

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

06.07.2023 | Timeout and Reset | Nehemiah 9 | Dr. Tim Wiarda

For most of us, Christian life is many things. I mean, it's church. Sunday morning worship, hearing God's word, a circle of friends and relationships, satisfaction of serving. I mean, where would we be without our church? And Christian life is a code of behavior, a responsibility to act with justice and faithfulness, compassion, purity, humility. There's things you do that most people don't, and things you don't do that many people do. And then there's the blessing of being able to rely on God for things, I mean, food, housing, employment, protection and healing, the privilege of prayer. And from another angle, meaning and identity. I may be one small person among billions, but I've got my place prepared by the creator of all that exists. And there's hope. Okay, we all get frightened by thoughts of death or an unknown future, but at a deep level, we know our future is in the hands of a loving God, and He's prepared for us an eternal weight of glory. So I hope you are experiencing all these things and growing in them. But you know, the core around which they all revolve is you and God. Never mind anybody else, I'm talking about your heart-to-heart relationship with God. Your awareness that He loves you, your love, trust and desire to please Him, His Word touching you, your prayers reaching Him. And all the rest, church life, habits of behavior, everything hangs on that one central reality. If your Christian life is real, it began with you doing personal business with God.

And that personal element remains at its core. But sometimes that relationship needs a review, a timeout or a reset. I mean, I've got this map app on my phone, and when I go new places, I use it. And more often than you think, sometimes in route to where I'm going, I get into a confusing place. I mean, I make a wrong turn, I get disoriented. But there's this red button, it says "reset," and I press it. And from whatever location I've gotten lost in, I get a fresh start. And marriages sometimes need a timeout and a reset. I mean, maybe a long walk and talk together. A morning or a day set apart, or a weekend retreat. You know, a couple reviews where they have been and where they want to go. Their self-examination and getting complaints out, listening carefully to each other's concerns, confession, a list of changes to be made. You look back on a day like that and you can see a before and after. May not be the most fun day you've ever had together, but one of the best.

Israel had a day like that with God in the days of Nehemiah. The 24th day of the seventh month, 445 BC, Israel had a day like that. 23 days after the assembly described in Nehemiah chapter 8, that Pastor Ben preached about last week. So the first three verses in Nehemiah chapter 9 kind of give an overview of what that reset looked like. Nehemiah chapter 9 verses 1 to 3. Now on the 24th day of this month, the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth and with earth on their heads. And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquity of their fathers. And they stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day. And for another quarter of it, they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God.

Do you notice two times that expression, the Lord their God? Why the Lord their God? I mean, why not just the Lord or just God? Well, God is a general way of talking about God, creator and ruler of the universe. But Lord was the specific name God revealed to Israel because behind that Lord in your English Bible is Jehovah, Yahweh, the name that God revealed to Moses. When calling him to lead his people up out of Israel, out of Egypt, out of slavery. It's the name that were called their covenant relationship with God, not just his power, but his personal character. Anyhow, Israel had regular time out days, weekly Sabbath, yearly festivals like Passover, like the Day of Atonement. But this was not one of those regular days. This one was not driven by the calendar, but by their need and their hearts. They know they've been doing wrong and they want to put it right. They had a burden and a desire to repent.

And we see in these opening verses that this is a day marked by deep feeling. I mean, there's this outward expression. They're fasting. They've got this sackcloth they're wearing putting dirt on their heads. And that's, you can see here, it's accompanied by an inward feeling. There's sorrow for improper behavior. And you get the impression that this feeling wasn't just a sudden burst of emotion. I mean, there was planning behind this day. Something had been building up in them and now the time had come to do something about it. Deliberate decision. And we see the issue was between them and their God. Verse 2, the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners. Now remember the situation. They're returned from exile and there's all these other people groups that have been moved into the land. And they separated from them. Israel had a history and a covenant relationship with God. These other peoples worshipped idols.

