

When
Sorry
Isn't
Enough

Righting Wrongs

Talk About It

Here are a number of questions designed to spark interaction and stimulate thought. Share these with your spouse or close friend or in a small group, or use them for personal reflection.

Discuss the author's observation, "People are incurably moral."
Agree? Disagree?

Share a story you've heard or experience you've had showing humankind's "amazing capacity to forgive."

Those we care about most are those most affected by our apologies. Who are the people in your life who will be most affected by your learning in the area of apology?

“I’m Sorry”

EXPRESSING REGRET

Talk About It

Have you had childhood experiences similar to those described at the beginning of this chapter? Is there anyone from your past that you would like to say “I’m sorry” to?

Have you ever hurt someone without realizing it? What did you do when you became aware that you had hurt someone? What would most people say they are looking for in an apology?

“I Was Wrong”

ACCEPTING RESPONSIBILITY

Talk About It

Name a few of the most outrageous excuses you have heard people claim for refusing to admit wrong. Why do you think these people had such a difficult time admitting a wrongful act?

This chapter teaches that we often believe, “To admit that we are wrong is perceived as weakness.” How does it make you feel to admit that you were wrong?

When was a time you felt you had done nothing wrong, yet someone expected an apology? How did you respond?

“How Can I Make It Right?”

MAKING RESTITUTION

Talk About It

What do you think of courts offering large sums of money for reparative damages? When do you feel the awarded amounts become excessive?

This chapter suggests there is a voice within us that cries out for those who have wronged us to pay for their act. In what ways has this been true in your life? How have you sensed the need for another person to “pay for” his or her offense against you?

Speaking someone’s love language is central in making restitution successful. Of the five love languages (words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time, and physical touch), which is most important to you? Why do you think this is the case?

“I Want to Change”

GENUINELY REPENTING

Talk About It

Name some of the differences you have noticed between men and women when they apologize. Where do you think these differences come from?

This chapter defines repentance as “to turn around” or “to change one’s mind.” In what other ways have you heard repentance defined? What do you think of the idea that repentance includes the concept of “I’ll try not to do that again”?

Talk about a time when you wanted your spouse (or other person close to you) to not just apologize but change their behavior. What happened?

“Can You Find It in Your Heart ...”

REQUESTING FORGIVENESS

Talk About It

When was a time you thought you had apologized for a situation but later discovered the other person didn't feel that you had apologized? What further action did you take in that situation?

Have you ever had to forgive—or ask for forgiveness? How did you feel?

How can we learn to offer forgiveness even in situations when the other person is unwilling or unable to request it?

How Do You Say You're Sorry?

Talk About It

Which of the five apology languages are most important to you? Think about your closest friend. Which apology language do you think is most important to him or her?

Review the questions for discovering your primary love language. Which one do you find most helpful?

What do you personally desire most in an apology?

What If You Don't Want to Apologize?

Talk About It

When was a time you chose to wait to apologize rather than doing it immediately? How did this affect the relationship?

“Why should I apologize when she’s the one who started it?” said the man in the chapter. What would you say to him?

Many people form an “insensitive conscience” over time and no longer consider what they do as being wrong. How have you experienced this in your own life? In the lives of those close to you?

Learning to Forgive

Talk About It

When do you find it most difficult to forgive someone? Why do you think this is the case?

Discuss the author's observation that "we are never separated from God's love, but our disobedience does separate us from His fellowship."

Why is it dangerous to forgive too easily?

Healing Your Family Relationships

Talk About It

Have you ever experienced or observed a broken or damaged relationship in your family?

“Most siblings, in the process of growing up, do and say things that are hurtful to each other.” How have you dealt with that in your own life?

In what ways can writing an apology statement help in dealing with an emotional issue? Can you think of a time when writing out your apology would have better helped the situation?

Choosing to Forgive Yourself

Talk About It

Why does it seem easier at times to forgive other people than to forgive ourselves? How have you seen this in your life?

Share an experience you have had in taking “positive steps” to overcome a challenge.

