



Article by Dr. David L. Lane, Resident Retired Minister
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THE HEALING POWER OF AN APOLOGY

TEXT: Genesis 50:15-18

(15) And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.

(16) And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying,

(17) So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.

(18) And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps nothing is more hurtful than strained or broken relationships within a family. People who love freely and trust deeply, sometimes find themselves misused and emotionally wounded by those they choose to love. Friendships are fractured, relationships are corrupted, and fellowship is often hindered, hurt and hampered because of the lack of appropriate apologies.

While the story of Joseph provides a great narrative on Divine Providence, it also provides a scriptural paradigm for conflict resolution. Several elements of conflict resolution emerge from this

inspiring and instructive narrative. First there is recognition of ones' wrong actions of sins as an act of intelligence and moral conscience (Gen. 41:21-22, 44:16). Second, there is remorse, the feeling of regret at failure to maintain one's moral standards (ibid.); and third, there is desisting from sin, ceasing the patterns of sinful action to which one was addicted (Gen. 43:34 [jealousy], 44:13-16 [abandonment]).

There was a Fear that was Reasonable. Daddy was dead, Joseph could requite recompense upon them for their deeds. There was a Guilt that was Curable. His brothers were guilty and knew it. But there was also a Grace that was Bountiful, if only they would seek forgiveness. There was no way to lie their way out. They had no coat with blood, no story to tell the father, and no father to tell. The lesson to be learned is when you “mess up”, it is best to “fess up”!

While they finally beg forgiveness from Joseph in Genesis 50:15-18, we find them fearing to do so directly; so they put the request into the mouth of their deceased father. However, their words give us opportunity to study the healthy way to make an apology.

Everyone makes mistakes as well as missteps, but not everyone is good at apologizing for them or repairing the damage done by them. Making an apology and asking for forgiveness is both an Art and a Science. The *Art* is the manner in which the apology is delivered while the *Science* is the recipe that forms the apology itself.

Recent research led by Roy Lewicki, of The Ohio State University's Fisher College of Business, has confirmed by empirical data what my counseling practice has understood for more than twenty-five years. **Apologies are no good if they don't provide healing for the offended and changed behavior in the offender.**^[1] That premise is based on the strong Biblical principles, which by the way cannot be improved on even in this advanced technological age in which we live. All relationship therapist have worked with some

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variations of a proper apology having certain components which include:

- a **detailed account** of the situation
- **acknowledgement** of the hurt or damage done
- taking **responsibility** for the situation
- **recognition** of your role in the event
- a statement of **regret**
- asking for **forgiveness**
- a **promise** that it won't happen again
- a form of **restitution** whenever possible

The one unavoidable and un-get-a-around-able component that I have always stressed, because the Bible does, is what I have called the 'Declaration of Repentance'. It is extremely reassuring that science has finally accepted what the Bible has always taught as a major factor in correcting wrongs and being responsible to the people we hurt as believers. This article is intended to review the six steps necessary for a perfect apology and explore a little deeper into how one comes to the place of repentance in the correcting of a wrong inflicted on someone.

The researchers discovered that an effective apology has six elements and they delineated them as:

1. Expression of regret
2. Explanation of what went wrong
3. Acknowledgment of responsibility
4. Declaration of repentance
5. Offer of repair

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6. Request for forgiveness[2]

Beware and be aware, healing work is the work of the brave, because it takes guts and lots of courage to participate. Admitting a wrong and attempting to make it right is scary because you must make yourself vulnerable, face the person you have hurt, be fully accountable for your words and actions, and then accept the consequences of your mistakes. It's uncomfortable, embarrassing, humbling and hard to face the truth, particularly when the truth is that you messed up royally.

However, you cannot begin the journey into fullness until you realize that apologies are not about you. Apologies are about the person you hurt and the relationship you share. If you make your apology about yourself, you will make the effort to minimize your pain, guilt, and embarrassment to spare self at the expense of the injured. Apologizing is an honorable first step in the journey toward healing. It is a sacred act, and you are a critical part of it.

EXPRESSION OF REGRET

A statement of regret begins as, "I apologize" or "I'm sorry" along with a promise that it will not happen again . This step is important in the rebuilding of the relationship and one of the key ingredients to any apology. After all, there is no value in apologizing for something that you will do again and again. We will show the correlation of remorse and repentance as we deal with the declaration of repentance.

Be very specific about what you are apologizing for. It's not enough to say, "I'm sorry for anything I did that may have hurt you," or "I said some things I should not have said." The person you hurt doesn't remember their pain in generalities — they remember the words you used and the smallest details of your actions. So while you could begin with those generic lines, remember to follow up with a detailed list of your mistakes. The person receiving your apology will perceive

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it as more authentic and sincere, because they know you know what your crimes were and why they were wrong. Acknowledging them specifically will allow the other person to experience healing in a deeper and lasting way.

EXPLANATION OF WHAT WENT WRONG

By giving a detailed account of the offence, you are making sure that both you and the other person are talking about the same thing. It also legitimizes the feelings of the recipient by having the person who caused the offence recount the situation.

