

# STUDY GUIDE

prepared by Pastor Geoff Burger

for use in congregations in conjunction with stories in the April 2008 edition of  
**The Lutheran**

## Say sorry, turn around and come home

Before you begin, preferably at home before meeting together, make sure that each person in the group has read the articles in *The Lutheran* relating to the topic:

**Chatline** by editor Linda Macqueen

**It's finished** by Rachelle McIvor

**Through fire and water** – interviews compiled by Linda Macqueen

**Sorry day in Mbantua** by Pastor Basil Schild

Mark and underline any sections you would like to talk about in your group.

### Introduction

There are three stages to being sorry.

**Say sorry**  
**turn around**  
**and come home.**

They link up with three biblical languages used to translate the concept – Latin, Greek and Aramaic.

### 1. Say sorry - *Poenitentia* (Latin)

The English word 'repentance' meaning 'repentance of sins' has quite a linguistic history. It comes from the French *penitire* (to regret), from the Latin *poenitire* (make sorry), from *poena* (meaning pain, punishment, penalty). *Poena* was the spirit of punishment and the attendant of Nemesis, the goddess of divine retribution.

In other words, being repentant is saying, 'Sorry. Please don't punish me; I want to right a wrong.'

- . **Share stories of people saying 'Sorry' to someone.**
- . **Think of and share major and minor times you have said 'Sorry'.**
- . **Why do we say 'Sorry' to one another?**
- . **When you say 'Sorry', are you meaning to say, 'Don't punish me. Please don't hurt me in return'?**

### Denial

The experience of the psalmist is that when we don't recognise the sin and refuse to say sorry we punish ourselves.

*When I did not confess my sins,*

*I was worn out from crying all day long.  
Day and night you punished me, Lord;  
my strength was completely drained,  
as moisture is dried up by the summer heat. (Psalm 32:3,4)*

- . **From your observation of life and your personal experience, does this make sense?**
- . **Share your stories.**

### **Recognition**

Before you say 'Sorry' you need to recognise that somehow you have been involved in the pain of another person.

'Reconciliation needs truth', says Pastor Basil Schild. And it demands courage to be relentlessly honest, to face up to unpleasant aspects of reality. Pastor Basil describes where the truth has taken him:

*The Lutheran settlers and so in turn the Lutheran Church successfully established themselves on land that was originally stolen, its people cleared away. And I wonder why we can't confess the truth of our Lutheran past, and why as a nation, even on this day of repentance, 'Sorry' is said only to the Stolen Generations. Where is the full confession? — that this whole country was built on land that was stolen, whose people were poisoned, shot, raped, chained and whipped? What will it take? I wonder. This day is a good start. But it is only a start.*

### **How do you respond?**

### **Solidarity and community**

The journey of recognition can be very hard. There is a profound and complex truth in the thanksgiving ritual of Deuteronomy 26:5-10. The people of Israel hundreds of years after the Exodus are told to unite themselves with the early Israelites slaves freed by the mighty outstretched arm of YAHWEH: 'He rescued us'.

The same deep spiritual understating of community is there in Christian reflection on the 'body of Christ' who gather round the altar to receive the 'body of Christ' in the sacrament of communion.

In the same way we think of ourselves as one with the legendary Aussies of the past at Gallipoli, Olympic swimmers and footballers. 'We won!' we say.

Does this truth have another side?

In a powerful speech at Redfern in 1992 Prime Minister Keating took this a step further. He used the word 'we' and he described what happened as a 'failure of imagination':

*We need to recognize that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought ... the alcohol ... We took the children from their mothers ... It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us. With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds. We failed to ask: 'How would I feel if this were*

*done to me?’ ... As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us.*

- . **What is involved in holding these insights together?**

## **2. Turn around – *Metanoia* (Greek)**

Earlier this year I went to *Spamalot*, a musical based on Monty Python's *Search for the Holy Grail*. Early in the musical the clouds open and God appears. King Arthur and his knights fall to their knees.

‘Oh, stop groveling’, says God.

‘Sorry’, says Arthur.

‘And don’t apologise. Every time I try to speak to someone, it’s sorry this and forgive me that and I’m not worthy ... What are you doing now?’

‘I’m averting my eyes, Lord.’

‘Well, don’t!’

Sorry doesn’t end in groveling and blame, guilt, unworthiness and self-pity – and ultimately rejection of God. Who can love a God who demands incessant groveling?

There is a very important second step in being sorry, and the Greek word for ‘repent’ has the key.

***Metanoia*** means ‘to turn around, change your mind, think differently’.

The second step in being sorry means the slate is wiped clean and there is a change of heart. A person turns around 180 degrees and faces the other way and acts in a new and opposite way:

from hate to love

fear to faith

selfishness to giving

exploitation to respect.

- . **Think about and share your experience of people (or better, yourself) turning around and thinking about things and doing things differently.**
- . **What would be some appropriate ways for the wider Australian community to express a change of mind toward the Stolen Generations?**

## **3. And come home – *Tubu* (Aramaic)**

At the beginning of his gospel Mark introduces a simple and profound summary of the message of Jesus – and the rest of the Gospel amplifies this:

*The right time has come, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, turn away from your sins and believe in the good news’ (Mark 1.14).*

The Aramaic word for 'repent', which Jesus would probably have used was *tubu*, meaning 'return to where you belong, go back home, be restored'.

Going back home is a constant biblical theme – for example, going back home to the farm in the year of Jubilee after it has been repossessed (Leviticus 25: 23 ff), going back home to Jerusalem and the temple after 70 years of exile in Babylon.

And the classic Jesus story of repentance involves going back home to the Father – the prodigal son.

- . **Read it again in Luke 15.**
- . **What was Jesus saying when he said '*Tubu* – repent, come home'?**
- . **What insights and directions do the concept of *tubu* give Australians in general and Christians in particular in relation to the final step of being sorry?**

## **Postscript**

### **Being sorry is a life-transforming gift.**

The most important thing about being sorry is that it gives space and opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation. There was a great comment from Kathy Freeman. Her mother was a member of the Stolen Generation in Townsville. She was refused permission to visit her parents at Christmas. Her great-great-grandfather fought for Australia in WWI in the Light Horse and was never paid for his service or recognised. Kathy said: 'For my family [the federal government's 'Sorry'] allows some kind of healing and forgiveness to take place where there is anger and bitterness in the hearts of people. It takes away the pain. We will never forget, but this allows us to forgive.'

April 2008