What do you think of the idea of talking with yourself about self-apology? Does it feel natural or awkward? How has your background influenced how you view this concept of self-talk?

Truly Sorry, Truly Forgiven

Talk About It

Take some time to discuss some of the conflicts and ills in our society. How would “admitting wrong” help heal some of these ills?

Things Not to Say When Apologizing

When do you tune out of an apology and decide the other person is insincere? Often, we reject an apology as soon as we hear words that blame, excuse, or deny. Do you want to use best practices for apologies that actually work? If so, omit these phrases. When I am sitting in my counselor chair and I hear these phrases being spoken to a partner, I often stop the action and say, "You are heading in the WRONG direction. Proceed only if you intend to wreck this relationship."

- Haven't you gotten over that yet?
- I am sorry that you were offended.
- I asked for and received forgiveness from God.
- I should be excused because I . . .
- You're too sensitive. I was only joking.
- Why do you always . . . ?
- If you hadn't . . .
- You sound like your mother.
- That's just silly.
- That's life.
- What's the big deal?
- To the extent that you were offended . . .
- Give me a break.
- You just need to get over it.
- There is nothing I can do about that now. I can't take away the past!
- Why can't you let bygones be bygones?

Things to Say When Apologizing

What is the right way to apologize? There are two good methods: you could write down the apology and then read it to the person, or you could just say it. Do not try to give a serious apology via electronic media. Taking the time to speak directly with someone better conveys your sincerity.

What are the steps for giving a good apology? Body language can make or break the sincerity of an apology. Be sure that you maintain eye contact, don't cross your arms defensively, listen with concern, and speak with a pleasant tone of voice. Then, choose words that do not blame others, excuse yourself, or deny responsibility. Instead, take responsibility for your part of the problem (do this even if it wasn't all your fault), express sorrow for hurt feelings, offer to make amends, talk about how you can prevent the problem from happening again, and consider requesting forgiveness.

Here is a useful phrase to help you jump back into an issue: "I'd like to circle back to (name the issue). I realize that I didn't say (or do) things the right way. I apologize for that." This method brings you back to the topic and it shows your intent to be open and nondefensive.

Next, use some of these tried and true apology phrases. Use more than one of these if they really apply to your situation, if the offense has happened repeatedly, and/or if the damage was serious:

- I did it, and I have no excuse.
- I'm responsible for the mistake.
- It might take us a long time to move on from what I've done.
- I would have a hard time forgiving me if I were you.
- I've damaged your trust.
- I was careless, insensitive, thoughtless, or rude.
- I will do the work to fix my mistake going forward.
- My actions were unacceptable.
- My heart aches over what I've done.



- You didn't deserve that kind of treatment.
- You have every right to be upset.
- I know that what I did was wrong.
- My mistake is part of a pattern that I need to change.
- I will rebuild your trust by . . .
- I will try to make this up to you by . . .
- I've put you in a very difficult position.
- I realize that talk is cheap. I know that I need to show you how I will change.
- I hope I haven't waited too long to give you the apology you deserve.
- Can you ever forgive me?

The Apology Language Profile

The following profile is designed to help you discover your apology language. Read each of the twenty hypothetical scenarios, and check (✓) the one response you would most like to hear if that particular situation were to occur in your life. Assume that, in each scenario, you and the other person have a relationship in which it is in both of your best interests to maintain a respectful and considerate attitude. In other words, if the relationship is damaged in some way by the other person, assume that the relationship is important enough that you feel it necessary to receive the other person's apology when he/she has offended you. Also, assume that the "offender" is aware of his/her offense because you have expressed your hurt in some noticeable, direct way.

Some of the possible responses to each of the twenty scenarios are similar. Focus less on their similarity and more on choosing the response that most appeals to you, and then move on to the next item.

1. Your spouse failed to acknowledge your wedding anniversary. (If you are not married, assume you are in this scenario.) He/she should say:
 - _____ ◇ “I can’t believe I forgot. You and our marriage are so important to me. I am so sorry.”
 - _____ ○ “There is no excuse for me forgetting. What was I thinking?”
 - _____ △ “What can I do to prove my love for you?”
 - _____ □ “You can bet I won’t forget next year! I’m going to circle the date on my calendar!”
 - _____ ☆ “I know you are hurt, but can you ever forgive me?”

