing with you, convicting you, God has come in and he's shown you things that aren't right in your heart. Attitudes, motives, lust, pride, whatever it is, and God starts revealing that to you and you come into agreement with what God is saying.

And you say, oh God! You're right, Lord! But the opposite to confession is self-justification. Minimizing the wrongness of it. What's the big deal? What are you making such a federal case about? Man, it's just a little bit of sin.

Man, it's nothing like what they do out in the world. You tell that to God when you get to the white throne judgment. Or they'll rationalize their behavior.

Man, it's not my fault they put a strip club on the way home from work. Or they blame shift. Man, it's not my fault those girls dress the way they dress.

God knows I'm a man and I'm going to deal with those things. It's not my fault. Here's a big one nowadays.

The problem is really because I was abused as a child and therefore I'm a victim and I'm really not responsible for what I do. As the person goes into damage control, what he's trying to do is heal the wound that God has inflicted in the heart. And when a person does that, dear ones, I don't know how many of you have physical scars on your body.

I've got a scar. I've got some scars. Big scar here and stuff.

But a scar material, you know, your skin is kind of soft, you know. And a scar is when you get cut open and then it starts healing. Then what happens is you get this rubbery thing.

I wish I could show you some of my scars. People would get upset. But there's this rubbery thing that happens.

It's hardness. And that's what happens when you start trying to heal over what God has done. What happens is a callousness starts forming on your heart and you become hard hearted.

And when you get that way, dear ones, then you know what happens. Because your heart is hard, the Word of God will still come at you. But because you're hard hearted, it doesn't penetrate.

And you get to the place where you can no longer feel the conviction of the Holy Ghost. You can't hear the still small voice of God trying to reach out to you, trying to save you, trying to pull you in. But I want to say to you, thank God that there are others who do respond to the voice of God.

Thank God that there's men like Bradley Furgess, who when God started showing him the ugliness in his heart, he said, oh God, forgive me, for I am a sinner. And feel remorse, godly sorrow over the sin. You know who's a good example of this in the Bible? It's the prodigal son.

You know the prodigal story? This guy got half his dad's money, went away to a far away country, I'm pretty sure it was Memphis, and he drank it, smoked it, lived it up with the girls, and before you know it, it was all gone. He ended up in the pig pen. And Jesus said that when he was in the pig pen, he came to his senses.

He came to his senses, dear ones. And what that means is he came into a sight of spiritual reality. And once he was there, he made two confessions.

He said, I have sinned, and I am not worthy. That's what a repentant heart looks like, dear ones. I have sinned, and I am not worthy.

You see, when God starts exposing the sin that's in the heart, in your life, or whatever, when he starts exposing it, and you respond to him, then something starts happening inside. A sense of overwhelming grief rises up inside you. I'm just going to read a couple of things out of this book, sexual idolatry, because this describes, there's a whole chapter devoted to what this repentance looks like.

When a person begins to experience true godly sorrow over his sin, a change begins to occur in his heart. He literally begins to hate his sin, realizing its evil, deceitful nature, which has kept him out of real fellowship with God and other believers. And then I quoted Paul, who talked about those who were made sorrowful to the point of repentance.

Praise God, and that sorrow leading them to a repentance without regret. Each time one is broken by God's self, loses that much control over one's life. The old nature which loves the pleasures of sin must be crushed.

This can only come about through the mighty hand of God. I'll just stop there. I don't want to keep reading.

You can get the book later. But I just want to express to you, dear ones, you know what a lot of us are like? Like the guy who broke his leg. This is kind of fresh to me, Pastor, because one year ago yesterday, I crushed my collarbone here, so this is kind of real to me.

But this is like the guy who broke his leg, and he knew that if I go to the doctor, that doctor is going to set my leg, and that is going to hurt. How many of you have had a broken bone set? You know what I'm talking about. Did it hurt? It hurt a little bit, didn't it? But this guy is a coward.

