Repentance and Sin
At its most basic sense, the word repentance means to change one’s behavior. But, the biblical concept of repentance implies much more. Author Eugene Peterson says it this way:

Repentance is not an emotion. It is not feeling sorry for your sins. It is a decision. It is deciding that you have been wrong in supposing that you could manage your own life and be your own god; it is deciding that you were wrong in thinking that you had, or could get, the strength, education and training to make it on your own; it is deciding that you have been told a pack of lies about yourself and your neighbors and your world. And it is deciding that God in Jesus Christ is telling you the truth.
Repentance is a realization that what God wants from you and what you want from God are not going to be achieved doing the same old things, thinking the same old thoughts. Repentance is a decision to follow Jesus Christ and become his pilgrim in the path of peace. (A Long Obedience in the Same Direction, pp. 29-30)

This is not only a good definition for repentance, it summarizes the goal of discipleship: to follow Christ. But there is more to this study, namely, for what reason do we need to repent? This study will also focus on the meaning, origin and nature of sin. These two concepts help put the nature of what it means to be a Christian in focus.

Repentance
Read Mark 1:1-8.
Mark indicates that John the Baptist came as a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. What was John sent to do?

According to verse 4, what was John doing in the desert?

John was performing two functions in the desert. Baptizing was a means of renewing or establishing a relationship with God through being plunged or dipped in water. John’s baptism of repentance for the remission of sins meant not only that the person being baptized was being forgiven for past sins, but also that he/she was expected to make a 180 degree turn away from their past sins. This is implied in the Hebrew and Aramaic words for repent (the languages John probably spoke. It is also the meaning of the term in Greek (the language Mark used to write his Gospel).

What was the response of the people?

Confession is a major aspect of repentance. It means that we are admitting our wrong doing before God. In essence, the word for confess in the Greek implies that we agree we have sinned. We will study sin in the second half of this study.

Read Mark 1:14-15.
What message was at the heart of God’s good news in verse 15?

What is the difference between John’s baptism and the one that Jesus would perform? (see what John said in verses 7-8).

Re-read the quotation from Eugene Peterson in the introduction. Define repentance in your own words.

Mark tells us that the people were “confessing their sins” (verse 5). How would you define the word “sin”?

Read Acts 2:38.
After Peter’s message, the people ask what the response to the message of the Gospel is. How does Peter answer them? (See also Acts 3:19)

How does Peter answer the question of how one becomes a Christian?

Going Deeper
Look up Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:10 and 2 Timothy 2:25. From what you learn in these verses answer the following question:

How do people come to repent?

Sin
Read Genesis 1:26-31.
What do you think it means to be created in the image and likeness of God?

Why do you think it is important that God declared His creation very good in verse 31? Every other aspect of creation is only declared good, why do you think creation on day 6 is considered “very good”?

Read Genesis 2:15-17.
What command did God give the man? What was the result of disobedience?

Read Genesis 3:1-4.
How did the serpent coax the woman into distrusting God?

How does the serpent distort God’s generosity in Genesis 2:16-17?
From observing the serpent’s strategy, how would you define sin? How does this compare with your answer above?

**Read Genesis 3:6-19.**
How do the consequences of sin affect humankind’s relationships with self (verse 7)? With God (verses 8-10)? With other people (verses 11-16)? With creation (verses 17-19)?

**Read Romans 3:9-23.**
In the mind of Jewish people in the first-century there were two types of people: Jews and everyone else (the Gentiles). What does this tell you about the extent of our sin?

How does a “fear of God” (verse 18) relate to what you know about sin?

From what you have learned in these verses does leading a righteous life qualify anyone to be considered “righteous enough”? Why or why not?

How does Paul define sin in these verses? How would you change your definition of sin from what you have learned?

**Read Romans 6:15-23.**
How does Paul use the image of slavery in these verses to describe sin?

What does verse 23 indicate we earn from sin?

What do you think “death” implies in this verse? How does this relate to the message of these verses?

**Going Deeper**
Look up 1 John 1:5-2:2 and Psalm 32. What do these verses teach you about the relationship between repentance and sin?

Do you think becoming a Christian implies that a person will no longer sin? Why or why not?

**Make it personal**
How has this study changed your view of sin? Of the need for repentance? Ask God to make you aware of areas of sin in your life from which you need to repent. Plan this week to establish a partner with whom you can share and confess sins (see James 5:16). Keep one another accountable.