

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for May 16: Do right when you do wrong

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Steps number 8 and 9 in Alcoholics Anonymous' 12 step-recovery program require recovering addicts to make amends. Step 8 is to make a list of all the people who have been harmed and become willing to make amends. Step 9 is to make direct amends with the people who have been harmed whenever possible.

Why is making amends or restitution a part of AA? People who become addicted to alcohol often lie to the people closest to them to cover up their illness. Sometimes they steal from family and friends in order to get and use alcohol. They show up at important family events like graduation or birthday parties intoxicated or not at all.

As a result of this behavior, a trail of shattered relationships is left in their wake. Recovering addicts are encouraged to make restitution because it is one way they can begin to own up to how their behavior has harmed others. It also is a way for them to begin to let go of the guilt they feel, and hopefully, it is a first step in repairing their relationships.

How does making amends differ from apologizing? Making amends or restitution is an effort to restore justice or repair what has broken or damaged. For example, if the recovering addict stole money from his parents for alcohol, it is not enough for him to say, "I am sorry." Making amends means working to repay the money.

As Christians, when our sinful behavior affects others, God also expects us to make restitution. This lesson is about acknowledging one's sinful actions

and making restitution where possible. Through this lesson, adults are encouraged to rectify any situation in which they offended or sinned against another person.

God knows us all too well. God knows sin and impurity will interrupt our relationship with him and our fellow human beings. In Leviticus, we discover that God made a way for Israel to restore their relationship with him when it became broke and that is through sacrifice.

The sacrificial system in Leviticus is completely foreign to us, and it can seem barbaric. But according to Leviticus, there is no atonement without bloodshed. Only sacrifice can undo the effects of sin.

In Leviticus 1-7, the people are told how to bring sacrifices before the Lord. In this week's passage of Scripture, two types of sacrifices are described: the sin offering and the restitution (guilt) offering.

The sin offering is required for a multitude of general sins. It is also required for sins of inaction, like witnessing a crime and not reporting it. The restitution offering is required for injury against another person or for doing something that distracts from the worship of God. When an Israelite made a restitution offering it also required that they make amends. Like recovering addicts learn in AA, restoring justice or righting wrongs is a part of repentance.

As Leviticus 6:1-6 says, when someone steals, he must return the item; if he finds lost property, he must return it. But he must also add a fifth of the value to the item when he returns it to the owner. It is not enough just to admit guilt or to apologize.

As Christians, when we do wrong, the first step is to admit it or confess our sins. But like the Israelites, God also wants us to work to make it right. What would this look like?

One example in the New Testament is found in Luke 19, when Zacchaeus makes restitution. He was the chief tax collector, which means he probably made his money by extortion, raising people's taxes beyond what was required by the Romans for his own gain.

When Jesus came to town, Zacchaeus was so changed by his encounter with him that he agreed to pay back everyone he had wronged four times the amount he owed them. He set the bar high for us.

So, what might restitution look like for us? If you own a business and you overcharge someone, restitution means not pocketing the money, but refunding it as soon as you realize the mistake. Or maybe you leave the grocery store and realize they did not ring up an item, you should go back and pay for it.

Genuine repentance leads to a desire to right wrongs. Yet we know we can never fully make restitution for the sins we have committed. We stand in need of a savior.

The book of Isaiah describes how God made the suffering servant, the Messiah, a guilt offering for us. It says, "Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering ..." (Isaiah 53:10).

This is the very same word used in Leviticus 5 to describe the sacrifice called the guilt offering. Therefore, the prophet Isaiah proclaims that the Servant of the Lord, Jesus, "gave up his life in death, as a guilt offering on behalf of those who are too heavily in debt to help themselves."

We show our determination to do right and our appreciation for what Jesus did, when we not only seek to be forgiven of our sin, but also when we make restitution for losses or damages we might have caused.