So this is an event within a special relationship. Just them and their God. And this day is marked by listening and speaking. Look at verse 3. They stood up in their place, read from the book of the law their Lord. That's the Lord their God speaking to them for a quarter of the day. Two, three hours maybe. For another quarter of it they made confession and worship the Lord their God. So Israel was both listening and speaking. And God was listening and speaking. Serious mutual engagement. So how are we going to apply this passage? We got Old Testament Israel, a whole nation. We got a day of time out and reset, a day of repentance.

Now Paul tells us in the New Testament that New Testament followers of Jesus, he says whatever was written in the former days was written for our instruction. So Nehemiah 9 is God's word for us. This event is for our instruction. This morning I want to apply this passage to us as individual Christians living in the New Covenant era. When we draw lines between an event in Jerusalem in 445 B.C. and our spiritual situation today, we've got three choices. We could apply this passage to our nation. Many nations in history have had national days of repentance. 1775, middle of the Revolutionary War, the second Continental Congress issued a proclamation calling for a day of public humiliation, fasting, and prayer. They spelled public P-U-B-L-I-C-K in those days. Public humiliation, fasting, and prayer. 1863, Civil War, Abraham Lincoln declared a national day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer. They asked citizens to repent for national sins and seek peace. So one way to apply this passage would be calling for a national day of repentance. Fair enough. But we do need to see that the two situations then and now aren't exactly the same. The main difference, Israel as a nation was in a special covenant relationship with God. America as a nation is not. Remember verse 2, Israel separated themselves from non-Israelites. This is not a day for everyone. Back there at the time of Nehemiah, this was a day for those who knew their God.

Well, there's a second option. Could apply this passage to our church as a corporate body. I mean, this is better. Israel was the redeemed people of God under the old covenant. The church is the redeemed people of God under the new. So there's a place for church repentance. Remember the book of Revelation, those messages to the seven churches? Several of those churches had fallen into disobedience or false teaching or backsliding, and they were called to church repentance. So this could be a very legitimate way of applying this event in Nehemiah. But that's not the way I'm going to apply it this morning. Corporate church repentance would normally be a matter of the Holy Spirit convicting pastors and leaders about a specific area of unfaithfulness, and then leading them to call the whole congregation to united repentance. That's not the situation this morning.

I'm going to focus on a third choice. Applying the example of Israel's day of repentance to our individual lives as Christians. Now, I don't want to downplay the importance of group confession and repentance. That might be a good topic for another sermon. I actually once experienced a very powerful time of group confession and repentance. I might have mentioned it in a sermon or a Bible class I taught at church here. My freshman year of college, during a week of special meetings held in the college chapel, this was not a planned event. I mean the fact that there was this confession and repentance, but a spontaneous work of the Holy Spirit. During this week, kind of very calm and measured sorts of sermons the speaker was giving. During the middle of that week, he said near the beginning of the service, "After the next couple of songs, we'll give a time just before I preach if anybody wants to come up, and maybe the Lord's, if you have something you want to say, the Lord's been showing you something through this week." At the end of the first song, there was one student who came up.

When he was finished, there was another student. By the time that student was finished, there were two or three others, and the speaker said, "Okay, after these people, that will be it, because we need to preach the sermon." By the time those people had done, there were more. That went on for until after midnight, and the chapel wound up with more people in it at midnight than it had when the meeting started. It went on another night, and many people became a big hall full of people. Now, everyone, I think almost everyone who got up to speak, what they said was personal confession, repentance, and recommitment. So, in a way, it was an individual thing, but in a group setting. Now, that was something very special the Lord did. That was the only time I experienced something like that in my life.

But more commonly, when and where might our times, our timeouts and resets, take place? Well, first they should be part of your regular daily prayer times, like daily resets. I mean, Jesus taught his disciples a daily prayer, the Lord's Prayer. Now, part of it says, "Give us today our daily bread." Well, if you think about it, that's got to be a daily prayer. Today, our

daily bread, that's something, if I want bread, I've got to pray that every day, right? So, part of that prayer was, "Forgive us our sins." Well, maybe the implication is that if this is daily, it would be, "Forgive us today our daily sins." I don't know. But part of the daily prayer times Jesus intended his followers to have, there is a time of seeking forgiveness. Now, the timing may be regular every day, but the content isn't. I mean, if I say, "This morning, forgive me my sins," I'm going to do some self-examination, and what comes to my mind that the issues are that day, I'm going to confess. And then, there's this reset that can be part of your weekly church worship.