So rather than going into the doctor's office and facing the music and getting his leg fixed, he decided, well, you know, I think I can get by. You know, I think I can do it, and you know, it's not so bad. I mean, it hurts kind of, but man, anything is better than going and having that guy wrench my leg, you know.

So he goes through life lame like that. Ten years later, did I just spit on you, man? She's liable to jump up and slap me right across the face, you know. Ten years later, he's still dealing with the same thing, because the fool didn't have the courage to face it down.

Do you understand what I'm saying to you? Well, that's what repentance is like. I know it hurts. It's sorrowful.

In fact, that word sorrow literally means anguish. But dear ones, Peter said, repent that your sins may be wiped clean and that you may experience times of refreshing from the presence of God. But you know what a lot of us try to do is we come into godly places like this.

The presence of God is here, and we come into this place and join in the, look at me, I'm still limping around. What's the matter with me? I'm free, okay? I'm free. I forgot what I was doing, Pastor.

Where was I? I'm just, what was I saying, Sister Williams? Yeah, you come in here, the presence of God is here, and you know what you're doing though, dear ones? If you have sin that you haven't repented of, what you're doing is you're coming into Pastor's anointing. So you don't have the real thing for yourself. And if this man weren't here, where would you be? You're riding on his coattails.

But God wants you to have all that he has and more. Why settle for a cheap imitation of Christianity when you can have resurrection power? I believe in repentance, if you haven't noticed, because it's changed my life. I was hopeless, I was bound for hell, I had no way out, no psychologist was going to set me free, dear ones.

Only God could do it, but he did do it. Only God can transform a heart. Well anyway, when you start feeling the conviction of God, and you start responding in your heart, you start feeling that sorrow inside.

Dear ones, don't be a coward and run from it. Please don't be a coward and run from it. And go through the rest of your life laying and limping along when God wants you running.

Bradley Furgess, I hope you don't mind, Pastor. I want you to come up here and give a picture of me with these dear folks when I get down there. Come on up here, don't be shy.

Bradley's a little on the shy side. We're working with him, we're helping him. Go up there and get a picture.

When you start experiencing that kind of godly sorrow that leads to real repentance, dear ones, I want to tell you there is a change that happens inside. You understand, it's not outward change, it's inward change. That's what you need is inward change.

But you know what we do, and I don't mean to offend anybody here, but see they're heading for the doors. It gets better. Anybody else want to go to the bathroom? You know what we do is we're walking along in life just in total self-will, rebels to the core, I'm doing my own thing in life, nobody tells me what to do.

And that's basically, you could be a nice guy, but that's basically what's inside. And you're going along and then someone comes to you and shares with you the gospel. And they tell you, listen, man, Jesus just wants to bless your life and he just wants to do all that's good for you.

And listen, if you just start coming to church, man, he'll just bless you, it'll be wonderful, and you go to heaven to boo. And so, oh, okay, so you're going along this way, total self-will and everything, so what do you do? You make a slight little alteration. Oh, okay, what you're telling me is, oh, I just got to quit cussing and outward fornicating drugs and all that and start going to church and reading a couple of good books and I can go to heaven.

Oh, I don't know. I don't know if that's what the Bible says, pastor. I'm not so sure.

You see, what I read in scripture is that repentance means that there's a change, there's a transformation. You're going in self-will this way and God suddenly falls upon you. He starts convicting you of your sin and exposing what's really inside your heart.

And there's only one thing to do. You're broken before God and you turn all the way around and say, God, I want to go for you. That's repentance.

And that's the kind of response to God that brings about freedom from sin. You know, a lot of folks, oh, you just hear it so glibly. I love the Lord with all my heart.

Oh, you do? You love the Lord with all your heart? So if you love the Lord with all your heart, then how come you're so obsessed with this world? How come God's so small in your life? How come sin is still controlling you? How come nothing has really changed about you as a person? But I just want to tell you, dear ones, that God can change you. God can change you. I'm not hyping you here this morning.

I may yell and carry on, but listen, I'm telling you something. I believe with all my heart everything I'm sharing with you because I've seen it in my own life and I've seen it in hundreds of men like Bradley. There he is.

