

Lesson Five

REPENTANCE

Learning to Solve Problems

Now that you know how to prepare for and begin counseling appointments, and now that you know how to identify cycles, belief systems, and root issues, we can talk about the process of solving an issue. It is essential to remember that as a counselor, your job is to aid in the healing process by asking good questions, introducing helpful tools, and leading someone to the opportunity to get breakthrough. It is not your responsibility to make a client dependent upon you in order to walk in freedom.

You cannot help someone who doesn't have a problem, and you cannot work harder on someone else's problem than they do. -Danny Silk

If you know anything about baking cakes, you know that most cakes have certain basic ingredients in common including flour, sugar,

baking powder, salt, and butter. Depending on the type of cake you're baking, you use varying amounts of these basic ingredients, as well as adding anything else you need to yield your desired outcome. Similarly, in counseling, in order to yield the desired result of health and freedom for a client, there are some basic ingredients that you'll need in varying measure. Once a root issue or target is identified, you'll need to walk your client through these three foundational processes, with varying emphases, according to the specific situation:

- Repentance
- Working Through Pain
- Forgiveness

As counselors, we guide people through these processes in order to break unhealthy cycles and restore each person to God's original design.

It's important to take your time while working through each process to ensure your clients get the freedom that each one provides. Skipping necessary steps can leave people hurting and broken, making it exceptionally harder to help them get free later on. The more times people

pursue breakthrough unsuccessfully, the more hopeless they become.

In this lesson, we will specifically cover the process of Repentance, and in Lessons 6 & 7, Working through Pain and Forgiveness, respectively.

Repentance

In counseling, there are beautiful and sobering moments that we get to share with our clients when they recognize and understand, for the first time, the root issues driving their unhealthy cycles of bondage. People often feel a sense of remorse over the reality of their dysfunction when they recognize the root of their problem, but repentance is more than deep remorse. It's so much more than saying, "I'm sorry." We want people to feel *empowered*, not just remorseful because understanding the root of a problem is a powerful position in that adjustments can be made when ownership is assumed!

The truth is, "I'm sorry" doesn't cut it! True biblical repentance is actually best defined as a changing of one's mind. It can be translated this way: *To turn around and go the other direction; to change the way one thinks.*¹

A lot of people go wrong in thinking that repentance is a moment or an experience of deep regret and conviction. In reality, it's more than that! True repentance is actually a process because changing the way you think and behave after years of unhealthy habits doesn't typically happen overnight.

Why is changing the way you think so hard?

In the early stages of your life, the way you think and process information is developed as a result of your family culture, experiences, and other environmental factors. Years of subconscious, repetitive thought patterns create literal grooves in your brain that act like well-traveled highways for information. These highways of unhealthy subconscious thinking require *conscious* effort to reroute or remove. Simply put, changing the way you think is hard work!

¹ Strong's Concordance: 3340.metanoëo. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://biblehub.com/>. See also Romans 12:2.

I find neuroscience to be absolutely fascinating, and there are many good resources available to you if you want to understand it better, but for the sake of simplicity, consider your brain and body as a sophisticated communication network. There are all kinds of messages sent and received many times per second, most of which are transmitted entirely subconsciously. This vast flow of information about your wants, needs, and desires determines your physical and emotional behaviors. Let's look at a couple of the dynamics of this powerful communication network.

- **Thoughts catalyze actions.** According to Dr. Athena Staik, "Your thoughts create inner standards or rules that spark neurochemical dynamic processes, which selectively govern your choices and actions with precision. It takes a thought to spark an emotion, or drive a decision to take an action, or to take no action at all. And emotions give meaning to thoughts; they are the spark."²
- **Bad thoughts create more bad thoughts.** Dr. Staik says that toxic thinking "stimulates the body's reward or learning centers with pseudo feel-good feelings. It also activates the body's fear response, which further increases the likelihood that the defensive behaviors it triggers will be repeated."³ This sheds light on why we perpetuate negative thinking, even when we don't want to!
- **Thought patterns are learned and can, therefore, be unlearned.** Every person's brain interprets the world differently, but our interpretations are not permanent because they are based on thoughts that can be unlearned, changed, or replaced.

By definition, repentance requires changing the way you think, and neuroscientifically, that means you literally have to reshape the patterned grooves in your brain. This typically requires time and intentionality. Of course, it is possible for God to supernaturally and instantaneously intervene, but more often than not, true repentance is a process.

As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

² Staik, A. (2016). The Neuroscience of Changing Toxic Thinking Patterns (1 of 2). *Psych Central*. Retrieved from <https://blogs.psychcentral.com/>

³ Staik, A. (2016). Toxic Thinking Patterns – How Pseudo "Feel-Goods" Put Your Brain on Hold. *Psych Central*.

Retrieved from <https://blogs.psychcentral.com/>



REFLECT

Scenario: Ella is struggling to find acceptance at school. At seventeen years old, she feels like a failure because she cannot make good friends. She mentions to you that she cannot remember a time when she had friends or knew how to connect with other kids. Through inquiring about her background, you find that she comes from a home with parents who work a lot and often leave her by herself. She tells you, "I will never be like the other kids in class. I will always be an outcast. Life isn't even worth living." Together, you've discovered that the root cause of her pain is that she doesn't believe she is lovable.

If true repentance requires that Ella "changes her mind," what are some of the thought processes that you can identify that need to change in order for Ella to walk the other way in the truth that she truly IS lovable?

