



## Repentance

*“Let us this very day begin anew,  
and now say, with all our hearts,  
we will forsake our sins and be righteous.”*

### **From the Life of Joseph Smith**

**O**n June 14, 1828, Martin Harris left Harmony, Pennsylvania, taking the first 116 manuscript pages translated from the gold plates to show to some of his family members in Palmyra, New York. The very next day, Joseph and Emma’s first child was born, a son they named Alvin. The baby died that same day, and Emma’s health declined until she was near death herself. The Prophet’s mother later wrote: “For some time, [Emma] seemed to tremble upon the verge of the silent home of her infant. So uncertain seemed her fate for a season that in the space of two weeks her husband never slept one hour in undisturbed quiet. At the end of this time, his anxiety became so great about the manuscript that he determined, as his wife was now some better, that as soon as she had gained a little more strength he would make a trip to New York and see after the same.”<sup>1</sup>

In July, at Emma’s suggestion, the Prophet left Emma in her mother’s care and traveled by stagecoach to his parents’ home in Manchester Township, New York. The Prophet’s trip covered about 125 miles and took two or three days to complete. Distraught about the loss of his firstborn son, worried about his wife, and gravely concerned about the manuscript, Joseph neither ate nor slept during the entire trip. A fellow traveler, the only other passenger on the stagecoach, observed the Prophet’s weakened state and insisted on accompanying him for the 20-mile walk from the stagecoach station to the Smith home. For the last four miles of the walk, recalled the Prophet’s mother, “the stranger was under the necessity of leading Joseph by his



*Repentance is made possible through the atoning sacrifice of the Savior, Jesus Christ. "Search your hearts, and see if you are like God," the Propbet Joseph Smith declared. "I have searched mine, and feel to repent of all my sins."*

arm, for nature was too much exhausted to support him any longer and he would fall asleep as he stood upon his feet.”<sup>2</sup> Immediately upon reaching his parents’ home, the Prophet sent for Martin Harris.

Martin arrived at the Smith home in the early afternoon, downcast and forlorn. He did not have the manuscript, he said, and did not know where it was. Hearing this, Joseph exclaimed, “Oh! My God, my God. . . . All is lost, is lost. What shall I do? I have sinned. It is I that tempted the wrath of God by asking him for that which I had no right to ask. . . . How shall I appear before the Lord? Of what rebuke am I not worthy from the angel of the Most High?”

As the day wore on, the Prophet paced back and forth in his parents’ home in great distress, “weeping and grieving.” The next day he left to return to Harmony, where, he said, “I commenced humbling myself in mighty prayer before the Lord . . . that if possible I might obtain mercy at his hands and be forgiven of all that I had done which was contrary to his will.”<sup>3</sup>

The Lord severely chastised the Prophet for fearing man more than God, but assured him he could be forgiven. “Thou art Joseph,” the Lord said, “and thou wast chosen to do the work of the Lord, but because of transgression, if thou art not aware thou wilt fall. But remember, God is merciful; therefore, repent of that which thou hast done which is contrary to the commandment which I gave you, and thou art still chosen, and art again called to the work” (D&C 3:9–10).

For a time, the Lord took the Urim and Thummim and the plates from Joseph. But these things were soon restored to him. “The angel was rejoiced when he gave me back the Urim and Thummim,” the Prophet recalled, “and said that God was pleased with my faithfulness and humility, and loved me for my penitence and diligence in prayer, in the which I had performed my duty so well as to . . . be able to enter upon the work of translation again.”<sup>4</sup> As Joseph moved forward in the great work before him, he was now fortified by the sweet feelings of receiving the Lord’s forgiveness and a renewed determination to do His will.

## Teachings of Joseph Smith

---

**By repenting of our sins, we draw toward God  
and become more like Him.**

*Wilford Woodruff, while serving as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, recorded:* “Joseph the Seer arose in the power of God; reproved and rebuked wickedness before the people, in the name of the Lord God. He wished to say a few words to suit the condition of the general mass, and then said:

“ ‘I shall speak with authority of the Priesthood in the name of the Lord God. . . . Notwithstanding this congregation profess to be Saints, yet I stand in the midst of all [kinds of] characters and classes of men. If you wish to go where God is, you must be like God, or possess the principles which God possesses, for if we are not drawing towards God in principle, we are going from Him and drawing towards the devil. Yes, I am standing in the midst of all kinds of people.

“ ‘Search your hearts, and see if you are like God. I have searched mine, and feel to repent of all my sins.

