

Unburden

Your

Soul



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Forward

Repentance like forgiveness is a necessary part of God's plan for Those who enter into God's provision for his kingdom.

It seems perfectly clear that David was called "A man after God's Own heart" because he was quick to repent.

We must always repent to God, but when we have wronged our Fellow man, we must also repent to him.

Divorce and many kinds of dissension could have a different Outcome if people would seek forgiveness for the wrong that he has done.

Try it. It is not hard. Say, "I did wrong and I am sorry."

You cannot be saved or receive forgiveness without repentance.

Think of the relief to be forgiven. Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Put away selfish pride.

Throughout this study you will find that the word of God directs us to salvation through repentance.

Rejoice in the Lord through repentance and forgiveness.

Chapter 1



True repentance is revealed by changed actions.

Exodus 9:27-34

Then Pharaoh urgently sent for Moses and Aaron. "I finally admit my fault," he confessed. "The Lord is right, and my people and I are wrong. Please beg the Lord to end this terrifying thunder and hail. I will let you go at once."

"All right," Moses replied. "As soon as I leave the city, I will lift my hands and pray to the Lord. Then the thunder and hail will stop. This will prove to you that the earth belongs to the Lord. [30] But as for you and your officials, I know that you still do not fear the Lord God as you should."

All the flax and barley were destroyed because the barley was ripe and the flax was in bloom. But the wheat and the spelt were not destroyed because they had not yet sprouted from the ground.

So Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city. As he lifted his hands to the Lord, all at once the thunder and hail stopped, and the downpour ceased. When Pharaoh saw this, he and his officials sinned yet again by stubbornly refusing to do as they had promised.

After promising to let the Hebrews go, Pharaoh immediately broke his promise and brought even more trouble upon the land. His actions reveal that his repentance was not real. We do damage to ourselves and to others if we pretend to change but don't mean it.

Ezra 10:3-4

Let us now make a covenant with our God to divorce our pagan wives and to send them away with their children. We will follow the advice given by you and by the others who respect the commands of our God. We will obey the law of God.

Take courage, for it is your duty to tell us how to proceed in setting things straight, and we will cooperate fully."

Why were the men commanded to send away their wives and children? Although the measure was extreme, intermarriage to pagans was strictly forbidden (Deut. 7:3-4), and even the priests and Levites had intermarried.

This could be compared today to a Christian marrying a devil worshiper. Although a severe solution, it only involved 113 of the approximately 29,000 families.

Ezra's strong act, though very difficult for some, was necessary to preserve Israel as a nation committed to God. Some of the exiles of the northern kingdom of Israel had lost both their spiritual and physical identity through intermarriage.

Their pagan spouses had caused the people to worship idols. Ezra did not want this to happen to the exiles of the southern kingdom of Judah.

Following Ezra's earnest prayer, the people confessed their sin to God. Then they asked for direction in restoring their relationship with God. True repentance does not end with words of confession—that would be mere lip service. It must lead to corrected behavior and changed attitudes.

When you sin and are truly sorry, confess this to God, ask his forgiveness, and accept his grace and mercy. Then, as an act of thankfulness for your forgiveness, make the needed corrections.

Ezra 10:11

Confess your sin to the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and do what he demands. Separate yourselves from the people of the land and from these pagan women."

As believers in Christ, all our sins are forgiven. His death cleansed us from all sin. Why do we then still confess our sins? Confession is more than appropriating Christ's forgiveness for what we have done wrong, and we do not have to confess again sins that were previously confessed.

Confession is agreeing with God that our thoughts, words, and actions are wrong and contrary to his will. It is recommitting ourselves to do his will and to renounce any acts of disobedience. Confession is turning away from sin and asking God for fresh power to live for him.

Old Testament sacrifices required an attitude of repentance.

