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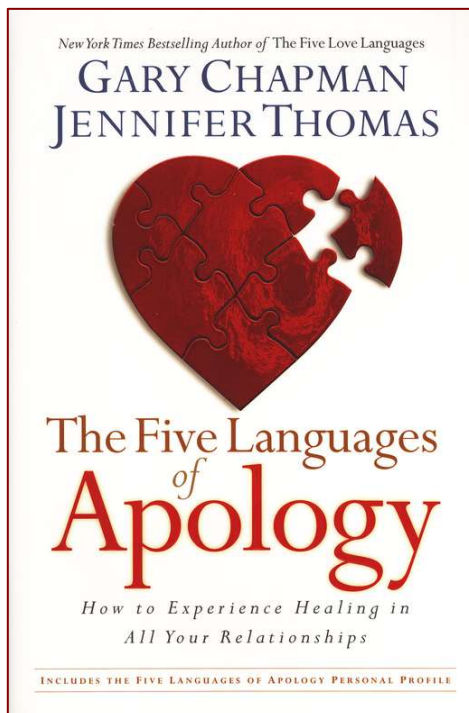


[APOLOGY LANGUAGE #5: REQUESTING FORGIVENESS]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

NOVEMBER 30, 2008

LESSON #4 FROM THE *MASTERWORK* SERIES STUDY OF:



FORGIVE ME?

[APOLOGY LANGUAGE #5: REQUESTING FORGIVENESS]

as someone ever said or done something to you for which you found it difficult to forgive them? Every time their very name is brought up, even if it was years ago, it still brings butterflies to your stomach. When you think of them, your heart rate increases. And you can feel your blood pressure rising when you think of what they said or did. It's as though you were reliving it again, just thinking about it! Some people really struggle with saying these two simple words, "*Forgive me?*"

In his autobiography in 2004, Pete Rose finally admitted that he bet on baseball games while employed as manager of the Cincinnati Reds—a violation that produced a lifetime ban from the sport in 1989. Rose's admission of guilt came after denying any wrongdoing for almost 15 years. And he has not stopped confessing, either. You may recall a couple of years ago, in September 2006, he began using his website to personally apologize to each of the fans he had failed or offended. In fact, for only **\$299** (plus \$4.95 for shipping and handling), Pete Rose will send you an autographed baseball that reads, "*I'm sorry I bet on baseball.*"

The marketing copy of the website says: "*Now you can get the baseball collectible everyone's talking about—Pete Rose's personal apology for betting on baseball, newly inscribed on an actual baseball—at a fantastic price.*" [HOLD UP AND PASS AROUND AN ACTUAL BASEBALL THAT I WROTE ON THAT SAYS, "I AM SORRY I BET ON BASEBALL."] I'm going to pass this baseball around for each of you to touch it, hold it, or smell it, but as I do, I want you to think about: **If this is a sincere and meaningful apology to YOU? Is it effective? Why or why not?**

Today, we conclude our four-week study from THE FIVE LANGUAGES OF APOLOGY, so as we start, let's review all five apology languages: (1) **EXPRESSING REGRET**: "*I am sorry.*" (2) **ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY**: "*I was wrong.*" (3) **MAKING RESTITUTION**: "*What can I do to make it right?*"



(4) **GENUINELY REPENTING:** *"I'll try not to do that again."* (5) **REQUESTING FORGIVENESS:** *"Will be please forgive me?"* I'm reminded of one of our previous memory verses that ties right in this most of these "languages". Remember what **1 JOHN 1:9 (NIV)** says? ***9** If we **confess** our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

I hope by now that everyone has discovered what their primary apology language is. How many of you discovered that the fifth apology language—REQUESTING FORGIVENESS—is your primary apology language? In our lesson this week, Dr. Chapman said it is often difficult for some people to say, *"Will you please forgive me?"* **Why do you think that's so hard to say?** [FEAR] **Or is it?**

I recently read about a man on his deathbed who had wronged another person and was harassed by fear because he harbored hatred against the other man. Finally, he sent for the individual with whom he had had the disagreement years before; he then made overtures of peace and asked for forgiveness. The two of them shook hands in friendship. But as the visitor left the room, the sick man roused himself and said, "Remember, if I get over this, the old quarrel stands and I take it back."