2. Your mother knew how you felt about a matter and knowingly went against your wishes. She should say:
 - _____ ○ “If I had only thought about what I was doing, I would have realized it was wrong.”
 - _____ △ “What can I do to regain your respect?”
 - _____ □ “I won’t take your feelings for granted in the future.”
 - _____ ☆ “Will you please give me another chance?”
 - _____ ◇ “I knew how you felt but went against your wishes anyway. I wish I had not done that.”

3. You were in a crisis and needed help, but your friend ignored your need. He/she should say:
 - _____ △ “Saying ‘I’m sorry’ doesn’t feel like it is enough. What more can I say or do to mend our friendship?”
 - _____ □ “I realize now that I could have been more help to you, and I promise that I’ll do everything I can do to help you if ever you are in trouble again.”
 - _____ ☆ “I am sincerely sorry and ask you to forgive to me.”
 - _____ ◇ “I should have been there for you. I’m so sorry I let you down.”
 - _____ ○ “I let you down when you needed me the most. I made a terrible mistake.”

4. Your sister made an insensitive remark about you. She should say:
- _____ “While I will likely say wrong things again in the future, what I’ve learned from this experience will help me avoid hurting you with insensitive comments.”
 - _____ “I blew it! Can you forgive me?”
 - _____ “That was so thoughtless of me. I wish I had been more considerate of your feelings.”
 - _____ “I know what I said was wrong and that I hurt your feelings.”
 - _____ “Would you allow me to retract what I said? I would like a chance to restore your reputation.”
5. Your spouse lashed out in anger against you when you had done no apparent wrong. He/she should say:
- _____ “I am truly sorry for yelling at you. I hope that you can find it in your heart to forgive me.”
 - _____ “I wish I had not hurt you by yelling at you. I feel so bad for how I treated you.”
 - _____ “I was angry, but I had no right to speak to you that way. You did not deserve that.”
 - _____ “What can I do or say to make things right between you and me?”
 - _____ “I’m afraid that I’ll do this again, and I don’t want to. Help me think of ways to avoid blowing up like this in the future.”
6. You were proud of your accomplishment, but your friend acted as if it was trivial. He/she should say:
- _____ “You needed me to share your excitement, and I let you down. I hate that I didn’t respond more appropriately.”
 - _____ “I spoiled your celebration by not being happy for you. I could make excuses, but really, I have no good excuse for ignoring your achievement.”
 - _____ “Is it too late for us to celebrate your accomplishment? I really want to make this up to you.”

- _____ “I promise I’ll notice and celebrate your accomplishments in the future. I’ve learned a hard lesson.”
- _____ ☆ “I know I failed you before, but will you please forgive me again?”

7. Your business partner failed to consult with you on an important matter of mutual interest. He/she should say:

- _____ ○ “I really blew it this time. I was wrong to not include you in this decision. You have a right to be upset with me.”
- _____ △ “Is there anything I can do to make up for what I did?”
- _____ □ “In the future, I plan to consult with you no matter what. I won’t bypass you in making decisions again.”
- _____ ☆ “You have every right to hold this against me, but will you please forgive me?”
- _____ ◇ “I know now that I hurt you very badly. I am truly sorry for what I did.”

8. A coworker unintentionally poked fun at you and embarrassed you in front of others in your workplace. He/she should say:

- _____ △ “Is there any way I can repair our relationship? Would you like for me to apologize to you in front of the staff?”
- _____ □ “It’s easy to take others’ feelings for granted, but I want to be more considerate of you and others in the future. Will you help hold me accountable?”
- _____ ☆ “I didn’t intend to hurt you, and now all I can do is ask for your forgiveness and try not to repeat my same mistake again.”
- _____ ◇ “I deeply regret embarrassing you like I did. I wish I could go back in time and say something more appropriate.”
- _____ ○ “That was so thoughtless of me. I thought I was being funny, but obviously, hurting you like I have is not funny.”