Leviticus 5:5

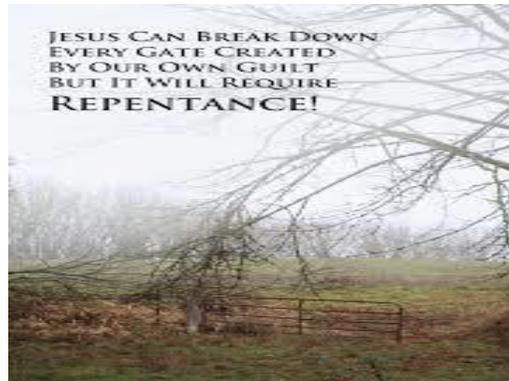
"When any of the people become aware of their guilt in any of these ways, they must confess their sin

The entire system of sacrifices could not help a sinner unless he brought his offering with an attitude of repentance and a willingness to confess sin.

Today, because of Christ's death on the cross, we do not have to sacrifice animals. But it is still vital to confess sin, because confession shows realization of sin, awareness of God's holiness, humility before God, and willingness to turn from this sin (Psalm 51:16-17).

Even Jesus' death will be of little value to us if we do not repent and follow him. It is like a vaccine for a dangerous disease—it won't help unless it enters the bloodstream.

Chapter 2



Repentance must be more than admitting guilt.

Numbers 14:40-44

So they got up early the next morning and set out for the hill country of Canaan. "Let's go," they said. "We realize that we have sinned, but now we are ready to enter the land the Lord has promised us."

But Moses said, "Why are you now disobeying the Lord's orders to return to the wilderness? It won't work. Do not go into the land now. You will only be crushed by your enemies because the Lord is not with you. When you face the Amalekites and Canaanites in battle, you will be slaughtered. The Lord will abandon you because you have abandoned the Lord."

But the people pushed ahead toward the hill country of Canaan, despite the fact that neither Moses nor the Ark of the Lord's covenant left the camp.

When the Israelites realized their foolish mistake, they were suddenly ready to return to God.

But God didn't confuse their admission of guilt with true repentance because he knew their hearts. Sure enough, they soon went their own way again. Sometimes right actions or good intentions come too late.

We must not only do what is right, but also do it at the right time. God wants complete and instant obedience.

We need continual repentance.

Deut. 31:27-29

For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are. Even now, while I am still with you, you have rebelled against the Lord. How much more rebellious will you be after my death!

Now summon all the leaders and officials of your tribes so that I can speak to them and call heaven and earth to witness against them.

I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt and will turn from the path I have commanded you to follow. In the days to come, disaster will come down on you, for you will make the Lord very angry by doing what is evil in his sight."

Moses knew that the Israelites, in spite of all they had seen of God's work, were rebellious at heart.

They deserved God's punishment, although they often received his mercy instead.

We too are stubborn and rebellious by nature. Throughout our lives we struggle with sin. Repentance once a month or once a week is not enough. We must constantly turn from our sins to God and let him, in his mercy, save us.

Repentance measures our spiritual integrity.

Judges 2:4

When the angel of the Lord finished speaking, the Israelites wept loudly.

The people of Israel knew they had sinned, and they wept aloud, responding with deep sorrow. Because we have a tendency to sin, repentance is the true measure of spiritual sensitivity.

Repentance means asking God to forgive us, and then abandoning our sinful ways. But we cannot do this sincerely unless we are truly sorry for our sinful actions. When we are aware that we have done wrong, we should admit it plainly to God rather than try to cover it up or hope we can get away with it.

The book of Judges reveals cycle of sin, judgment and repentance.
Judges 2:10

After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the Lord or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel.

One generation died, and the next did not follow God. Judges 2:10-3:7 is a brief preview of the cycle of sin, judgment, and repentance that Israel experienced again and again. Each generation failed to teach the next generation to love and follow God. Yet this was at the very center of God's law (Deut. 6:4-9). It is tempting to leave the job of teaching the Christian faith to the church or Christian school. Yet God says that the responsibility for this task belongs primarily to the family. Because children learn so much by our example, faith must be a family matter.

Chapter 3



No one is too evil to repent.

1 Kings 21:29

"Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has done this, I will not do what I promised during his lifetime. It will happen to his sons; I will destroy all his descendants."