I mean, on a Sunday morning, we have worship, the Word. Every two weeks, we have the Lord's Supper. Each of those is a potential occasion for spiritual reset. Let me say something about the Lord's Supper. In 1 Corinthians 11, verses 27 and 28, Paul gives these instructions, "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself then, and so eat of the bread and drink the cup." That expression, "Eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner." King James says, "Unwordly." But look carefully, because people sometimes misunderstand that. That's what I want to mention is. This is not saying that I have to be worthy, like I haven't sinned all week or something, if I'm going to participate in the Lord's Supper. It's saying that I've got to come in a worthy manner.

Well, what's a worthy manner? Well, a big part of that is recognizing precisely that I and myself am not worthy. I'm a sinner in need of mercy, and I'm remembering what God has done through Jesus Christ to provide for a sinner like me. So yes, examine yourself. And when you come to the Lord's Table, sense your unworthiness. But remember that the Lord's Table is precisely a place for unworthy sinners to remember the mercy that they receive. The bread and the cup represent a free gift. Jesus' body broken for us, His blood shed for us to make us clean and perfectly acceptable. So come gladly, trusting in Jesus and His sacrifice for us. There's a prayer that some churches use at the Lord's Supper that gets this just right. Here it is. "We do not presume to come to this Thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness. But in Thy manifold and great mercies, we are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Thy Table. But Thou art the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy."

So just in case there's anyone here who's been thinking they've got to somehow earn the right to take the Lord's Supper, you don't. It's a sign, an invitation for a little reset in your thinking, coming back and remembering the gift that God has given you, confessing sins and receiving His mercy. But then, in addition to those regular times, daily, weekly, we have turning point moments. Not part of any regular schedule, but situation driven. It's like the difference between an annual checkup with your doctor and a special visit to see your doctor. I mean, in the one case, you're just trying to maintain your regular health. The other, you've got some serious symptoms you've got to go deal with. Turning point moment, not so much a searching for God time, but a time when God is searching for you. God convicting you following a period of unfaithfulness, or giving you a growing awareness of a disconnect between something in His word and something in your life. A sense that it's time to stop running and avoiding and hiding.

I mean, there may be a time in your life as a follower of Jesus when that's kind of where you are a little bit. So that's a point for one of these major timeout resets. I mean, remember Adam and Eve. They sinned, and afterwards they hid themselves from the presence of God. God didn't let them go. He came calling them, "Where are you?" So, if forever is a time when it's that, you know, God calling you, "Where are you?" Well, that's a time to get apart, focus, put distractions away, and do a reset. Now, if we're going to do a reset day, Nehemiah 9 shows us how to do it, or at least it gives us one good model for how to do it. There are four components of this timeout and reset that Israel had.

The first component is, was to me, kind of a surprise. I didn't realize or think about it until I was preparing this sermon, and that is worship God. We see that especially in verses 6 to 21. You remember that two, three hour period when the Israelites spoke to God? I mean, two, three hours hearing God speak to them through the Word, then two or three hours when they were speaking. It says they made confession. Well, yeah, that's what I would expect. But it also says they worshiped the Lord your God. That was a surprise to me. But they would be worshiping that day. But look at what they worshiped God for. Verse 6, creation. "You are the Lord alone. You have made the heaven and the heaven of the heavens with all their hosts the earth with all that is in it." They worshiped God for His calling and promise to them as a nation. Verse 7, "You are the Lord, the God who chose Abraham and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham, called him to be the father of a nation."