Keep in mind that you should be as specific as possible and your apology should be focused on the particular event(s). For example, if you missed an important date, don't apologize for your general absent-mindedness but instead for missing that specific date.

Acknowledge the emotional and physical consequences that the person has suffered as a result of what you've done. Once again it is about being specific. How did you make this person feel? In what ways was their life changed because of your actions?

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RESPONSIBILITY

You cannot fix what you will not face, you cannot change what you will not acknowledge and you cannot heal what you will not own. By acknowledging the hurt or damage done, you are validating their feelings and the recipient begins to sense that you understand the situation. This is important in rebuilding your relationship because it legitimizes their reaction, even if others in the same situation may have reacted differently.

Taking responsibility and recognizing your role in the situation without offering excuses is important in letting them know that you understand that the event and your actions did cause them harm.

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Do not try to defend yourself or justify the situation or your actions. The apology is all about THEM and how they feel. It doesn't matter if the actions were intentional or not, the end result is the same and that is what needs to be focused on when learning how to say I'm sorry.

“I wish I had said (or done) _____ instead.” By listing alternative scenarios, you show that you have consciously thought about the nature of your mistakes and how they could have been avoided.

DECLARATION OF REPENTANCE

This step is crucial in order for there to be changed behavior, Reality must set in, Remorse must take over and Repentance must shine through. [3]

The reality that must set in is how deeply you hurt or wounded the offended. The only reason they are hurt is because they love you enough to allow you to be close and trusted. The wound is deep and you cannot begin the repair work until you understand trust has been violated.

Repentance is not just being sorrowful. A criminal who is apprehended may be quite sorrowful that he has been apprehended, his schemes failed, or that he is frowned upon by society, etc. However, if the opportunity presented itself again, he may very likely commit the same offense again.

Judas Iscariot was sorrowful, but he never genuinely repented. The crowning error of Judas's life was not that he betrayed Jesus. The crowning error of his life was limiting the grace of God! He failed to confess his sin and to ask for forgiveness. (Matt. 27:3.) Torments of regret surged through his soul. The blood-tainted silver burned his fingers. The heavy guilt of his iniquity burdened his soul, and confession was made by his tongue; but, he went out and hung himself! There was plenty of remorse, but no repentance!

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Likewise, Herod was exceedingly sorrowful, but he did not repent. (Mark 6:26.)

However, when the inspired writers wanted to convey the idea of turning from sin, the Greek word translated "repent" was metanoio, a change of heart that leads to a change of state. Which explains why godly sorrow is not repentance; but is that which worketh repentance (2 Cor. 7:10.)

OFFER OF REPAIR

Making the person whole is a crucial part of the process. A suggested statement to be offered could be: "I know I can't erase the past, but I am prepared to _____ in order to make things right between us." OR..."What can I do to make things right?" Or even, "How can I make you whole?"

This will show the person how serious you are about repairing the damage you have created. It is one of the most effective and satisfying forms of justice, and it will help the person heal.

You may also add, "Is there anything else I have said or done that hurt you?" Here you are giving the person an opportunity to vent, even if it means that they are repeating the offenses and consequences you listed in your apology. This is tremendously important because a powerful part of the healing process is the purging of thoughts and emotions that have plagued the wounded person. Many people cannot feel a sense of closure unless they get everything off their chest.

Be ready to add what you have learned from the experience by saying something like, "From this experience I've learned ____."

When you demonstrate you have learned important life lessons as a result of the situation, it gives the other person a sense that none of it

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was in vain, that the “perpetrator” has grown and will not strike again, and that the world is a better place for it.

REQUEST FOR FORGIVENESS

Finally, asking for forgiveness at the end of the apology gives the "power" back to the recipient. It tells them, that you have done all that you can by apologizing and providing whatever form of restitution you can. The next move is up to them.

The spirit of the brothers of Joseph is worth noticing as spirit is the crux of this issue. They approached him face to face. They humbled themselves and pledged themselves to Joseph, as a symbol of making him whole.

.Remember, as someone wisely suggest, just because you make a great apology doesn't mean it will be accepted. This is just one of the consequences of your actions. And sometimes a great apology is followed by a delayed reaction — like a seed planted in the ground, it could take a long time before it settles in and bears fruit.

END NOTES

1. Lane sermon “FORGIVING THE UNFORGIVABLE”
2. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3536223/How-make-perfect-apology-Scientists-reveal-six-keys-saying-sorry.html#ixzz45oT2XQEm>
<http://www.indiatimes.com/health/buzz/here-s-how-to-make-the-perfect-apology-and-get-out-of-trouble-253412.html>
3. Lane sermon “ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE FAR COUNTRY” Lk. 15 series on How Far Is The Far Country?

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He is a scholar, psychotherapist, minister, international lecturer, theologian and one of the pioneers of therapeutic preaching. Lane gained world renown as a pioneer in Therapeutic Preaching back in the nineties and is recognized as being the first African American to write a text book on the subject. He has been given two honorary doctorates for his work in therapeutic preaching.

Dr. David L. Lane was chosen as the 2015 best representative of Deep Preaching in the nation by Sermon Central Preaching Resources. He became the first African American minister of any church fellowship or denomination to be so recognized and the only minister among Churches of Christ.



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