Ahab was more wicked than any other king of Israel (1 Kings 16:30; 1 Kings 21:25), but when he repented in deep humility, God took notice and reduced his punishment.

The same Lord who was merciful to Ahab wants to be merciful to you. No matter how evil you have been, it is never too late to humble yourself, turn to God, and ask for forgiveness.

God gave Israel and Judah many opportunities for repentance.

2 Kings 25:1

So on January 15, during the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon led his entire army against Jerusalem. They surrounded the city and built siege ramps against its walls.

Judah was invaded by the Babylonians three times (2 Kings 24:1; 2 Kings 24:10; 2 Kings 25:1), just as Israel was invaded by the Assyrians

three times. Once again, God demonstrated his mercy in the face of deserved judgment by giving the people repeated opportunities to repent.

Repentance is changing behavior that produces sin.

2 Kings 22:19

You were sorry and humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I said against this city and its people, that this land would be cursed and become desolate. You tore your clothing in despair and wept before me in repentance. So I have indeed heard you, says the Lord.

When Josiah realized how corrupt his nation had become, he tore his robes and wept before God. Then God had mercy on him. Josiah used the customs of his day to show his repentance.

When we repent today, we are unlikely to tear our clothing, but weeping, fasting, making restitution or apologies (if our sin has involved others) demonstrate our sincerity when we repent. The hardest part of repentance is changing the attitudes that originally produced the sinful behavior.

Repentance must precede forgiveness.

1 Chron. 21:8

Then David said to God, "I have sinned greatly and shouldn't have taken the census. Please forgive me for doing this foolish thing."

When David realized his sin, he took full responsibility, admitted he was wrong, and asked God to forgive him.

Many people want to add God and the benefits of Christianity to their lives without acknowledging their personal sin and guilt. But confession and repentance must come before receiving forgiveness.

Like David, we must take full responsibility for our actions and confess them to God before we can expect him to forgive us and continue his work in us.

Chapter 4

PSALM 51:1-17 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. ¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, You will not despise.

Repentance may require a broken heart.

Ezekiel 6:8-10

"But I will let a few of my people escape destruction, and they will be scattered among the nations of the world. Then when they are exiled among the nations, they will remember me.

They will recognize how grieved I am by their unfaithful hearts and lustful eyes that long for other gods. Then at last they will hate themselves for all their wickedness.

They will know that I alone am the Lord and that I was serious when I predicted that all this would happen to them.

A ray of light appears in this prophecy of darkness—God would spare a remnant of people, but only after they had learned some hard lessons.

God sometimes has to break a person in order to bring him or her to true repentance. The people needed new attitudes, but they wouldn't change until God broke their hearts with humiliation, pain, suffering, and defeat. Does your heart long for God enough to change those areas displeasing him? Or will God have to break your heart?

No limit to number of times you can repent.

Neh. 9:28-31

"But when all was going well, your people turned to sin again, and once more you let their enemies conquer them. Yet whenever your people cried to you again for help, you listened once more from heaven. In your wonderful mercy, you rescued them repeatedly!

You warned them to return to your law, but they became proud and obstinate and disobeyed your commands. They did not follow your regulations, by which people will find life if only they obey. They stubbornly turned their backs on you and refused to listen.

In your love, you were patient with them for many years. You sent your Spirit, who, through the prophets, warned them about their sins. But still they wouldn't listen! So once again you allowed the pagan inhabitants of the land to conquer them.

But in your great mercy, you did not destroy them completely or abandon them forever. What a gracious and merciful God you are!

Israel was devastated by times of intense rebellion and sin. Yet when the people repented and returned to God, he delivered them.

God puts no limit on the number of times we can come to him to obtain mercy, but we must *come* in order to obtain it, recognizing our need and asking him for help.

This miracle of grace should inspire us to say, "You are a gracious and merciful God!"

If there is a recurring problem or difficulty in your life, continue to ask God for help, and be willing and ready to make changes in your attitude and behavior that will correct that situation.

The first steps in repentance

Psalm 80:3

Turn us again to yourself, O God. Make your face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved.

