

**Title: “U-Turn”**

**Series: Righteous Road Signs**

## **Introduction:**

Today we’re starting a new series I’m calling “Righteous Road Signs.” I got the idea for this one day as I was driving through town, and for some reason as I looked at different signs I thought about how each of those applied to our lives. Today we’re going to talk about making a *U-Turn* with our lives; next week we’ll talk about how to *Yield* and let God take control; and then the following week we’re going to talk about having a *Curve Ahead* and how to deal with life’s problems. The weekend after that is Easter.

Now when we talk about making a U-Turn we’re talking about the biblical concept of repentance. The idea is that I’m going one direction with my life, but God wants me to go the other way – I repent when I do a U-Turn and start following God’s direction instead of my own.

## ***REPENTANCE = TO CHANGE THE MIND***

Garrison Keillor told the story about "Larry the Sad Boy ... who was saved 12 times in the Lutheran church, an all-time record. Between 1953 and 1961 he threw himself weeping and contrite on God's throne of grace on 12 separate occasions – and this in a Lutheran church that wasn't evangelical, had no altar call, no organist playing "Just as I Am Without One Plea" while a choir hummed and a guy with shiny hair took hold of your heartstrings and played you like a cheap guitar.

This is the Lutheran church, not a bunch of hillbillies. These are Scandinavians, and they repent in the same way that they sin: discreetly, tastefully, at the proper time. ...Twelve times! Even we fundamentalists got tired of him. ... God did not mean for us to feel guilt all our lives. There comes a point when you should dry your tears and join the building committee and start grappling with the problems of the church furnace and ... make church coffee and be of use, but Larry kept on repenting and repenting." **[end of illustration.]**

I understand Garrison Keillor's humor here, but I also know that if we had more repentance in this world and in the church, God's kingdom would be growing by leaps and bounds. There are four basic steps to repentance that we want to look at today. The first is for that person just making a decision for Christ, but the rest are applicable even to those who are already Christians.

## **1. FROM UNBELIEF TO FAITH**

No one is going to make a U-Turn with their life until they see the need for it. When I'm driving my car down the road, I'm not going to make a U-Turn until I recognize that I've been driving the wrong way. The same is true for those who are not Christ Followers.

Let's look at it this way – pretend that the non-Christian's life is like a person traveling with no roadmap that thinks they are headed in the right direction. But somewhere along the line things aren't looking like they should – they thought they were headed out to the country, but the further they drive the more tall buildings they see. They pull into a convenience store, buy a map, and realize they've been headed the wrong direction, so they turn around and start driving the right way.

Now let's apply that to our spiritual lives – I can be going down the road of life, living in complete disobedience to God, but until I see a spiritual road map and begin to believe in Christ, I'm going to keep going in the wrong direction. Jesus tells us we have two options:

*“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”* – **Matthew 7:13-14 (ESV)**

I will choose the narrow gate when I've been convinced that my life is headed the wrong direction, and I will be convinced I'm headed in the wrong direction when I begin to place my faith in Jesus Christ.

*“I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”* – **John 8:24 (ESV)**

Maybe you're at this crossroads today and you're longing to have what Jesus offers you – you simply need to place your faith in Him, and trust that He can fulfill the

promises that He has made to you of forgiveness, eternal life, and so much more. But until you get to that point, you will be unable to turn your life around. This isn't about getting your act together so that God will accept you; instead it is about recognizing your act isn't together and accepting God as the ruler of your life.

## **2. FROM INDEPENDENCE TO DEPENDENCE**

<sup>1</sup>Brennan Manning quite courageously admits that 25 years ago, he had a drinking problem – He voluntarily entered a 28-day treatment program. Early on in the treatment program they had to sit in a circle with a leader and tell the truth to themselves and to the other people in the group, about the extent of their drinking. So they went around the circle and they all told the truth, except for one business guy named Max. When it came time for him to reveal the extent of his drinking, he said, "I never really drank that much." They said, "Max, you're in an alcoholic treatment center for a month. You weren't sipping cokes. Tell the truth to yourself. Admit it." He said, "I'm being honest with you. I've never really had all that much to drink."

They had signed affidavits to be able to get information – Max had signed one too. They could glean information in any way they so desired. So they had a speakerphone in the center of the circle, and the leader of the group said, "I'm going to call the bartender close to your office and we'll just find out." So they called the bartender and the leader says to the person on the phone, "Do you know Max So-and-So?" The guy says, "Oh, like a brother! He stops in every day after work and has a minimum of six martinis. Man, this guy drinks like a fish! He's the best customer we have—a prolific consumer of alcohol." The rest of the people in the group all looked at Max. And now here's a moment of truth – Max tells the truth to himself. He says, "Yes, I've had a lot to drink."

