

230.1: Personal Gospel Principles (D&C Gospel Doctrine Lesson 7, Updated)
[“The First Principles and Ordinances of the Gospel”](#)

Manual Goal: To help class members understand and seek the blessings that come from the first principles and ordinances of the gospel: faith in the Lord [Jesus Christ](#), repentance, [baptism](#), and confirmation.

EGD Goal: To create space and encourage class members to explore what the principles of the gospel mean to them, and how they experience them personally.

- I. Framing: The principles are personal; create a safe to share those personal perspectives
- II. What the principles mean to me
- III. What the principles mean to you
- IV. Discussion of new resources
- V. Conclusion/Introduction to full episode

Framing: There is no one like you. And this isn't just a special snowflake talk, though that is also true in important ways. There is deep commonality to the human experience, but also thrilling and challenging uniqueness. Every moment, every experience shapes us, and who we are colors those moments and experiences. This life journey is deeply, sacredly personal.

Why do I bring all this up? Because the “First Principles and Ordinances of the Gospel” represent our early steps in gospel living (whether our childhoods or conversions). God interacts with us personally, individually, according to our language (2 Ne. 31:3; Ether 12:39)

What the principles mean to me (this can be a very meaningful conversation with those close to us, independent of the degree to which we can have this talk in Sunday School).

Faith: My favorite definition of faith is that principle that motivates us to action. Faith moves us from belief and hope to action and confirmation, and ultimately transformation. We hear that there is a better way, we have the hope that way will work, and faith motivates us to get up and leap beyond the status quo. Faith moves us from what is to what could be.

There is also “faith in”, which is vital. When we have faith in someone to do their part, hold up their end of a promise. When we have faith in someone, we trust them to be there for us in the way we need.

Repentance: The core of repentance for me is realizing the ways we need to change, and then changing. I find the Hebrew and Greek words for repentance meaningful. The Hebrew word translated “repent” is

simply “Shoov”, or “Return”. After we have strayed or missed the mark or fallen short, we can come back. Come back to our best selves, get back on track for our goals, realign with our values. Come back to God. Come home. Then the Greek “metanoia” means “to think in a new way” or “to change your thinking” “to have a new mind”. Repentance is about learning to be in a new way, become a new, better version of ourselves, every day. Repentance is a process, a practice. We don’t “commit sins” or “make mistakes” so much as we as humans are profoundly limited. This is why I think it is meaningful that Ether 12:27 says not “I give unto humans weaknesses” but the singular “weakness”. We are flawed and fallible. Repentance describes the daily practice of realizing the ways we fall short, harm ourselves and others, resolve to do better, and do better. I find the Primary elements adequately clear: 1) See it; 2) say you’re sorry; 3) fix it; 4) stop it.

Baptism: I find the symbolism of renewal to be deeply meaningful. I love the idea that not only are we symbolically reborn at the moment of baptism, but that the sacrament renews that renewal every week. In addition to LDS baptism, I use the term to both mean an immersion into a particular kind of experience (thus the phrase “baptism by fire”), or an initiation/birth into a new stage of my life.

Gift of the Holy Ghost: The Holy Ghost does many things, but I think the most important is sanctification and empowerment. As we strive to emulate our Heavenly Parents and the Savior, what we most need is increased ability to become better.

[Lesson 7: “The First Principles and Ordinances of the Gospel”](#)

I don’t think any of this Lesson’s resources are particularly compelling and can be left out without a problem.

- [“James Covell and the ‘Cares of the World’”](#): This article discusses the experience of an early investigator, James Covell, who had to choose between faith and familiarity. Potentially helpful but not necessary for the discussion, doesn’t add much beyond the Parable of the Sower itself. I think that application is valuable, and we can ask ourselves how the “cares of the world” or other concerns limit our ability to answer God’s call. At the same time, I don’t think these sections of the D&C are as unambiguous as they seem. James Covell didn’t go along with what Joseph wanted, and so it makes sense that Joseph would have put the force of God’s disapproval on to Covell. But are we sure what God wanted Covell to do? Could God use Covell where he was? I think we need to be open to inspiration but also use our own best judgment, and that not all sacrifices are justified (but we should be ready to sacrifice when necessary).
- [“More Than Food”](#): This short story describes the gift of faith one girl gained from her mother. Doesn’t feel particularly impactful to me.
- [“Repentance as Medicine”](#): In this excerpt, a bishop from Brazil shares an insight about helping people through the repentance process. I appreciate the point that we can be too hard on ourselves when repenting, or that punishment can be too extreme. The repentance must be proportional to the offense.
- [“Rare Footage of First Baptisms in West Africa”](#): The second video on this page includes footage showing groups of believers making their way into a river for baptism in Nigeria in 1978. Doesn’t feel faith promoting to me, given the very problematic reasons that there weren’t baptisms in Nigeria until 1978