9. You were trying to tell your friend something important, and he/she acted disinterested. He/she should say:

- _____ “I messed up this time, but in the future, I promise to give you my full attention when you say you have something important to tell me.”
- _____ ☆ “I’m sorry I wasn’t listening. You don’t have to forgive me, but I hope you will.”
- _____ ◇ “I feel really bad that I didn’t listen to what you were saying. I know how it feels to have something important to say, and I regret that I didn’t listen to you.”
- _____ ○ “Listening is such an important part of a strong relationship, but once again, I blew it. You needed me to hear you, and I basically just ignored your need.”
- _____ △ “Can we back up and try again? You talk, and I’ll listen. You’ll have my undivided attention.”

10. Your brother learned that he had previously been wrong about a significant point of conflict between the two of you. He should say:

- _____ ☆ “I apologize. Will you please forgive me?”
- _____ ◇ “I am upset with myself over how I handled our disagreement. My behavior threatened our relationship, and that scares me. I regret the way I acted.”
- _____ ○ “I admit that I was wrong. If I had only known then what I know now, I could have saved us a lot of heartache.”
- _____ △ “What can I do to mend our relationship? I feel like I need to do or say something to restore your respect for me.”
- _____ “If we disagree over an issue in the future, I plan on gathering all the facts before I make any judgments. That may save us from unnecessary arguing.”

11. Although you had expressed your annoyance with a particular habit many times before, your spouse continued exhibiting the behavior to spite you. He/she should say:

- _____ ◇ “I’ve taken this too far. I’m very sorry for not being more considerate of your wishes. I wouldn’t like it if you did that to me.”
- _____ ○ “OK, I admit it; I am annoying you on purpose, and that’s neither funny nor fair. I need to act more mature than that.”
- _____ △ “Saying ‘I’m sorry’ won’t take back the fact that I’ve knowingly tried to annoy you. What more can I do to win back your favor?”
- _____ □ “I have gotten into the habit of disregarding your wishes, and I don’t want to go on doing that. From now on, I’m going to make extra effort to honor your wishes.”
- _____ ☆ “I’ve tried your patience, and now I’m asking you to forgive me. Will you allow me a fresh start in honoring your requests?”

12. Your father gave you the “silent treatment” as a way of making you feel guilty about something on which the two of you disagreed. He should say:

- _____ ○ “There is no denying that I’m guilty. I should have handled the situation with more fairness and honesty.”
- _____ △ “I would like to make this up to you somehow, and I want to keep talking with you. May I take you out to dinner?”
- _____ □ “In the future, I’m going to be more honest about how I feel without trying to make you feel guilty for not agreeing with me.”
- _____ ☆ “It’s your choice, but I really do hope you will forgive me.”
- _____ ◇ “You are an adult, and I feel really bad about controlling your decisions. I don’t want to risk damaging our relationship.”

13. A business associate broke a promise and caused you to miss an important deadline. He/she should say:
- _____ “It’s too late to do anything about it now, but I want so badly to avoid this type of error again. Let’s talk about what I can do in the future to make good on my promises.”
 - _____ ☆ “I don’t expect you to forgive me considering the trouble I’ve caused you, but I would greatly appreciate it if you would forgive me.”
 - _____ ◇ “I am so sorry. I promised you I’d come through, and I not only let you down but caused you to miss your deadline. I know this jeopardizes your work and our partnership.”
 - _____ ○ “I’ve really messed up this time. You missed your deadline because of me.”
 - _____ △ “I don’t know what I can do at this point, but is there any way I can compensate you for my part in your missed deadline?”
14. Your neighbor asked you to wait on him/her outside the arena, but he/she never showed up for the concert. He/she should say:
- _____ ☆ “Our friendship really is important, and I hope you won’t give up on me. Will you forgive me for standing you up?”
 - _____ ◇ “I’m so sorry you had to stand there waiting on me. You are important to me, and I should have honored you and your time by being there when I said I would be.”
 - _____ ○ “You stood there waiting on me, thinking I would show up at any moment, and I let you down. If I had only managed my time differently, I would have been there. That is totally my fault.”
 - _____ △ “Let’s go to another concert, and this time, I’m paying for your ticket as a way of apologizing for standing you up last time.”
 - _____ “In the future, I will manage my time and prioritize my schedule so that I tend to our friendship like I should.”

