5 LANGUAGES OF APOLOGY:REQUESTING FORGIVENESS

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Luke 6:40-45

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# SETTING THE CONTEXT

In our culture, we often separate our personal lives from our professional lives. In Jesus’ day, there was no separation between the two. A disciple not only wanted to learn what the teacher taught, but they sought to become like the teacher;so modelling the behavior was a primary responsibility for a teacher. In our reading today, Jesus was teaching his disciples and a huge crowd that had gathered from around Judea and cities much further away. Notice the disqualifying factor – is it having flaws or is it refusing to see our flaws?

Read Luke 6:40-45

# THE SERMON

Last month, my daughter, Rachel, told me about one of her class sessions. The class was discussing people who are toxic. When the teacher asked the studentswho is the most toxic person in your life?The majority of them named a family member. My daughter was shocked and so was I. A few weeks later, my other daughter, Sarah, was telling me about her Courtship and Marriage class. They were discussing the five types of marriage ranging from a vital (healthy and supportive) marriage on one end of the spectrum to a devitalized (unsupportive and dying) marriageon the other end. The teacher asked how many students’ parents had a vital marriage and only three students raised their hands. Most students in the class had parents who were divorced or who had devitalized marriages. I was surprised again that is a lot of broken relationships and hurting people!I am part of a blended family and I know first-hand the pain of broken relationships and I also know God’s power to bring new life. It made me even more committed to preaching about things like apology and forgiveness. **Having good relationships involves commitment for sure, but it also involves some skills**. Following the way of Christ, seeking God’s wholeness in our relationships, calls us to learn and use these skills.

Jesus acknowledges that people make mistakes and create separation; he acknowledges thatwe are flawed. In our reading today, he doesn’t condemn his listeners for being flawed, does he? What he speaks against is refusing to see our own flaws, being unwilling to be self-aware and honest about the mistakes we make and the things we struggle with**. Self-deception prevents us from repenting or making changes in our lives that would improve not only our lives but the lives of people around us.**Lacking the humility that comes from self-awareness leads to lacking compassion. When we are willing to accept our own failings, we are less likely to judge other people for having failings. How can we repair relationships that are broken if we are unwilling to acknowledge our part in the breach?

Over the last five weeks we have been digging deeply into part of a sacrament for failure. Rev Len Sweet describes the sacrament for failure as confession, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation.[[1]](#endnote-2) Apology is a part of confession and forgiveness thatfacilitates that process. **We have learned that people receive apologies in different ways**. People have different languages of apology and until that language is spoken the person may not receive the apology or they may experience it as insincere. The five languages of apology are 1) Expressing Regret, 2) Accepting Responsibility, 3) Making Restitution, 4) Genuinely Repenting and 5) Requesting Forgiveness. The interesting thing**Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas found in their counselling practice is that 75% of couples have different primary languages of apology**.[[2]](#endnote-3) And guess which language we tend to speak when we need to apologize- the one that we need! You will improve the quality of your apology and your relationship if you intentionally choose the primary language of apology for the person who needs to forgive you. I had my husband take the online profile this week and to my surprise we are part of the 75% with different primary languages. His primary language of apology was low on my list and my top ones were very low or not even on his list! I guess I am going to be learning and practicing a new language of apology!Today we complete this sermon series with the language of apology called Requesting Forgiveness.

Alice worked in an office where she thought she got along with all her coworkers, but one afternoon a co-worker told her she was bothered by the fact that Alice “never apologized.” Alice hesitated, then remembered an incident in which she had made a mistake that affected this co-worker. As she recalled the incident she remembered, “I thought I had apologized quickly taking responsibility and saying that I was sorry for the inconvenience.” So she gingerly asked her co-worker what she needed to hear from her to receive an apology. “Well,” the co-worker exclaimed, “you never asked me to forgive you!” Alice responded, “Well, I do want you to forgive me, because I value our relationship. So I ask you now, will you forgive me?” The co-worker responded, “Yes, I will.” Then they both laughed and things were fine between them again.[[3]](#endnote-4)**Because Alice was open to accepting her co-worker’s different perceptions, she learned her co-worker’s language of apology and their relationship was really repaired.**For some people like Alice’s co-worker, an apology doesn’t sound like an apology until the person literally asks for forgiveness.

