



"Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but rather, thinking about yourself less."

—Rick Warren

22-Dec-17

Time to Repent (Part Three)

As explained previously, [God](#) gives His people [time to repent](#), but He is in no way idle during that time. Because He desires sons and daughters in His image, He is always working ([John 5:17](#)) to bring about His spiritual creation. In His [goodness](#), He creates situations and events—from smitten consciences to large-scale calamities—to lead us to (or back to) the right path.

We can see this in the example of the ancient Israelites. As God gave them time to repent, He also sent messenger after messenger. Throughout His interactions with them, He made sure they, especially, were without excuse by sending prophets to remind them of His unchanging will, because He was doing them good. Prophets warned them from [Moses](#) through the time of the judges, up to the exile, and even after. God sent prophets both to the kings and to the nation. Prophets were such a constant feature in Israel that the people just tuned them out and typically persecuted and killed them. God gave His people time to repent, but they considered the lack of divine judgment as [an open door](#) to continue doing what they were doing ([Ecclesiastes 8:11](#)).

God sends us messages as well, though not in the same way. It could be in the weekly sermon or in a sermon from decades ago that is exactly what we need today to get back on track. If we need humbling, God may send a message through a means that we think is beneath us, so we have to humble ourselves even to receive it. This is a theme in the book of Habakkuk, where the prophet was dismayed because God chose to use a nation that he considered to be even worse than Judah. He was horrified that Judah would be corrected by so unworthy a people. With Naaman, God's message involved a slave girl and simple instructions instead of a wondrous work through a man of renown ([II Kings 5:1-14](#)). With Balaam, God sent His message through a beast of burden ([Numbers 22:22-35](#)).

When Isaiah says that God's thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways ([Isaiah 55:8](#)), it indicates that His outworking will frequently contain surprises. *How* He demonstrates His [kindness](#) in leading us to [repentance](#) might be offensive to us, yet it will bear good fruit if we humble ourselves and follow it through.

God gives us time to repent, and He also gives us reminders and helps along the way because He truly wants us to live as He does. Sometimes His reminders are soft, but at other times they are impossible to ignore as the spiritual danger to us grows. On occasion, God steps back and waits to see if we will turn back to Him on our own.

Quite a period of time elapsed between King David's notorious sins and God's sending of Nathan to help lead him to repentance ([II Samuel 11-12](#)). Yet, in experiencing the death of his child, as well as what was later done to his wives ([II Samuel 16:20-22](#)), the parts of God's law that David was ignoring were written on his heart in a profound and unforgettable way. That kindness from God, as grievous as it was, was far better than having his heart set in doing evil. David delayed, and God gave adequate time to repent until He knew it was no longer good for matters to continue as they were.

The time that God gives a person to repent can be a double-edged sword. God allows us time to make the right choices and become reconciled to Him, if we truly are inclined. But we can also misunderstand that grace period, concluding that what we or others have done really is not such a problem, and God must not be too concerned about it. As time progresses, it is easy to

forget the gentle promptings or to override the conviction of [sin](#) that we felt momentarily and then let pass.

We may have silenced the alarm bells, just as Israel silenced the prophets. Perhaps we have numbed our conscience and explained away the nudges that God has given so that we no longer recognize them as coming from Him. The longer we put off making the necessary changes, the easier it is for us to turn away from God altogether. He is absolutely faithful to His covenant and will leave nothing undone in working on our behalf. However, He will not force us to take on His image if we choose the image of [the world](#) instead.

The prophet Isaiah issues this timeless call to repentance:

Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and [return] to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. ([Isaiah 55:6-7](#))

There is a time when the Lord may be sought and found, but this implies that there is also a time when it is too late. God is [merciful](#) and generous in giving us the former, but it does not last forever. For the sake of His spiritual creation, the time also comes when He responds to our choices, whether good or evil. This is why the apostle Paul—held by many to be the "champion" of a "no works" theology—warns of the coming judgment based on what we choose to do now:

But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and [peace](#) to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. ([Romans 2:5-11](#))

In light of this, let us redeem the time that remains ([Ephesians 5:16](#)) and turn back to God in whatever ways we have strayed from Him.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[From Pride to Humility](#)

by John O. Reid

God hates pride and presumptuous self-sufficiency but loves the person who is humble and trembles at His word. Pride consists of emphasizing our own personal endowments, accomplishments, or possessions, presumptuously trusting in our own deceitful heart rather than in God's direction. Two tests to reveal the presence of pernicious pride in ourselves consists of the way we treat others (especially members of our own family) and the way we receive instruction or correction from others. God resists the proud but accepts the humble. Humbleness produces sensitivity toward God, enabling us to be molded and fashioned by God into His purpose.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Living by Faith and Humility](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

People resist God because of their pride, but pride can be neutralized by humility, a character trait that allows a person to submit to God and have a relationship with Him. John Ritenbaugh provides many examples to reveal that God wants us to evaluate ourselves and recognize our dependence on Him, which draws God's attention and favor.

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