Let's turn to **LUKE 15: 11-27 (NLT)** and follow along as I read our focal scripture this morning: ***11** To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. **12** The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. **13** "A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. **14** About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. **15** He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. **16** The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything. **17** "When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! **18** I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, **19** and I am no*

longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.”’

²⁰ “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. ²¹ His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’ ²² “But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. ²³ And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began. ²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, ²⁶ and he asked one of the servants what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’”

We all know this parable so well that we often forget that it portrays not only a forgiving father, but **also** a returning son. What about him? **What was the son feeling as he approached the father at the end of the story?** Look again at **verses 17-20a**. The younger son found himself desperate and broken. Out of a spirit of futility, hopelessness and humility, he made a decision to **return** to his father. Notice that he even rehearsed **what** he would say in verses 18-19: *“I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”* And upon falling into his father’s arms, what did he do? Look at **verse 21**. He confessed just that and was really asking his father to forgive him! **Do you think the younger son was fully open to being forgiven?** No, he didn’t really expect to be fully restored. He was nervous. Do you think that’s a problem today when we approach someone with a request to be forgiven?

What did the father do when the father saw the boy coming home? [*“...HIS FATHER SAW HIM, AND FELT COMPASSION FOR HIM, AND RAN AND EMBRACED HIM, AND KISSED HIM.” v.20*] **What do we learn about God from this?** It tells us about the forgiveness of God. The father must have been waiting and watching for the son to come

home, for he saw him a long way off. When he came, he forgave him with no recriminations—no conditions. There is a way of forgiving—when forgiveness is conferred as a favor. It is even worse, when someone is forgiven, by always by hint and by word and by threat his or her sin is held over him. *Once Abraham Lincoln was asked how he was going to treat the rebellious Southerners when they had finally been defeated and had returned to the Union of the United States. The questioner expected that Lincoln would take a dire vengeance, but he answered: "I will treat them as if they had never been away."*

When I think about God's grace and the depth of His healing power, I am reminded of a story I read recently. *On February 24, 2005, just days after the head-on crash that killed their three sons, Nathan and Connie Backstrom did something most people would consider remarkable: They forgave the person responsible. Matthew, Jacob and Justin Backstrom died after a man, 22 at the time of the accident, swerved into their car on a dark two-lane road. The other driver apparently was using a cell phone and had been drinking that night. "This young man has consequences for his actions, and so I can forgive him because my God has forgiven me," Nathan Backstrom said days after the accident. "It is my duty as a Christian. I can't live the rest of my life carrying that anger."*

Isn't that exactly what we see in the father in our scripture passage about the returning son? But as hard as asking for forgiveness may be, what about the response of the other person? When someone pardons you, it's a big deal! We have seen the father's response in the parable, but what about in the real world today? Often, the response we receive is not quite as gracious. So, always be prepared for a very bad start to a verbal apology. For example, be ready to respond to something like, "You should be sorry, you idiot!", or "It's too little too late", or "I just can't trust you anymore", or "I've heard that one before", or "How do I know you won't do it again?" These kinds of reflexive responses or "apology busters" may come from anger or hurt feelings, but you should be prepared to accept and deal with it.

How should we respond to these kinds of remarks when we ask for the other person's forgiveness? The parable of the prodigal son describes how a child moves away from his father and how the father joyfully welcomes him back. Jesus told this parable of the lost son to help us understand God the Father's attitude toward us when we sin against Him. It is particularly aimed at those persons living under the awesome load of uncertainty of knowing they have displeased God.