Psalm 80:10

The mountains were covered with our shade; the mighty Cedars were covered with our branches.

Psalm 80:19

Turn us again to yourself, O Lord God Almighty. Make your Face shine down upon us. Only then will we be saved.

Three times the writer calls on God to “restore us.” Before restoration must come repentance, turning away from sin. Repentance involves humbling ourselves and turning to God to receive his forgiveness. As we turn to God, he helps us see ourselves, including our sin, more clearly. Then, as we see our sin, we must repeat the process of repentance. Only then can we constantly be restored to fellowship with God.

Matthew 3:1-2

In those days John the Baptist began preaching in the Judean wilderness. His message was, "Turn from your sins and turn to God, because the Kingdom of Heaven is near."

Almost 30 years had passed since the events of Matthew 2. Here John the Baptist burst onto the scene. His theme was “Repent!”

Repentance means doing an about-face—a 180-degree turn—from the kind of self-centeredness that leads to wrong actions such as lying, cheating, stealing, gossiping, taking revenge, abusing, and indulging in sexual immorality.

A person who repents stops rebelling and begins following God's way of living prescribed in his Word. The first step in turning to God is to admit your sin, as John urged.

Then God will receive you and help you live the way he wants. Remember that only God can get rid of sin. He doesn't expect us to clean up our lives *before* we come to him.

The kingdom of heaven began when God himself entered human history as a man. Today Jesus Christ reigns in the hearts of believers, but the kingdom of heaven will not be fully realized until all evil in the world is judged and removed.

Christ came to earth first as a suffering servant; he will come again as King and Judge to rule victoriously over all the earth.

Nineveh's repentance is a contrast to Israel's stubbornness

Jonah 3:10

When God saw that they had put a stop to their evil ways, he had mercy on them and didn't carry out the destruction he had threatened.

The pagan people of Nineveh believed Jonah's message and repented. What a miraculous effect God's words had on those evil people! Their repentance stood in stark contrast to Israel's stubbornness.

The people of Israel had heard many messages from the prophets, but they had refused to repent. The people of Nineveh only needed to hear God's message once.

Jesus said that at the judgment, the men of Nineveh will stand up to condemn the Israelites for their failure to repent (Matthew 12:39-41). It is not our hearing God's word that pleases him, but our responding obediently to it.

God responded in mercy by canceling his threatened punishment. God had said that any nation on which he had pronounced judgment would be saved if they repented (Jeremiah 18:7-8).

God forgave Nineveh, just as he had forgiven Jonah. The purpose of God's judgment is correction, not revenge. He is always ready to show compassion to anyone willing to seek him.

Chapter 5



When repentance is and isn't good news

Matthew 3:3

**Isaiah had spoken of John when he said,
"He is a voice shouting in the wilderness:
'Prepare a pathway for the Lord's coming!
Make a straight road for him!' "**

The prophet quoted is Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3), one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament and one of the most quoted in the New. Like Isaiah, John was a prophet who urged the people to confess their sins and live for God.

Both prophets taught that the message of repentance is good news to those who listen and seek the healing forgiveness of God's love, but terrible news to those who refuse to listen and thus cut off their only hope.

John the Baptist *prepared* the way for Jesus. People who do not know Jesus need to be prepared to meet him.

We can prepare them by explaining their need for forgiveness, demonstrating Christ's teachings by our conduct, and telling them how Christ can give their lives meaning.

We can "make straight paths for him" by correcting misconceptions that might be hindering people from approaching Christ. Someone you know may be open to a relationship with Christ. What can you do to prepare the way for this person?

What repentance means.

Matthew 3:6

And when they confessed their sins, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

When you wash dirty hands, the results are immediately visible. But repentance happens inside with a cleansing that isn't seen right away.

So John used a symbolic action that people could see: baptism. The Jews used baptism to initiate converts, so John's audience was familiar with the rite. Here, baptism was used as a sign of repentance and forgiveness.

Repent means "to turn," implying a change in behavior. It is turning from sin toward God. Have you repented of sin in your life? Can others see the difference it makes in you?

