

Repent. . . That I May Heal You
Neil L. Andersen, *Ensign*, Nov. 2009

My brothers and sisters, it has been six months since my call to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. To now serve with men who have long been my examples and teachers remains a very humbling experience. I deeply appreciate your prayers and sustaining vote. For me, this has been a time of fervent prayer, of earnestly seeking the acceptance of the Lord. I have felt His love in sacred and unforgettable ways. I testify that He lives and that this is His holy work.

We love President Thomas S. Monson, the Lord's prophet. I will forever remember his kindness as he extended my call last April. At the conclusion of our interview, he opened his arms to embrace me. President Monson is a tall man. As he wrapped his long arms around me and pulled me close, I felt like a little boy being held in the protective arms of a loving father.

In the months since that experience, I have thought of the Lord's invitation to come unto Him and to spiritually be wrapped in His arms. He said, "Behold, [my arms] of mercy [are] extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me."¹

The scriptures speak of His arms being open,² extended,³ stretched out,⁴ and encircling.⁵ They are described as mighty⁶ and holy,⁷ arms of mercy,⁸ arms of safety,⁹ arms of love,¹⁰ "lengthened out all the day long."¹¹

We have each felt to some extent these spiritual arms around us. We have felt His forgiveness, His love and comfort. The Lord has said, "I am he [who] comforteth you."¹²

The Lord's desire that we come unto Him and be wrapped in His arms is often an invitation to repent. "Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy are extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you."¹³

When we sin, we turn away from God. When we repent, we turn back toward God.

The invitation to repent is rarely a voice of chastisement but rather a loving appeal to turn around and to "re-turn" toward God.¹⁴ It is the beckoning of a loving Father and His Only Begotten Son to be more than we are, to reach up to a higher way of life, to change, and to feel the happiness of keeping the commandments. Being disciples of Christ, we rejoice in the blessing of repenting and the joy of being forgiven. They become part of us, shaping the way we think and feel.

Among the tens of thousands listening to this conference, there are many degrees of personal worthiness and righteousness. Yet repentance is a blessing to all of us. We each need to feel the Savior's arms of mercy through the forgiveness of our sins.

Years ago, I was asked to meet with a man who, long before our visit, had had a period of riotous living. As a result of his

bad choices, he lost his membership in the Church. He had long since returned to the Church and was faithfully keeping the commandments, but his previous actions haunted him. Meeting with him, I felt his shame and his deep remorse at having set his covenants aside. Following our interview, I placed my hands upon his head to give him a priesthood blessing. Before speaking a word, I felt an overpowering sense of the Savior's love and forgiveness for him. Following the blessing, we embraced and the man wept openly.

I am amazed at the Savior's encircling arms of mercy and love for the repentant, no matter how selfish the forsaken sin. I testify that the Savior is able and eager to forgive our sins. Except for the sins of those few who choose perdition after having known a fulness, there is no sin that cannot be forgiven.¹⁵ What a marvelous privilege for each of us to turn away from our sins and to come unto Christ. Divine forgiveness is one of the sweetest fruits of the gospel, removing guilt and pain from our hearts and replacing them with joy and peace of conscience. Jesus declares, "Will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you?"¹⁶

Some listening today may need "a mighty change [of] heart"¹⁷ to confront serious sins. The help of a priesthood leader might be necessary. For most, repenting is quiet and quite private, daily seeking the Lord's help to make needed changes.

For most, repentance is more a journey than a one-time event. It is not easy. To change is difficult. It requires running into the wind, swimming upstream. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."¹⁸ Repentance is turning away from some things, such as dishonesty, pride, anger, and impure thoughts, and turning toward other things, such as kindness, unselfishness, patience, and spirituality. It is "re-turning" toward God.

How do we decide where our repentance should be focused? When a loved one or friend suggests things we need to change, the natural man in us sometimes pops up his head and responds, "Oh, you think I should change? Well, let me tell you about some of your problems." A better approach is to humbly petition the Lord: "Father, what wouldst Thou have me do?" The answers come. We feel the changes we need to make. The Lord tells us in our mind and in our heart.¹⁹

We then are allowed to choose: will we repent, or will we pull the shades down over our open window into heaven?