They praised God for His deliverance. Verse 9, "You saw the affliction of our fathers when they were in slavery in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea." They praised Him for His spiritual provision. Verse 13, "You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke to them from heaven, gave them right rules, true laws, good statutes and commandments. Their daily spiritual bread is given to them. And for material provisions," verse 15, "You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger, brought water for them from out of the rock and the thirst." Point is, when they assembled before God, He was not an unknown God. They knew what He had done. They came to Him in guilt and need, but they also had reason to believe that He would listen to them. And the most important thing they knew about Him was that He was a God of mercy, grace and forgiveness. Verses 16 and 17, "But they, our fathers, acted presumptuously and stiffened their necks and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders you performed among them, but stiffened their necks and appointed a leader to return." In other words, after all God had done for them, they had turned away and been unfaithful. But then, verse 16, or the second part of verse 17, "But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them." That was something they worshiped God for and remembered.

You know, in the Old Testament, there's a handful of very special moments when God revealed who He really was. I mean, everything He does reveals who God is, but these were special moments, like Moses at the burning bush, or like Isaiah in the temple when he saw a vision of the Lord. One of those special revelation moments was, we read about in Exodus 34. This is after the people of Israel have made this golden calf and turned from God and began to worship that. And Moses has gone to intercede with them, or for them before God. And God promises He will not abandon Israel, even though they have turned from Him, He will forgive. And at one point then, Moses says to the Lord, "Show me your glory." It's a way of saying, "Show me more of who you are." And the Lord has Moses go up on a mountain, and He hides Him in the cleft of a rock. We sang about that this morning, didn't we? "Cleft of a rock." And this is kind of a mysterious passage, but there, with Moses kind of in this crack in the rock, it says, "The Lord covered him with His hand and allowed His glory, the Lord's glory, pass before Him so that He could partially see it and yet be protected and not die." And this is what that passage says, the Lord said at that moment. "The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with Moses there and proclaimed the name of the Lord, proclaimed who He was. The Lord passed before Him and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgressions of sin." That's who the Lord their God was.

Well, what about us on our day of reset and repentance? Well, it's good for us to take time to worship. As we worship, we remember. I mean, we as Christians today know things about God more than what the Israelites knew. And if we're having a time of repentance and reset, we need to remember that our God is a God of compassion and a willingness to receive us and forgive us. I mean, how are you going to come to God, stop running and come to God, unless you know He's going to receive you? You know, Jesus revealed God on earth. One day, a leper came to Him. I'm going to read you what it says in Mark, chapter 1. A leper came to Him, imploring Him and kneeling and said to Him, "If you will, you can make me clean." Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched Him and said, "I am willing. Be clean." Now, here's this leper. He's on his knees. He's imploring Jesus. And look at his question. He says, "If you are willing."

Now, there was another needy man, we read about later in the Gospel of Mark, who came to Jesus and said, "If you can, help me." His question was, "Are you powerful enough?" This man's got a different issue. Never mind your power. Are you willing? And Jesus says, "Yes, I am willing." And He touched Him and said, "Be clean." When we see Jesus' heart, we see God's heart. He is a willing God. And we need to remind ourselves that our God is an inviting God. Jesus, God's Son on earth, issued invitations like, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden. I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon me. Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart. You will find rest for your souls." And Jesus shows us that God does not break the weak. Matthew 12, 20, "A bruised reed he will not break. A smoldering wick he will not snuff out." Are you a bruised reed or a smoldering wick? Well, the Bible says that makes you a perfect fit for God's mercy. So if you're going to come to your God and confess and repent, you better spend some time worshipping and remembering what kind of God He is. A

few years ago, my wife and I took our grandkids. We went to the—we're going to take them to the California Academy of Science. Granddaughter was—I mean they were small. Granddaughter was maybe five or six. Her brother only three or four, but we thought we'd take them. And we got over there in the car, they're in the back seat in their little car seats, and we parked near the museum there. And they were acting up total rebellion. We kept saying, "Stop it." And zero

remorse in their little hearts. Zero readiness to change. And by the time I parked the car, I had had enough. And I pulled my granddaughter aside because she was the older one. I mean, she's only five or six. And I just told her what I thought, and I was ready to take those kids back home and forget the California Academy of Science. And at some point as I'm there, she started crying. And I'm like, "Well, what's it going to be?" And she just said, "Grandpa, I'm scared." So I guess she was finally ready to stop the rebellion, but I scared her. Well, remember that your God is a better God than I am a grandpa.