“ ‘We have thieves among us, adulterers, liars, hypocrites. If God should speak from heaven, He would command you not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to covet, nor deceive, but be faithful over a few things. . . . Is not God good? Then you be good; if He is faithful, then you be faithful. Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, and seek for every good thing. The Church must be cleansed, and I proclaim against all iniquity.’ ”<sup>5</sup>

“You must be innocent, or you cannot come up before God: if we would come before God, we must keep ourselves pure, as He is pure. The devil has great power to deceive; he will so transform things as to make one gape at those who are doing the will of God. . . . Iniquity must be purged out from the midst of the Saints; then the veil will be rent, and the blessings of heaven will flow down—they will roll down like the Mississippi river.”<sup>6</sup>

“Let not any man publish his own righteousness, for others can see that for him; sooner let him confess his sins, and then he will be forgiven, and he will bring forth more fruit.”<sup>7</sup>

“All hearts must repent and be pure, and God will regard them and bless them in a manner that they could not be blessed in any other way.”<sup>8</sup>

---

**It is the will of God that we forsake our sins and  
put away evil from among us.**

“Hear it, all ye ends of the earth—all ye priests, all ye sinners, and all men. Repent! Repent! Obey the gospel. Turn to God.”<sup>9</sup>

“Let us this very day begin anew, and now say, with all our hearts, we will forsake our sins and be righteous.”<sup>10</sup>

“The infidel will grasp at every straw for help until death stares him in the face, and then his infidelity takes its flight, for the realities of the eternal world are resting upon him in mighty power; and when every earthly support and prop fails him, he then sensibly feels the eternal truths of the immortality of the soul. We should take warning and not wait for the death-bed to repent; as we see the infant taken away by death, so may the youth and middle aged, as well as the infant be suddenly called into eternity. Let this, then, prove as a warning to all not to procrastinate repentance, or wait till a death-bed, for it is the will of God that man should repent and serve Him in health, and in the strength and power of his mind, in order to secure His blessing, and not wait until he is called to die.”<sup>11</sup>

“The sacrament was administered to the Church [on March 1, 1835]. Previous to the administration, I spoke of the propriety of this institution in the Church, and urged the importance of doing it with acceptance before the Lord, and asked, How long do you suppose a man may partake of this ordinance unworthily, and the Lord not withdraw His Spirit from him? How long will he thus trifle with sacred things, and the Lord not give him over to the buffetings of Satan until the day of redemption! . . . Therefore our hearts ought to be humble, and we to repent of our sins, and put away evil from among us.”<sup>12</sup>

“Repentance is a thing that cannot be trifled with every day. Daily transgression and daily repentance is not that which is pleasing in the sight of God.”<sup>13</sup>



*Just as the prodigal son was welcomed home by his father, our Heavenly Father is willing to “forgive sins, and restore to favor all those who are willing to humble themselves before Him.”*

*The Prophet Joseph Smith wrote the following to his brother William Smith after William became angry with him and treated him with contempt: “[I have spoken to you] for the express purpose of endeavoring to warn, exhort, admonish, and rescue you from falling into difficulties and sorrows, which I foresaw you plunging into, by giving way to that wicked spirit, which you call your passions, which you should curb and break down, and put under your feet; which if you do not, you never can be saved, in my view, in the Kingdom of God. God requires the will of His creatures to be swallowed up in His will.”<sup>14</sup>*

---

**Our Heavenly Father is willing to forgive those who repent and return to Him with full purpose of heart.**

*In 1835 Joseph Smith received a letter from Harvey Whitlock, who had apostatized from the Church and desired to return to full fellowship. The Prophet responded: “I have received your letter of the 28th of September, 1835, and I have read it twice, and it gave me sensations that are better imagined than described; let it suffice that I say that the very flood gates of my heart were broken up—I could not refrain from weeping. I thank God that it has entered into your heart to try to return to the Lord, and to this people, if it so be that He will have mercy upon you. I have inquired of the Lord concerning your case; these words came to me:*

*“Revelation to Harvey Whitlock.*

“Verily, thus saith the Lord unto you—Let him who was my servant Harvey, return unto me, and unto the bosom of my Church, and forsake all the sins wherewith he has offended against me, and pursue from henceforth a virtuous and upright life, and remain under the direction of those whom I have appointed to be pillars and heads of my Church. And behold, saith the Lord your God, his sins shall be blotted out from under heaven, and shall be forgotten from among men, and shall not come up in mine ears, nor be recorded as a memorial against him, but I will lift him up, as out of deep mire, and he shall be exalted upon the high places, and shall be counted worthy to stand among princes, and shall yet be made a polished shaft in my quiver for bringing down the strongholds of wickedness among those who set themselves up on high, that they may take counsel against me, and against my anointed ones in the last days. Therefore, let him prepare himself speedily and come unto you, even to Kirtland. And inasmuch as he shall hearken unto all your counsel from henceforth, he shall be restored unto his former state, and shall be saved unto the uttermost, even as the Lord your God liveth. Amen.’

