

Repent!

This chapter is addressed to all sinners, but especially to us children or spouses who, unknowingly, have been the source of grief to our long-suffering relatives. “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.” (Acts 17:30, NIV)

How we respond to this call for repentance will result in how God will deal with us. There are three general models.

First

The story in the *Book of Jonah* illustrates very well the best case scenario.

Jonah was sent to tell the people of Nineveh that if they continued in their ungodliness they would be destroyed. “Jonah began his journey through the city, and when he had gone only a single day’s walk announcing, ‘Forty days more and Nineveh shall be overthrown,’ the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and all of them, great and small, put on sackcloth.” (Jon 3:4–5, NAB)

Even the king reacted positively. He made this decree: “... Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.” (Jon 3:8–9, NIV)

“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.” (Jon 3:10, NIV)

We pray that, like the Ninevites, we will heed the Lord’s warning, and stop offending God and our kinfolk.

Second

When God’s gentle appeals fall on deaf ears, he will apply more pressure.

“Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.” (Pr 13:24, NIV)

“My child, do not scorn correction from Yahweh, do not resent his reproof; for Yahweh reproves those he loves, as a father the child whom he loves.” (Pr 3:11–12, NJB)

“Those whom I love, I reprove and chastise. Be earnest, therefore, and repent.” (Rev 3:19, NAB)

Are any of us at the moment experiencing broken relationships, family conflicts, and pointed criticisms from friends or foes, illnesses, accidents, failures...? These are not punishments from the Lord, but may have been permitted as promptings for us to set straight some things which are not right.

With a contrite heart let us turn to the Holy Spirit and implore him to help us discover where our problem areas are. Let us ask him reverently to assist us in repairing the damages we have done to ourselves and to those near us.

Third

As a last resort, God may have to deal drastically with the most recalcitrant of his people. “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.” (Heb 10:26–27, NIV)

In the following discourse we hear Jesus alluding to two Old Testament incidents. “As it was in Noah’s day, so will it also be in the days of the Son of man. People were eating and drinking, marrying wives and husbands, right up to the day Noah went into the ark, and the Flood came and destroyed them all. It will be the same as it was in Lot’s day: people were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, but the day Lot left Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and it destroyed them all.” (Lk 17:26–29, NJB)

We pray that this last stage will never have to be reached in any part of the world. God does not want sinners to die, but that they reform. “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the

Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? ... For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!” (Ezek 18:23, 32, NIV)

What Should We Do?

Listen to the people’s question after John the Baptist spoke to them at the river Jordan. “He said therefore to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits that befit repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father”; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’

“And the multitudes asked him, ‘What then shall we do?’” (Lk 3:7–10, RSV)

God’s reply could well be: “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to him.” (Deut 30:19–20, NAB)

Like the thousands who heard the apostles’ pleas on Pentecost Day, let us make the resolution to repent. “Hearing this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘What are we to do, brothers?’ ‘You must repent,’ Peter answered.” (Acts 2:37–38, NJB)

Serve the Lord

Besides turning back to God, besides healing the wounds we may have brought about to friends and relatives, besides avoiding the chastisements which await those who disregard Jesus, we can go one step further: take part in the Lord’s work.

This is a much better way to resolve family problems than sitting around all day watching television, or reading one story book after another, or playing games, or listening to music, or talking on the phone. Why not try engaging ourselves and our families in performing good deeds for our neighbours or for the Lord.

Matthew the tax collector is an example of someone who answered God’s call. “As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he got up and followed him. While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples.” (Mt 9:9–10, NAB) Besides taking time off his lucrative job to join Jesus, Mathew began bringing his colleagues to Jesus.

Peter and Andrew, too, when they heard Jesus’ invitation, accepted instantly. “As he was walking by the Lake of Galilee he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and his brother Andrew; they were making a cast into the lake with their net, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Come after me and I will make you fishers of people.’ And at once they left their nets and followed him.” (Mt 4:18–20, NJB)

Jesus needs labourers to continue the tasks he left for his followers after his ascension into heaven. “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.” (Mt 9:37, NIV)

“My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest.” (Jn 4:34–35, RSV)

Will you consider becoming one of Jesus’ harvesters in your home or among your acquaintances or in your parish? Whatever walk of life you are in, there may be one or more persons who, through contact with you, will be saved from a great deal of spiritual hardship because of your courageous and unselfish decision to be allied with the Lord’s work. Will you let yourself be a channel of his graces and redirect your life for the benefit of all?

“Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father.” (Jn 14:12, NAB)

One of Jesus’ many wishes is this: “It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples.” (Jn 15:8, NJB) Let his wish be fulfilled in you and your family, and so bring great glory, honour and praise to your loving Father in heaven.