So a second component. Here we get to the real problem. They're dealing with a real problem, confessing their sin. Now, for Israel, confession meant naming sins. I mean, look at the sins the people name. This section is verses 26 to 31. Verse 26. "Nevertheless, they were disobedient," and they're talking about their fathers now, but they're kind of knowing. They share. They're all part of this. What their fathers did, they're still caught up in that. "Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back." They cast God's law behind their back. Next part of that verse. "They killed your prophets who had warned them in order to turn them back to you." And then verse 30. "Many years you bore with them and warned them by your spirit through your prophets, yet they would not give ear." They wouldn't give their ear to the Lord. And then verse, back in verse 27, second part of that verse. "And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercy you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest, they did evil again before you. They turned to God when they were in trouble, forgot them as soon as they were okay."

Well, what can we say about our confession today? Well, confession and repentance are tied to an awareness of sin you can name. And sometimes it might be a long-standing pattern, just like it was for Israel. Not a single act for us individually, but a deep-seated attitude out of which a hundred little acts come. And confession and repentance will often be for us a whole-person operation. Body, feelings, words. Remember the tax collector in the temple that Jesus talked about, the parable of the tax collector in the temple? It's in Luke chapter 18. Here's how Jesus describes this man. Verse 13, "But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast and said, God be merciful to me a sinner." So you've got his position standing far off, way back in the corner. You've got his posture. He wouldn't lift his head up even to heaven. You've got a physical gesture. He beats his breast. And finally you've got words, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner." So it's a whole-person kind of thing for that man.

Or how about what James tells believers to do when they need to repent? James chapter 4 verses 8 to 10. Here's the way James says we need to come to God. "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners. Purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched, mourn, weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning, your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you. A hunger for cleanness and purity, a desire for single-mindedness in our love for God. Sorrow, not just for all my problems, my unfulfilled dreams, but for my sin. Self-humbling, that's what it looks like." So we come naming our sins. We come with body, feelings, and words. And when we do, God is faithful to cleanse and forgive. 1 John 1.9, "Confess your sins. God is faithful and just. He will forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness."

Well, a third component, we need to ask for God's mercy. I mean, Israel knew they had been unfaithful, but they also were aware they were experiencing genuine physical, economic, and social problems. So part of this time out with God, they devoted to seeking his help with those physical problems. I mean, look at verses 32 to 37 back in Nehemiah chapter 9, verses 32 to 37. Now, in this section there's an interesting mix of two ingredients. On the one hand, there is a confession that God was totally right in bringing these troubles upon them. I mean, look at verse 33. "Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us. You have dealt faithfully." We're the ones who have acted wickedly. And then verses 34 to 35, "Our kings, princes, our priests, our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings. Even in their own kingdom and amid your great goodness that you gave them, in the large rich land you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works." In other words, you're right, Lord, to have brought these troubles on us.

But then on the other hand, there's an appeal to God, "Lord, see our troubles." Verse 32 again, second part, "Let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, and upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all the people since the time of the kings of Assyria till now. Look at our trouble. Don't let that seem little to you, Lord. It's hard, it's painful. Look, I'm struggling. Verses 36 to 37, "Behold, we're slaves this day in the land you gave

our fathers to enjoy. Behold, we're slaves. Behold, Lord, look. Its rich yield goes to kings who never set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies, over our livestock as they please. We are in great distress." So it may be the same for us. On our day of repentance, we may want to include pouring out a painful cry and crying for deliverance. Now, just a word of warning. Not all physical and financial problems are due to sin. Physical trouble may be a result of sin, but equally it may not. So don't think it's always, you know, I'm sick, I must be sin. But sometimes there is a link, biblically, between sin and the experience of various kinds of troubles. I mean, read the book of Proverbs. Stepping away from God's path can and does lead to all kinds of life problems. And when Christians drift in the relationship of God, he may very well discipline them.