Why do you think it is important to learn to apologize effectively? [BECAUSE RELATIONSHIPS MATTER. BECAUSE WE ARE ALL SINNERS WHO NEED TO APOLOGIZE.] Turn to **JAMES 5:16 (NLT)** and listen for guidance about apologizing to others—not just to God: ***16 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*** So, what's James telling us? How certain is it that we need to apologize? **ROMANS 3:23 (NIV)** says, ***23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***

If we are to confess, or apologize, to each other, how important is it that we each discover our own primary apology language? What about the apology languages that are vital to the person to whom you need to apologize? Also, we must remember that receiving one's forgiveness is not something we can demand or even expect. It's the same with God. Like the father in the parable, God forgives because it is his nature to forgive. Nothing we do on our own can prompt God to forgive us. It is His character that moves Him, not ours.

When Jesus got to the part of the story where he described the son's desire to come home, I can only imagine the Pharisee's feelings as they thought about what they would do if they had a son who behaved in such a manner. No doubt they were shocked at how Jesus closed the story. The son finally realized the futility of his ways, and decided to go home. There was no mention of his cleaning himself up. As far as we know, he did not even attempt to make himself presentable to his father. He just headed home in the most despicable condition possible.

Look again at **verse 20**: ... *And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.* When the father saw his son coming down the road, he ran toward him, hugged him and kissed him. He showered his affection upon the dirty, bedraggled, hog-feeding son of his who had squandered his inheritance and embarrassed the family. He seemed unconcerned about where his son had been or what he had done; his focus was on his son who had returned.

Why do you think the father saw his son when he was still a great distance off? I believe he had never given up on his son's return. The son willfully left, and the father **had to wait** until that will was broken. But he waits for the son's return. Do you know what it is like to have someone who loves you and believes in you no matter how many times you have messed up your life? Our heavenly father is like that! But we need to confess and ask forgiveness in order for the **relationship** to be restored—just like with those we encounter in everyday life.

It was five days before Christmas when a stranger approached ten-year-old Christopher Carrier, claiming to be a friend of his father. "I want to buy him a gift, and I need your help," said the stranger. Eager to do something good for his dad, Chris climbed aboard a motor home parked up the street. The driver took Chris to a remote field, claiming to be lost, and asked Chris to look at a map. Suddenly Chris felt a sharp pain in his back. The stranger had stabbed him with an ice pick. The man drove the wounded boy down a dirt road, shot him in the left temple, and left him for dead in the alligator-infested Florida Everglades.

Chris lay lifeless for six days until a diver found him. Chris miraculously survived his injuries, though he was blind in his left eye. Because he was unable to identify his attacker, police could not make an arrest. For a long time young Chris remained frightened, despite police protection. Finally at an invitation given after a church hayride, Chris trusted Jesus Christ as his Savior. He recalls, "I was overwhelmed with emotion...because I knew I had never really accepted and personally met the Savior." This turning

point in Chris's life came three years after the attack. At age 15, Chris shared his story for the first time. He eventually decided to pursue full-time ministry, helping others find the peace he had discovered in Christ.

In 1996 a detective told Chris over the phone that a man had confessed to the crime that had cost him his left eye. The man's name was David McAllister. Chris made plans to visit the feeble and now blind man, living in a nursing home. The strong young man Chris remembered was now a broken, humbled 77-year-old. Chris learned from the detective some of the background of what had happened years ago. McAllister had been hired by Chris's father to work as a nurse for an ailing uncle. Chris's dad had caught McAllister drinking on the job and had fired him. The senseless attack on Chris had been motivated by revenge.

As Chris now talked to the old man, at first McAllister denied knowing anything about the kidnapping. As Chris revealed more about himself, the old man softened and eventually apologized and requested forgiveness. Chris said, "I told him, 'What you meant for evil, God has turned into a wonderful blessing.'" Chris told his attacker how God had allowed his wounds to become open doors to share the good news of Christ.

Chris went home and told his wife and kids about meeting the man who had tried to kill him. The entire family began almost daily visits to McAllister's nursing home. During one Sunday afternoon visit, Chris popped the most important question he had yet asked McAllister: "Do you want to know the Lord?" McAllister said yes. Both men basked in forgiveness as McAllister gave his heart to Christ. A few days later McAllister died—peacefully—in his sleep. Carrier says it is not a story of regret, but of redemption. "I saw the Lord give that man back his life, and so much more," Chris said. "I can't wait to see him again someday—in heaven."

