

Cultivating Connection

A biblical approach to relationship challenges

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The Power of Apologies

Introduction

Last week we talked about the Seat of the Offended and the Seat of the Offender. They are seats that mature Christians should avoid. When we get out of either seat, we may need to give or accept an apology.

Apologizing to God

Have you ever apologized to God? When Christians fail to recognize their own sinfulness or refuse to address sin in their lives, God is deeply offended, and Jesus' death on the cross is trivialized.

When we sin, we have this wonderful promise:

1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

How does God respond to our apologies?

Psalms 103:12: As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Isaiah 43:25: "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more"

Micah 7:19: You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

As we look at giving and receiving apologies, we begin by reminding ourselves again of how God responds when we truly apologize.

Jesus told us what happens when we don't accept apologies:

Matthew 6:14 - 15: For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Mark 11:25: "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

A good book on apologies: *The 5 Apology Languages: The Secret to Healthy Relationships* by Jennifer Thomas and Gary Chapman.

Why is apologizing so important?

What would the world be like if we all learned to apologize effectively?

Some apologies are just exactly what is needed to mend relationships, to bring healing and restore fellowship, while others miss the mark.

"Humankind has an amazing capacity to forgive. . . Something within us cries out for reconciliation when wrongdoing has fractured a relationship. The desire for reconciliation is often more potent than the desire for justice. . . Without apologies, anger builds and pushes us to demand justice" (*The 5 Apology Languages: The Secret to Healthy Relationship* p. 14 – 15).

These Scriptures give us more guidance as to apologies:

Romans 12:18: If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Ephesians 4:31 – 32: Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Proverbs 19:11: A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense.

Can You Forgive Without an Apology?

Here's a quote from the book:

"Genuine forgiveness and reconciliation are two-person transactions that are enabled by apologies. . . . Nothing in the Old or New Testaments indicates that God forgives the sins of people who do not confess and repent of their sins" (*The 5 Apology Languages: The Secret to Healthy Relationship* p. 16).

Luke 17:3 – 4: "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. ⁴Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them."

But is it true that you can forgive without an apology? There are many times when Jesus forgives someone without an apology. For example:

Matthew 9:2: Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."

When you choose to get out of the offended seat even though you've never received an apology, you release that person to God knowing that God will make all things right someday.

Romans 12:19: Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Whatever you call it, the same thing is required of you. You need to release the bitterness and hurt that a person has caused you even though you'll never hear those magic words, "I'm sorry."

So, what does it mean to leave room for God's wrath? It means:

- **God is better at vengeance than you are:** If you try to take revenge, you may prevent God from avenging you.
- **God's judgment is holy and just.**
- **Trust God's timing.**
- **Give vengeance over to God:** If they never repent, they will still be on God's hook and it's much better than yours.
- **Respond with kindness.**

Luke 6:27, 32 – 33, 35

"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. . . ³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. . . ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

How would you define an enemy in your life? Would you like a great reward from Jesus? Then, do good to people who don't do good to you, and thank God for the opportunity.

The Languages of Apology

"The art of apology can be learned! The key to good relationships is learning the apology language of the other person and being willing to speak it. . . Those we care about most are those most affected by our apologies" (*The 5 Apology Languages: The Secret to Healthy Relationship* p. 18 – 19).

What do you expect in an apology?

Apology Language No. 1 – Expressing Regret

Can you give an example of what you could add to "I'm sorry" just to make sure the other person knows your apology is sincere?

Do you assume if something goes wrong it must be your fault, and you apologize just too often?

In a relationship that is intended to last—like marriages, family members, even coworkers—effective apologies need to express specific understanding of the pain the other person might have experienced.

Don't follow an apology with an excuse or explanation. Don't say *I'm sorry but*. . .

"Regret focuses on dealing with one's own behavior and expressing empathy for the hurt it has caused the other person. Insincerity is also communicated when we say 'I'm sorry' simply to get the other person to stop confronting us with the issue" (*The 5 Apology Languages: The Secret to Healthy Relationship* p. 27).

Putting your apology in writing may carry more weight and it gives you an opportunity to think through carefully what to say.

Apology Language #2 – Accepting Responsibility

Saying "I'm sorry" and saying "I was wrong" are two different statements.

Why is it so difficult for some people to say, "I was wrong"?

If you are struggling with your self-image, if you beat yourself up a lot and heap condemnation on your own head, did you realize that is pride in disguise? Pride in disguise is a weapon used by our enemy to keep us self-focused. If he can't keep you mired in positive pride, he'll use pride in disguise.

We need to add another seat: The Seat of Condemnation. When you allow others to condemn you or when you condemn yourself, you put yourself into this miserable seat.



Romans 8:1 - 2: Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:33 – 34: Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

How much time are you spending in the Seat of Condemnation, either condemning yourself or allowing someone else to condemn you? We can get out of that Seat of Condemnation by knowing and continually repeating who we are in Christ.

Juni said the first thing God taught her was to learn and focus on who she was in Christ. She began this list, and she said she still adds to it.

If you're in that Seat of Condemnation too often, would you be willing to put this discipline in place of daily reciting who you are in Christ? What can you do to impose this discipline on yourself if you need it?

"Learning to say I was wrong is a major step toward becoming a responsible and successful adult." P. 35

Apology Language #3 – Making Restitution

This language goes further than saying you're sorry and admitting you're wrong. It is doing whatever can be done to "make it right."

Luke 19:1 – 10: Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ²A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy.