“Thus you see, my dear brother, the willingness of our heavenly Father to forgive sins, and restore to favor all those who are willing to humble themselves before Him, and confess their sins,

and forsake them, and return to Him with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy, to serve Him to the end [see 2 Nephi 31:13].

“Marvel not that the Lord has condescended to speak from the heavens, and give you instructions whereby you may learn your duty. He has heard your prayers and witnessed your humility, and holds forth the hand of paternal affection for your return; the angels rejoice over you, while the Saints are willing to receive you again into fellowship.”<sup>15</sup>

“There is never a time when the spirit is too old to approach God. All are within the reach of pardoning mercy, who have not committed the unpardonable sin.”<sup>16</sup>

## Suggestions for Study and Teaching

---

Consider these ideas as you study the chapter or as you prepare to teach. For additional help, see pages vii–xii.

- As you read the account of the Prophet’s reaction to the loss of the 116 pages (pages 69–71), what insights do you gain about Joseph Smith? What do you learn from his example about repentance?
- Review the section beginning on page 72. As you ponder the teachings in this chapter, take time to search your heart, as the Prophet counseled. Think about what you need to do—and what you need to stop doing—to become more like God.
- Ponder Joseph Smith’s warnings against procrastinating our repentance (pages 73–74). What are some possible consequences of procrastinating repentance?
- Study the Prophet Joseph’s counsel about turning to God and humbling ourselves before Him (pages 73–76). Why would repentance be incomplete without humility? What do you think it means to “return to [God] with full purpose of heart”? (page 76).
- Read the revelation Joseph Smith received for Harvey Whitlock, noting the Lord’s promises if Brother Whitlock would sincerely repent (page 75). What are your thoughts or feelings as you ponder “the willingness of our heavenly Father to forgive sins, and restore [us] to favor”?

*Related Scriptures:* 2 Corinthians 7:9–10; Mosiah 4:10–12; Alma 34:31–38; D&C 1:31–33; 58:42–43

## Notes

1. Lucy Mack Smith, “The History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet,” 1844–45 manuscript, book 7, pp. 1–2, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. Lucy Mack Smith, “The History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet,” 1844–45 manuscript, book 7, p. 5, Church Archives.
3. Quoted by Lucy Mack Smith, “The History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet,” 1844–45 manuscript, book 7, pp. 6–9, Church Archives.
4. Quoted by Lucy Mack Smith, “The History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet,” 1844–45 manuscript, book 7, p. 11, Church Archives.
5. *History of the Church*, 4:588; bracketed words in original; punctuation and capitalization modernized; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 10, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
6. *History of the Church*, 4:605; paragraph divisions altered; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 28, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow.
7. *History of the Church*, 4:479; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Dec. 19, 1841, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
8. Discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 28, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Eliza R. Snow, in Relief Society, Minute Book Mar. 1842–Mar. 1844, p. 34, Church Archives.
9. *History of the Church*, 6:317; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Apr. 7, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and William Clayton.
10. *History of the Church*, 6:363; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on May 12, 1844, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Thomas Bullock.
11. *History of the Church*, 4:553–54; punctuation modernized; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on Mar. 20, 1842, in Nauvoo, Illinois; reported by Wilford Woodruff.
12. *History of the Church*, 2:204; from the minutes of a Church council meeting held on Mar. 1, 1835, in Kirtland, Ohio.
13. *History of the Church*, 3:379; from a discourse given by Joseph Smith on June 27, 1839, in Commerce, Illinois; reported by Willard Richards.
14. *History of the Church*, 2:342; from a letter from Joseph Smith to William Smith, Dec. 18, 1835, Kirtland, Ohio.
15. *History of the Church*, 2:314–15; punctuation modernized; from a letter from Joseph Smith to Harvey Whitlock, Nov. 16, 1835, Kirtland, Ohio.
16. *History of the Church*, 4:425; from the minutes of a Church conference held on Oct. 3, 1841, in Nauvoo, Illinois, published in *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 15, 1841, p. 577.