I've seen so many people who really responded to God and you know what happens? You know what happens when there's real repentance? John the Baptist said there will be fruits of repentance. There's going to be fruit. You know, we deal with the wives of men in sexual sin and we're ministering to the man and then the wife comes to us and you know, I have all my friends in my family telling me to divorce him, that he'll never change and how do I know? He's been a liar for 20 years.

How am I supposed to know that this man has really changed, that he's not going to go back to his sin? How am I supposed to know? Well, that's a good question. And this is what we tell him. Did you want to hear what we tell him? Okay, just making sure.

What we tell him is if he's been broken, if he's experienced real repentance, you're going to see a change in him. You will know. The wife will know because she will see that there's a softness about his countenance.

The old hardness, the sarcasm, all that is just not there. He's been broken by God. Dear ones, when you've been broken by God, everything changes.

Everything's different. Of course you can't love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul when you're trying to do it in yourself. You can't work up those emotions.

It don't happen that way. The only way you can love God and love others that way is to be broken. But when you've been broken by God, then fresh life flows through you.

Behold, all things become new. That's repentance. That's repentance.

That's the real thing, dear ones. That's the real thing. Another thing that happens, when you experience true repentance, you become very sensitized to the Holy Spirit.

He's not done with you just because you go through one little experience. Man, I've been through a half a dozen like that. You know, and I thank God for every one of them.

Every one of them hurt, but I thank God for every one of them because every time I was broken, something changed more and I became a little bit more like Jesus. But you become sensitized to the voice of God. I want to just tell you, I'm going to wrap it up here in just a couple, one, two minutes.

I want to tell you just a little story. My wife, Kathy, the pigpen she crawled out of is called self-righteousness. I know nobody here ever struggled there.

So my wife was a very godly woman. I couldn't help but notice, Pastor, God bless this man. He's up there, he should have been resting.

He's had a horrendous week and he's up there, people calling, asking questions, decisions, doing business, you know, and I'm thinking, God, help this man to get a little rest. I hope you get some good rest this week, Pastor. But that's the way ministry can be.

If you really start pouring your life into people, you start just, sometimes you can just become absolutely frazzled and there's no way around it. You know, it's just the way it is. And when you get that way, sometimes you just start losing sight of the Lord a little bit and normally maybe you're walking in the Spirit, but you know, pretty soon you're kind of drifting a little bit.

I'm not saying this about you, Pastor. I didn't mean to pull him into this, okay? It's a different subject. First I spit on the lady, then I offend the pastor.

Anyway, my wife was going through one of these times, probably, I don't know, a year ago, whatever, something, not too long ago. And one day she was driving up to town because she does all the books for the ministry, Pure Life Ministries, and she runs around and buys stuff, you know, and so she went to Staples and we were talking on the phone. And we were talking about, I don't even know what we were talking about, business, you know, and she made a comment about one of my staff members.

And when she said what she said, I heard it in her voice. And I said, I said, Deary, I just heard, that's what we call each other, Deary. He's got a look on his face, Pastor, he's just like, what? He's too big to mess with, you know, so I'm just going to leave him alone.

I said, Deary, you had that in your voice. Well, what are you talking about? And by the way, if you would have heard this conversation, you wouldn't have even thought a thing, you know, but I know my wife. I knew what God was dealing with her about and I know her, you know, so when she said, made this little statement, and I said that to her, she said, well, what are you talking about? I said, you had that in your

voice.

And when I said that, dear ones, she burst into tears. She said, I can't talk now. And she hung up the phone.

And she told me later what happened. For ten minutes, she was out there in the car, weeping. And she kept trying to go into Staples.

She'd get about halfway there and fall apart again and have to go back to the car, you know. Dear ones, do you know what it means to be broken by God? Do you know what it means to have a heart that's sensitive to the Holy Spirit? Because if you would allow God to break through, you would experience times of refreshing. And you wouldn't always have to be trying to conjure it up and work it up or something.

It would just be there.

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/RF0rGVyiiNg.mp4>

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