³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see

over the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

⁸But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

⁹Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Actual Sycamore tree in Jericho today



There is something inside us that cries out that those who have wronged us must somehow pay for what they've done. Has that been true in your own life experience?

Apology Language #4 – Planned Change

Some apologies don't really work unless there is change. "Without laying out specific steps to prevent a recurrence, the other languages of apology may fall on deaf ears." (*The 5 Apology Languages: The Secret to Healthy Relationship* p. 64).

If you wanted to reassure someone that you truly intended to change, how would you word that apology?

This "Planned Change Apology" addresses long-term and really hurtful behavior.

Apology Language #5 – Requesting Forgiveness

This language of apology relates most often to close relationships, not often professional relationships or casual friendships. When is it important and why is it important?

1. It helps to remove the barrier between two people after an offense which created an emotional barrier.
2. It shows you realize you have done something wrong. You're not shifting the blame or offering excuses.
3. It shows that you want to restore the relationship; you value it.

Why is it hard for some people to ask for forgiveness?

"A healthy individual is the one who recognizes his/her personality traits, accepts them as being the normal pattern of operation, but refuses to be controlled by these personality traits when they are obviously dysfunctional to a relationship" *The 5 Apology Languages: The Secret to Healthy Relationship* p.84-85).

What is your strongest personality trait? How would that trait influence the way you give or receive an apology?

“Mature people recognize their fears but refuse to be held captive by their fears. When they value a relationship, they are willing to go against their fears and take the steps necessary to bring healing to the relationship” (*The 5 Apology Languages: The Secret to Healthy Relationship* p. 85).

What is your apology language?

To clarify what your apology language is, ask yourself these questions:

1. What do I expect the person to do or say?
2. What kind of things hurt me most often and most deeply?
3. How do I apologize to others?
4. Which of the five apology languages are most important to you?

“The art of apologizing is not easy, but it can be learned, and it is worth the effort. Apologizing opens up a whole new world of emotional and spiritual health. . . It is those who truly apologize who are most likely to be truly forgiven” (*The 5 Apology Languages: The Secret to Healthy Relationship* p. 170-171).

Exercises:

1. Your mother has a habit of trying to control your life, and she offers far more advice than she should. In other words, she tries to interfere, but you know she really loves you and cares about you. But one day she pushes your button one time too many, and you respond with a raised and angry voice, “Mom, really that’s none of your business. You just can’t run my life; I’m a grown woman.” She gets quiet and you know she is hurt. Do you apologize to her, and if you do, what would you say?
2. A friend pushes her boundaries with you often, asking you to help her get things done or asking to be included in your family activities. You want to be a friend to her, but the more you offer your friendship, the more she pushes the boundaries. So you have decided to cool it with her a bit and you’ve avoided her for the past couple of weeks. She calls and says, “I know something is wrong. If I have offended you, I’m sorry.” How do you respond.
3. A coworker brings a mistake to your attention and accuses you of making the mistake and that has caused her a lot of extra work. However, she has her facts all wrong; what you did was accurate and it is her lack of understanding her job that has caused her the problem. She expects you to apologize for something you did not do. What do you say?
4. Your husband (or child or sister or someone very close) has once again not removed his muddy shoes and as a result, he makes a mess in your kitchen, and you have to mop the floor again. He always says he’s sorry, but that’s as far as it goes. When you bring it up, he treats it as though it’s no big deal. After all, he said he was sorry. You need an apology from him and a commitment not to do it anymore. What do you do?



WHO YOU ARE IN CHRIST

How to abide in & remain in His love.

(John 15:9-12)

“Thank you Jesus....”

I am a beloved, cherished Child of the Light. (Jeremiah 31:3, 1 Thes. 5:5)

I am complete in You Lord, I lack nothing. (Colossians 2:10, Psalm 23:1)

I am Your Child and You are directing my steps. (1 John 3:1-3, Proverbs 16:9)

I’m wise! I have the mind of Christ and I will not live in fear.

(Prov. 1:7, 1 Cor. 2:16, Phil. 2:5, Isaiah 54:14).

I have the peace of God that I experience even when I don’t understand.

(Philippians 4:7).

I am Your Joy! And when you gave your life, it was for me. (Hebrews 12:2)

I am a Beautiful Masterpiece and Lord, You’re proud of me. (Ephesians 2:1-10)

I have new life and a new mindset in Christ, I’m learning to live and love just like my Savior. (Colossians 3:10)

I have authority and power over the enemy in this world. I am *never* powerless.

(Mark 16:17-18; Luke 10:17-19).

I have received the power of the Holy Spirit. I am a miracle every single day!

(John 14:17)

I am renewed as I take the time to grow in my knowledge of God.

(Colossians 3:9-10, John 17:3)

I have Your Spirit living in me, and am victorious over every attack from the enemy.

(1 John 4:4).

The ‘eyes of my heart’ are illuminated by the hope of my eternal life in Christ.

(Ephesians 1:18).

I am courageous and brave! You’ve called me by my eternal name and I belong to you. (Isaiah 43:1b).

I am able to accomplish whatever I’m meant to today because You are with me and my best is always good enough. (Philippians 4:13).

I am a worshipper in Spirit and in Truth, no one is going to out-praise me!

(John 4:23-24, Hebrews 13:15).

“Choose 1, anchor the Truth to anything in your existing routine. Speak it out loud at least once a day. Always remember to Celebrate to feel that Shine!”

Anything above once a day is A+ Extra credit! 😊



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