A changed life with new and different behavior makes your repentance real and visible.

The Jordan River is about 70 miles long, its main section stretching between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Jerusalem lies about 20 miles west of the Jordan. This river was Israel's eastern border, and many significant events in the nation's history took place there.

It was by the Jordan River that the Israelites renewed their covenant with God before entering the promised land (Joshua 1-2). Here John the Baptist calls them to renew their covenant with God again, this time through baptism.

2 Cor. 7:10

For God can use sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek salvation. We will never regret that kind of sorrow. But sorrow without repentance is the kind that results in death.

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation” refers to the sorrow for our sins that result in changed behavior. Many people are sorry only for the effects of their sins or for being caught (“worldly sorrow”).

Compare Peter’s remorse and repentance with Judas’s bitterness and act of suicide. Both disowned Christ. One repented and was restored to faith and service; the other took his own life.

Baptism is a sign of repentance

Mark 1:4

This messenger was John the Baptist. He lived in the wilderness and was preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had turned from their sins and turned to God to be forgiven.

Why does the Gospel of Mark begin with the story of John the Baptist and not mention the story of Jesus’ birth?

Important Roman officials of this day were always preceded by an announcer or herald. When the herald arrived in town, the people knew that someone of prominence would soon arrive.

Because Mark’s audience was primarily Roman Christians, he began his book with John the Baptist, whose mission it was to announce the coming of Jesus, the most important man who ever lived.

Roman Christians would have been less interested in Jesus’ birth than in this messenger who prepared the way.

John chose to live in the desert

- (1) to get away from distractions so he could hear God’s instructions;
- (2) to capture the undivided attention of the people;
- (3) to symbolize a sharp break with the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who preferred their luxurious homes and positions of authority over doing God’s work;
- (4) to fulfill Old Testament prophecies that said John would be “a voice of one calling: in the desert prepare the way for the LORD” (Isaiah 40:3).

In John’s ministry, baptism was a visible sign that a person had decided to change his or her life, giving up a sinful and selfish way of living and turning to God. John took a known custom and gave it new meaning. The Jews often baptized non-Jews who had converted to Judaism.

But to baptize a Jew as a sign of repentance was a radical departure from Jewish custom. The early church took baptism a step further, associating it with Jesus’ death and resurrection

The two sides of repentance

Luke 3:3

Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had turned from their sins and turned to God to be forgiven.

Repentance has two sides—turning away from sins and turning toward God. To be truly repentant, we must do both.

We can't just say we believe and then live any way we choose (see Luke 3:7-8), and neither can we simply live a morally correct life without a personal relationship with God, because that cannot bring forgiveness from sin.

Determine to rid your life of any sins God points out, and put your trust in him alone to guide you.

Chapter 6



Repentance must be tied to action.

Luke 3:8-9

Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God. Don't just say, 'We're safe—we're the descendants of Abraham.'

That proves nothing. God can change these stones here into children of Abraham.

Even now the ax of God's judgment is poised, ready to sever your roots. Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire."

Many of John's hearers were shocked when he said that being Abraham's descendants was not enough for God.

The religious leaders relied more on their family lines than on their faith for their standing with God. For them, religion was inherited.

But a personal relationship with God is not handed down from parents to children. Everyone has to commit to it on his or her own. Don't rely on someone else's faith for your salvation. Put your own faith in Jesus, and then exercise it every day.

Confession of sins and a changed life are inseparable. Faith without deeds is dead (James 2:14-26).

Jesus' harshest words were to the respectable religious leaders who lacked the desire for real change. They wanted to be known as religious authorities, but they didn't want to change their hearts and minds.

Thus their lives were unproductive. Repentance must be tied to action, or it isn't real. Following Jesus means more than saying the right words; it means acting on what he says.

Repentance makes us valuable to God.

Luke 3:17

He is ready to separate the chaff from the grain with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, storing the grain in his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire."

John warned of impending judgment by comparing those who refuse to live for God to chaff, the useless outer husk of the grain.