God has dealt with your sin too. It is no longer His focus. YOU are His focus. To God, your sin is no longer a hindrance to his fellowship with you. It's a hindrance only as long as YOU ALLOW

THE GUILT that accompanies sin blinds you to the fact that God is eager to reestablish fellowship with you. When we are confronted with people who have hurt us or abused our relationship with them, our initial response—the one that just happens without our planning it—is usually anger or hurt. Then, if we're really spiritual, we may try to deal with those emotions by asking God to help us see things from His perspective. But notice the Father's first response in the parable. He saw his son, ran and embraced him first. Amazing!

You have a forgiving father whose love and patience are unlimited. You cannot push Him too far. He is eager to have a fellowship with you. And the only thing blocking that is YOU. What's your responsibility here? We saw that in **1 JOHN 1:9** about confessing our sins. But be careful here or you'll be fooled. Why does the Bible teach us we are to CONFESS if we are already forgiven? Notice the prodigal son did NOT have to return home to receive forgiveness ... but he did to experience the forgiveness the father already had for him. And to make HIS relationship right. Isn't that why we TOO should confess and apologize?

Two or three years ago, as we studied the book by Dr. Stanley, *The Gift of Forgiveness*, I shared the case of the stolen watch that should clarify exactly what we're talking about, until we turn back to God from our sin, fellowship is broken. Listen to Dr. Stanley's words: *"Suppose that just before I begin to preach, I take off my watch and lay it on the pulpit. I forget that it is there and walk off and leave it. Someone from the balcony notices that I left it. He makes his way down to the platform area, and thinking that he is unobserved, he simply walks by the pulpit and slips the watch into his pocket. However, someone sees him take my watch and the next day informs me as to the identity of the thief. It is someone I know. Naturally, I am surprised and disappointed, but I choose to forgive him. Once I deal with any negative feelings I may have, there is no barrier in my relationship with this man as far as I am concerned. My relationship with him has not changed. Even though he stole my only watch, I have forgiven him for his actions; I have canceled the debt; I have assumed the loss. When I see*

him sitting in the balcony the following Sunday, I do not say, "Hey, you stole my watch." I have forgiven him, so I must trust the Lord to convict him of his sin.

But suppose the offender discovers that I am aware of his action. By coincidence, we meet in the hallway. There are just the two of us, and I say to him, "How are you? I'm glad to see you." You see, I am free because I have forgiven him. I am not carrying the excess emotional weight of an unforgiving spirit, bitterness or resentment for his action. But what do you suppose is going on inside him? He feels guilty, embarrassed, ashamed, fearful, regretful, found out. I give him a warm, friendly handshake; I smile; I even invite him to lunch. But he nervously excused himself; his eyes are unable to meet mine. He hurries off. He is miserable. His conscience is gnawing at him. His smile and sense of humor are gone.

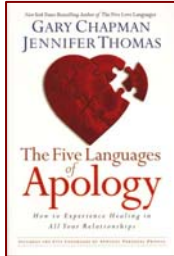
*The only way he is going to be comfortable around me and have fellowship with me again is to clear his conscience by **confessing** to me that he took my watch and **asking for my forgiveness**. My reply would then be, "You were already forgiven. I forgave you before I knew who took it." He did not have to come to me to get forgiveness; he was already forgiven. His confession was necessary for **HIM** to clear his conscience and to be restored in his previous fellowship with me.*

This is what happens when we come to God confessing our sin. The confession does not persuade God to forgive us. He did that at the cross. The confession restores us to our previous level of fellowship and intimacy with Him—from our perspective! God did not change. He did not turn away from us because of our sins. His love was not affected. He was not disappointed. He already knows the sins we are yet to commit, and His response is the same: "Forgiven!"

The Lord draws close to those who humble themselves. I encourage you to find strength in the Lord as you seek to exercise the five languages of apology in your relationships. Remember the

words of **PHILIPPIANS 4:13**, *"I can do ALL things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Let's Pray.



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