A little later on in the group, they asked everyone, "Have you ever hurt anybody, a friend or family member, while you were drunk?" Some people said, yes, and they described it – Other people said, no. They tried to get at the truth, and if that was the truth, that was the truth. They get all the way around to Max, who says, "I would never, ever hurt anybody. Not when I'm sober, not when I'm drunk. I have four lovely children. I'd never hurt my wife, I'd never hurt my kids." The leader says, "You know, Max, we don't believe you. We're going to call your wife." As soon as Max's wife starts talking on the speakerphone, Max starts breathing heavily – He knows something's coming that he has been unwilling to face. The leader

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Hybels, "Telling Yourself the Truth" (4-14-02)

says, "Mrs. So-and-So, has Max ever mistreated you or anyone in the family when he was drunk?" And she said, "Well, yes he has. It happened just this last Christmas Eve. He took our 9-yr-old daughter shopping on Christmas Eve, bought her a new pair of shoes; he's a generous man. On the way home, our little girl was sitting in the front seat enjoying her new shoes and Max passed the bar and saw the cars of some of his buddies. "He pulled in. It was a cold, wintry day, 12 degrees, with a high wind chill. He made sure all the windows were rolled up snugly. He left the car running so that the heater was blowing, and he said to our 9-year-old daughter, 'I'll be right back. You just play with your shoes; I'll be right back.' He went in the bar and started drinking with his buddies. He didn't come out of the bar until midnight. In that time, the vehicle had shut off and the windows had become all frosted over and locked up tight so she couldn't get herself out of the car. When the authorities opened up the car and rushed her to the hospital, she was so badly frostbitten that her thumb and forefinger had to be amputated. And her ears were so damaged by the cold that she'll be deaf for the rest of her life." The wife describes this to the group, and Max falls off his chair and starts convulsing on the ground. He just couldn't bear telling himself the truth about what he had done – He couldn't face it. He was going to live the rest of his life in some fantasy world of denial about what he had done. **[end of illustration.]**

I'll tell you why I bring this up – if I had the time, I could pass a microphone down the aisle and I could say, "What is that one sin that you feel so desperately bad about that you can't even bring yourself to acknowledge that you actually did it? The one that you can't bring out of the darkness into the light to let God forgive it? What is that one sin that keeps you under a cloud of guilt day in and day out?"

Until you are willing to release that sin through repentance to God you are declaring that you are independent from Him and do not need Him in your life. There has got to come a point where you admit that you've failed and that you need God to take over because you haven't done such a good job of it. And this isn't something that is just true for some of us; it is true for all of us. Until we admit that God has not been first place in our lives in every area of our lives we will not be able to go down the path of healing and forgiveness.

*Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. – Acts 2:38 (ESV)*

Notice that God doesn't view us as weak because we need Him, instead He invites us to turn from our sins and turn to Him for salvation. It is simply a matter of

admitting that we've been going the wrong direction and doing a U-Turn so that we're headed in the direction God wants for us to go.

### **3. FROM LIVING FOR SELF TO LIVING FOR GOD**

Now let's get back in our car for a minute and pretend that we've realized we are headed the wrong direction, stopped and bought a map that tells us the right way to go, but when we get out on the road we start heading the wrong direction again. We know the right way, but we've decided to go the wrong way anyway. This is a real problem that many of us face – we've had an initial act of repentance, but quickly begun to live a life of sin all over again. And while we need to recognize we are not saved by doing good works, we are expected to live in obedience to God, and obedience to God is demonstrated when we continue following His directives for our lives.

*So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*  
– **Romans 6:11 (ESV)**

When I repent I am saying to God, "I am not just turning from my old way of life, I am killing it off and burying it; the old man is out the door." Because until I do that I'm not going to be empowered to live for God's glory.

*"Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God."* – **Matthew 3:8 (NLT)**

In other words, there is going to be some evidence of change in my life that will stand as proof positive that I am a child of God. Are there going to be times of weakness when I give in and need to repent again? Sure! But if I'm serious about this those times will become less and less frequent. When I make a U-Turn with my life I am turning away from dishonesty, from lust, from jealousy, from greed, and from all the things that were taking me away from God. Because until I allow God to help me remove those things from my life, I will not be able to live in obedience to Him.

### **4. FROM SEPARATION TO SALVATION**

Now back to my car trip again – I can choose to keep going the direction I'm going and not make the U-Turn that God requires. God gives me the ability and the choice to turn toward Him or away from Him. But I need to understand that He will not only honor that choice in the here and now, but that He will honor it for all

of eternity. If I never repent and turn to God, I will never be in a relationship with Him; in fact, He promises me that I will go down the road of eternal destruction.

*“I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” – Luke 13:5 (ESV)*

There it is, in black and white – no fluff, no brushing past it, no looking the other way. Jesus says plain and simple that I can choose for him and receive salvation, or choose against Him and continue down the path of separation forever.

*“The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” – Acts 17:30-31 (ESV)*

There is a judgment coming, and those who have repented and turned their lives over to God will be with Him for eternity, and those who do not will be judged unfit for the kingdom of God. Now look at what God is offering – none of it is something that you wouldn't want to have. He offers us a clean slate, all sin removed from our lives, all guilt taken away, joy, peace, security, eternal life, hope, and blessings a thousand fold. There is nothing He wants to give us that is unpleasant or that will harm us in any way. He just asks that we acknowledge that His way is the best way, and that we place our trust in Him instead of in ourselves.

*“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...” – Acts 3:19-20a (ESV)*

I don't know about you, but those “times of refreshing” are something that I sorely need in this world, and I can't find it anywhere else. I need, and you need, to turn our lives over to God and let Him be in control.

### **Conclusion:**

This U-Turn sign looks so simple – one moment you're headed one direction, and in the next moment you're going the opposite direction. And it can be that simple for each of us – you don't need to have all the answers, you don't need to be a theologian, and you don't need a degree in religion. All you need to know is that your life is headed the wrong way, that Jesus knows what is best for you, and that you're willing to follow His way instead of your own. Are you willing to do that today?