Now if this is not a primary language for you, you may be thinking that saying the words, “will you forgive me” would feel weird, maybe even sound stilted**. What are some of the barriers to asking for forgiveness?**

* **Chapman and Thomas found that requesting forgiveness is especially difficult for people with strong controlling personalities**. When you ask for forgiveness, you give the other person the power to repair the relationship or to refuse to forgive and that is very hard for people who like to be in control.
* **Another reason some people have a hard time requesting forgiveness is the fear of rejection**. Scholar Hamilton Beazley said, “Apologizing is making an admission that we erred, (Jesus put it taking the log out of our own eye) and we don’t like having to do that… It makes us vulnerable because we are requesting something- forgiveness- that we think only the other person can grant, and we might be rejected.” For some, the thought of rejection is unbearable.
* **Another barrier to requesting forgiveness is the fear of failure**. Some people equate “doing right” with “being good” or “being successful”. These are people with a strong moral compass who try very hard to do the right thing. To this person, admitting a wrong is equivalent to admitting, “I’m a failure.” Typically this person will argue vehemently with the other person that what they did was not wrong. “You took it the wrong way; I didn’t mean it that way.”[[4]](#endnote-5)Refusing to ask forgiveness is a form of self-protection, but it also keeps us from repairing and restoring relationships that are important. If we see any of these barriers in ourselves, we can make the choice to overcome our resistance to requesting forgiveness so that we speak the language of the person who is hurt and open the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Even though this language of apology may be difficult for some of us, **why is it important to learn and become comfortable with it?**

1) It tells the person who was hurt that you want to remove the barrier caused by the hurt and restore the relationship.

2) It demonstrates to the person that you value them and your relationship with them and that you realize that you did something hurtful whether it was intended or unintended. Consider the message they will get when you are willing to be a little uncomfortable so that they may truly know how sorry you are. And consider the message of willingly giving up your power by requesting forgiveness putting the future of the relationship in the hands of the offended person- especially if you’re someone who likes control.

This brings up another matter – requesting forgiveness and demanding forgiveness are two different things. As Chapman and Thomas say, “***When we demand forgiveness, we fail to understand the nature of forgiveness.*** Forgiveness is essentially a choice to lift the penalty and to let the person back into our lives. It is to pardon the offense so that we might redevelop trust”[[5]](#endnote-6) and restore the relationship. Forgiveness is a gift. Think about your reaction if someone demanded a gift from you. We wouldn’t be inclined to give it to them, would we? Forgiveness is not only a gift but sometimes it is a costly gift. If the offense is major or often repeated, it may take time and a process to forgive as we have seen in our five languages of apology. They may need time to see if you will follow through with genuinely repenting or making restitution.

Part of our motivation to practice apology and forgiveness is that God forgives us and it is a costly forgiveness. God’s forgiveness through Christ was very costly. As we receive and benefit from that gift, shouldn’t we be willing to extend it to others, especially those that God has entrusted to our love and care? Apologizing requires us to admit that we are imperfect. It requires us to see the log in our own eye.It is not a sign of weakness as some claim, but it is the sign of a humble and contrite heart that values the other and ourselves. **The languages of apology help us to request the gift of forgiveness and knit together relationships that have been broken**. Jesus said, “A good person produces good from the good treasury of the inner self.” (Luke 6:45, CEB) May we bear the fruits of love and grace as we speak the languages of apology. Amen.

1. Leonard Sweet. *Learn to Dance the Soul Salsa: 17 Surprising Steps for Godly Living in the 21st Century*, 2000, p. 78. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas. *When Sorry Isn’t Enough: Making Things Right With Those You Love*. (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2013), p. 84. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. Chapman and Thomas, p. 74. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Chapman and Thomas, p. 76-78. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. Chapman and Thomas, p. 76-79 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)