The Process of Repentance

As we've already discussed, you cannot change the way you think in a minute or even a day. Scientifically, it takes a minimum of twenty-one days to break a habit and even longer to create a new one!⁴

If you want to travel from California to Texas, you would have to prepare for the journey and acknowledge the fact that you'll have to take a different route than you'd take to the grocery store or work like you do in your normal routines. Simply *wanting* to arrive in Texas is not enough to get you there. Similarly, in order to gain new ground in a process of internal breakthrough, people

⁴ Taylor, R. (2017). *New Habits For Old*. In *Willpower: Discover It, Use It and Get What You Want*. Hoboken: Wiley.

need to gain understanding, create a strategy, and execute a plan! True repentance is largely the commitment to do whatever it takes, for however long it takes, to break old habits and mindsets and replace them with Heaven's Truth.

The first step in the process of repentance is letting your heart feel the conviction of not having been aligned with God's truth over your life. The remorse, conviction, and beautiful exchange of honest apology to God is a significant part of the process! Remember, we can't fix a problem that "doesn't exist." But this is just the beginning! The second step in the process of repentance is actually recognizing that you cannot keep the same belief system and expect different results. Thirdly, you must renounce the old lies and replace them with truth to set yourself on a new path towards your destination of health. This process of renunciation is simple, but we will discuss it briefly to ensure your understanding.

Renunciation

According to *dictionary.com*, "renunciation" can be understood as "an act or instance of relinquishing, abandoning, repudiating, or sacrificing something, as a right, title, person, or ambition; to speak the opposite."⁵

There are many times when people have a wrong belief system holding them hostage, simply because of how integrated it has become in their everyday lives. In these scenarios, intentional effort will be required in order for lasting change to take root. Renunciation is one of the key ingredients to breaking these cycles, and it does not have to be long and drawn out. Following a few simple steps can take a client further down the road to freedom. Let's explore the steps in the context of Lukas's scenario.

⁵ Renunciation. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved from <http://www.dictionary.com/>



REFLECT

Scenario: Lukas is afraid of getting to know people, and even more so for people to know him. He shows anti-social behaviors and cannot connect to his peers because of anxiety. While at work, Lukas often gets ridiculed for his lack of social awareness, which only furthers his anxiety and antisocial behaviors. As you can probably tell, Lukas often feels misunderstood and is losing hope daily about life getting any better. In a previous session, he began to work through the pain of an abusive father, experienced the emotions of disappointment, and forgave his father for not being available on a heart level. Now, the purpose of this appointment is to begin the breaking of negative thought patterns that were created in his childhood through renunciation.

Steps Involved in Renunciation:

1. **Pray and ask Holy Spirit to show the client what lies they are believing.** Lies are thoughts which don't line up with the Word of God that person believes and acts out.

Lukas may believe that intimacy is scary; however, he doesn't have to stay trapped in this negative belief system. Identifying the lie that "intimacy is scary" begins the process.

2. **Identify the root of the lies and where they entered the life of your client.** Quite often people may come to realize they have a problem, but they might not know what the root is. We should ask Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

If Lukas believes that intimacy is scary, have him ask Holy Spirit, "Holy Spirit, when did the lie that 'intimacy is scary' enter my life?" Give him time to hear from Holy Spirit and tell you what He says. Once Lukas finds out what the lie is and where it came from, it's now time for the Holy Spirit to let him know the truth. Lukas can simply ask "Holy Spirit, what is the truth about intimacy?" From there, Lukas is now able to take the next step.

3. **Replace the lies with the truth.** Once a lie is renounced, it is time to replace the lie with the truth. Often the truth is the opposite of the lie and should line up with Scripture.

Lukas could say, "I receive the truth that intimacy is healthy and good."

Get Practical

There are many practical strategies that people can implement in their lives to aid in the process of repentance, renouncing lies, and forming new mindsets. These are tools people can use when they're tempted to revert back to their old beliefs and behaviors. These tools can also be used to proactively practice healthy mindsets. Here are a few I recommend the most often:

- **Use your mirror.** Writing truths on your bathroom mirror is a great way to remind yourself of the truth that opposes the toxic beliefs you are trying to repent from. It's not enough to recognize the lie! We must renounce the lie and replace it with the Word of God. Taking a dry erase marker to your mirror and covering it with healthy mindsets is a practical way to keep the Truth in front of you!

Ex: If you're repenting from self-hatred, litter your mirror with phrases like this:

- I am worth caring for!
- I am beautifully and wonderfully made!
- I am made in the image of God!

- **Set an alarm.** Setting the alarm on your cell phone or one in your home for different times throughout the day can remind you to stop and give attention to the steps you need to take.

Ex: If you're repenting from relying on money to give you a sense of security and learning to trust the Lord as your provider, set an alarm that goes off five times a day to remind you to recall the times in your life when you've experienced the Lord's provision.

- **Ask an expert.** Chances are, if you knew what to do about your situation, you would have already done it! The best posture to take when walking through the process of repentance is that of a learner. Submit yourself to hearing from the best and commit to learn and grow in your areas of weakness! You can find experts on podcasts and TedTalks, in books, or with counselors. The main goal is to strategically form a team of "experts" that help you along in your journey of building a new culture of truth inside of you.

For example, if you are repenting from the fear of being trapped or controlled in your marriage, see a marriage counselor that will give you wisdom, practical tools, and exercises to help you uproot the lies you have believed about this.