By contrast, he compared those who repent and reform their lives to the nourishing wheat itself. The winnowing fork was a pitchfork used to toss wheat so that the kernels would separate from the blades.

Those who refuse to be used by God will be discarded because they have no value in furthering God's work. Those who repent and believe, however, hold great value in God's eyes because they are beginning a new life of productive service for him.

Heaven's joy over each repentant sinner.

Luke 15:8-10

"Or suppose a woman has ten valuable silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and look in every corner of the house and sweep every nook and cranny until she finds it?

And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her because she has found her lost coin. In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents."

Palestinian women received ten silver coins as a wedding gift. Besides their monetary value, these coins held sentimental value like that of a wedding ring, and to lose one would be extremely distressing.

Just as a woman would rejoice at finding her lost coin or ring, so the angels would rejoice over a repentant sinner.

Each individual is precious to God. He grieves over every loss and rejoices whenever one of his children is found and brought into the kingdom.

Perhaps we would have more joy in our churches if we shared Jesus' love and concern for the lost.

Don't be suspicious of repentant sinners.

Luke 15:25-31

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, [26] and he asked one of the servants what was going on.

'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the calf we were fattening and has prepared a great feast. We are celebrating because of his safe return.'

"The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, 'All these years I've worked hard for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends.

Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the finest calf we have.'

"His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you and I are very close, and everything I have is yours.'

It was hard for the older brother to accept his younger brother when he returned, and it is just as difficult to accept “younger brothers” today. People who repent after leading notoriously sinful lives are often held in suspicion; churches are sometimes unwilling to admit them to membership. Instead, we should rejoice like the angels in heaven when an unbeliever repents and turns to God.

Like the father, accept repentant sinners wholeheartedly and give them the support and encouragement that they need to grow in Christ.

In the story of the lost son, the father’s response is contrasted with the older brother’s.

The father forgave because he was filled with love. The son refused to forgive because he was bitter about the injustice of it all. His resentment rendered him just as lost to the father’s love as his younger brother had been.

Don’t let anything keep you from forgiving others.

Chapter 6

Repentance needed for entrance into God's kingdom

John 3:3

Jesus replied, "I assure you, unless you are born again, you can never see the Kingdom of God."

What did Nicodemus know about the kingdom? From the Bible he knew it would be ruled by God, it would be restored on earth, and it would incorporate God's people. Jesus revealed to this devout Pharisee that the kingdom would come to the whole world (John 3:16), not just the Jews, and that Nicodemus wouldn't be a part of it unless he was personally born again (John 3:5).

This was a revolutionary concept: the kingdom is personal, not national or ethnic, and its entrance requirements are repentance and spiritual rebirth.

Jesus later taught that God's kingdom has *already begun* in the hearts of believers (Luke 17:21). It will be fully realized when Jesus returns again to judge the world and abolish evil forever (Rev. 21; Rev. 22).

Repentance is the only way to stop sin.

John 12:10-11

Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too, for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus.

The chief priests' blindness and hardness of heart caused them to sink ever deeper into sin. They rejected the Messiah and planned to kill him, and then plotted to murder Lazarus as well.

One sin leads to another. From the Jewish leaders' point of view, they could accuse Jesus of blasphemy because he claimed equality with God. But Lazarus had done nothing of the kind. They wanted Lazarus dead simply because he was a living witness to Jesus' power.

This is a warning to us to avoid sin. Sin leads to more sin, a downward spiral that can be stopped only by repentance and the power of the Holy Spirit to change our behavior.

Repentance brings spiritual refreshment.

John 3:19-20

Their judgment is based on this fact: The light from heaven came into the world, but they loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil.

They hate the light because they want to sin in the darkness. They stay away from the light for fear their sins will be exposed and they will be punished.

Many people don't want their lives exposed to God's light because they are afraid of what will be revealed. They don't want to be changed. Don't be surprised when these same people are threatened by your desire to obey God and do what is right, because they are afraid that the light in you may expose some of the darkness in their lives.

Rather than giving in to discouragement, keep praying that they will come to see how much better it is to live in light than in darkness.

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