Alma warned, "Do not endeavor to excuse yourself in the least point."²⁰ When we "pull the shades down," we stop believing that spiritual voice inviting us to change. We pray but we listen less. Our prayers lack that faith that leads to repentance.²¹

At this very moment, someone is saying, “Brother Andersen, you don’t understand. You can’t feel what I have felt. It is too difficult to change.”

You are correct; I don’t fully understand. But there is One who does. He knows. He has felt your pain. He has declared, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”²² The Savior is there, reaching out to each of us, bidding us: “Come unto me.”²³ We can repent. We can!

Realizing where we need to change, we sorrow for the sadness we have caused. This leads to sincere and heartfelt confession to the Lord and, when needed, to others.²⁴ When possible, we restore what we have wrongly harmed or taken.

Repentance becomes part of our daily lives. Our weekly taking of the sacrament is so important—to come meekly, humbly before the Lord, acknowledging our dependence upon Him, asking Him to forgive and to renew us, and promising to always remember Him.

Sometimes in our repentance, in our daily efforts to become more Christlike, we find ourselves repeatedly struggling with the same difficulties. As if we were climbing a tree-covered mountain, at times we don’t see our progress until we get closer to the top and look back from the high ridges. Don’t be discouraged. If you are striving and working to repent, you are in the process of repenting.

As we improve, we see life more clearly and feel the Holy Ghost working more strongly within us.

Sometimes we wonder why we remember our sins long after we have forsaken them. Why does the sadness for our mistakes at times continue following our repentance?

You will remember a tender story told by President James E. Faust. “As a small boy on the farm . . . , I remember my grandmother . . . cooking our delicious meals on a hot woodstove. When the wood box next to the stove became empty, Grandmother would silently pick up the box, go out to refill it from the pile of cedar wood outside, and bring the heavily laden box back into the house.”

President Faust’s voice then filled with emotion as he continued: “I was so insensitive . . . I sat there and let my beloved grandmother refill the kitchen wood box. I feel ashamed of myself and have regretted my [sin of] omission for all of my life. I hope someday to ask for her forgiveness.”²⁵

More than 65 years had passed. If President Faust still remembered and regretted not helping his grandmother after all those years, should we be surprised with some of the things we still remember and regret?

The scriptures do not say that we will forget our forsaken sins in mortality. Rather, they declare that the Lord will forget.²⁶

The forsaking of sins implies never returning. Forsaking requires time. To help us, the Lord at times allows the residue of our mistakes to rest in our memory.²⁷ It is a vital part of our mortal learning.

As we honestly confess our sins, restore what we can to the offended, and forsake our sins by keeping the commandments, we are in the process of receiving forgiveness. With time, we will feel the anguish of our sorrow subside, taking “away the guilt from our hearts”²⁸ and bringing “peace of conscience.”²⁹

For those who are truly repentant but seem unable to feel relief: continue keeping the commandments. I promise you, relief will come in the timetable of the Lord. Healing also requires time.

If you are concerned, counsel with your bishop. A bishop has the power of discernment.³⁰ He will help you.

The scriptures warn us, “Do not procrastinate the day of your repentance.”³¹ But, in this life, it is never too late to repent.

Once I was asked to meet an older couple returning to the Church. They had been taught the gospel by their parents. After their marriage, they left the Church. Now, 50 years later, they were returning. I remember the husband coming into the office pulling an oxygen tank. They expressed regret at not having remained faithful. I told them of our happiness because of their return, assuring them of the Lord’s welcoming arms to those who repent. The elderly man responded, “We know this, Brother Andersen. But our sadness is that our children and grandchildren do not have the blessings of the gospel. We are back, but we are back alone.”

They were not back alone. Repentance not only changes us, but it also blesses our families and those we love. With our righteous repentance, in the timetable of the Lord, the lengthened-out arms of the Savior will not only encircle us but will also extend into the lives of our children and posterity. Repentance always means that there is greater happiness ahead.

I bear witness that our Savior can deliver us from our sins. I have personally felt His redeeming power. I have unmistakably seen His healing hand upon thousands in nations throughout the world. I testify that His divine gift removes guilt from our heart and brings peace to our conscience.

He loves us. We are members of His Church. He invites each of us to repent, turn away from our sins, and come unto Him. I witness that He is there in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.