So biblical common sense tells us not to assume trouble is connected to sin, but on the other hand, not to ignore that possibility. And biblical common sense tells us not to puzzle too long over that question. I mean, if you're aware of uncontroverted sin and you can name it, then deal with that sin as part of your appeal for deliverance from your physical and material problems. But if you're not aware of a specific sin, not aware of an area, you're resisting God, refusing to repent, well, don't let Satan put accusing ideas in your head. Just assume the problem is something God has brought into your life for his good purpose, maybe to teach you something you need to learn, maybe to help you grow in some area, and don't think it's discipline for sin. You see what I'm saying? Because there are times we know we've got sin, there are times we know we've got some physical or material or financial crises, and we wonder what's the relationship? Sometimes there's a relationship, sometimes there's not.

But let's say we do sense a connection. Look at a passage in James 5. Let me just recall it to you. James says, "If anyone is sick among you, let him call the leaders of the church to come and pray for him." It says, "If he's confessed any sin, or if he's committed any sins, they will be forgiven." It says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another." In other words, there is a time when a person is sick or a person is facing a very deep crisis and problem, and it's proper for them to stop and confess sins in the process of seeking God's help and deliverance. And then look at Hebrews chapter 5. And this is a passage I want to read, you may want to turn there. Hebrews chapter 12, verses 5 to 13. "Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him, for the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there that whom his father does not discipline? If you're left without discipline in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons." And it goes on.

"Have you ever been hit by a problem? You know you've been drifting in your relationship with God. You try to pray, and the nagging voice keeps saying, "Why should God listen to your prayer?" I remember going, I was in college going through a period like that, and in the middle of it, by God's grace, somehow I came across this passage. I didn't realize this passage in Hebrews was in the Bible. What a relief. Just what I needed to hear. This suffering is not God rejecting me. It's precisely because I belong to him. I'm going through this. So since we have a merciful God, if you are in physical trouble, material trouble, financial trouble, cry out for mercy. The final component, chapter 9, make a serious commitment to change.

Back in Nehemiah chapter 9, the very last verse. Verse 38, "Because of all this, we make a firm covenant in writing. On the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and priests." And you're going to be hearing about that next week because chapter 10 gives the details of that document. So notice a few things. A firm covenant. Quite official. Signed and sealed. In other words, not just a day of strong feeling and loud prayers, but an actual written out commitment to change. A covenant it's called. And there's already this existing covenant with God, but this is like a fresh reiteration, an update. They've already got the basic principle in place. Here's what they need to recommit to at this specific time.

What about us? Repentance and reset is not just a matter of feelings, emotions, and dramatic gestures. Most essentially it is a commitment to change. Do you need to write it out? Well, if it helps, do it. Something tangible, something you can remember. Be a little careful. I make to-do lists. Makes me feel good, like I've actually accomplished something. I find those lists under a bunch of papers. Two months later, most of the items still pending. Not the document that counts, the commitment behind it. What repentance really is, is a change in heart. Special kind of change of heart that leads to a change of behavior. I mean, look at Luke 3.8. John the Baptist preaching repentance, baptism, and a crowd comes to him.

Verse 7 and 8, Luke chapter 3. He said therefore to the crowds that came to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with your repentance." So, it seems like these people are doing something. They're really taking action, right? They're coming to John to get baptized. But he sees there's something missing. Or at least he knows there's something that could very well be missing in the future. He says bear fruits in keeping with repentance.

So, repentance is in the heart, but the actions are going to follow if what's in the heart is real. Something important to see there. On the one hand, repentance because it's something internal in your heart between you and God, means you can have a time out and reset the any time. You don't have to go out and do something to earn the right to repent. Any time your heart is ready, look to Jesus, tell God of your commitment, and it's done. On the other hand, if what you do in your heart today is real, it will produce fruits going forward. And that means a relax of faithful obedience.

So, brothers and sisters, confession and repentance are essential for followers of believers, followers of Jesus. Our relationship with Jesus can get stretched and strained. We need regular resets. And sometimes it might even get seriously frayed. And the only thing we can do is call for a time out and do a major reset. We come to God in worship, remembrance of who He is. We name our sins, appeal for His mercy, and commit ourselves to change. So, if it applies to you, stop resisting, avoiding, running away. Come to our God who is merciful and compassionate and ready to hear our prayers.