15. A friend's child broke one of your prized possessions while visiting in your home. Your friend should say:

- _____ ◇ "I know this was one of your prized possessions, and I feel terrible about what has happened."
- _____ ○ "I should have been watching my child more closely. It was my fault for not paying more attention to what was going on. If I had just done a couple of things differently, this would not have happened."
- _____ △ "May I pay you for this special item, or can I purchase it somewhere for you? Is there some way I can replace this?"
- _____ □ "I promise that I will be more protective of your possessions in the future and will not allow my child to play in 'off-limits' areas when we're in your home."
- _____ ☆ "You have a right to be upset, but I hope that you can forgive me and remain my friend despite your disappointment."

16. A church member blamed you with sole responsibility for the failure of a committee project although he/she shared leadership duties of the committee. He/she should say:

- _____ △ "There is no excuse for my behavior, and the only way I'm going to feel remotely better is to make this right between us. What do you need me to do or say?"
- _____ □ "I'm either going to learn how to treat my team members more appropriately, or I'm not going to lead any more committees. I want to grow from this experience."
- _____ ☆ "Please forgive me. I was wrong to blame you, and I pray that you will forgive me."
- _____ ◇ "I can't believe I blamed you like I did. I really am embarrassed about my behavior, and I'm sorry."
- _____ ○ "I had just as much to do with the failure of this project as you or anyone else. I should have admitted my shortcomings in this area."

17. Despite his/her promise to keep your secret, your coworker broke your trust in him/her by telling others in the office. He/she should say:

- _____ ○ “I told you I would keep your secret, and I broke my promise and damaged your trust in me. I made a terrible mistake.”
- _____ △ “Help me know what I should do to restore your trust in me.”
- _____ □ “It may take you some time to rebuild your trust in me, but I’ll be working hard from now on to prove that I am trustworthy.”
- _____ ☆ “You don’t have to answer immediately, but will you consider forgiving me for making this mistake?”
- _____ ◇ “If only I had thought about how much damage I was doing by telling your secret. I feel so bad for not having taken my promise more seriously.”

18. Your teammate spoke negatively about you to others on the team.

He/she should say:

- _____ △ “I want to do anything I can to correct my mistake. Shall I apologize in front of the team?”
- _____ □ “If I am ever again upset with you, I promise to gather my thoughts and approach you directly and respectfully.”
- _____ ☆ “You may not be able to forgive me, at least not now, but I hope you can forgive me someday.”
- _____ ◇ “What I said was mean and unkind. I regret what I said, and I wish that I could take it back.”
- _____ ○ “I had a bad attitude and didn’t once think about your positive attributes. I should have thought more about what I was saying.”

19. Despite your having several positive accomplishments, your supervisor only criticized your performance. He/she should say:

- _____ “You deserve recognition for your hard work. I will try to be more balanced next time.”
- _____ ☆ “I hope this won’t damage our relationship. Will you accept my apology?”
- _____ ◇ “I am so sorry that I focused on the minor flaws of your performance. I regret that I didn’t encourage you more.”
- _____ ○ “I neglected to compliment you on the many strengths of your performance, and you may have felt that all your practice was for nothing. As your supervisor, I should be more forthcoming with praise for all the good work that you do.”
- _____ △ “How can I earn your forgiveness? Shall I write down the strengths of your performance?”

20. At lunch, your server dropped food on you and ruined your shirt. He/she should say:

- _____ ☆ “Can you please forgive me for my carelessness?”
- _____ ◇ “I am so sorry about that. I feel bad that I’ve ruined your shirt and inconvenienced you like this.”
- _____ ○ “I am normally pretty careful, but I wasn’t careful enough this time. I accept full responsibility for this mess.”
- _____ △ “I would like to reimburse you for your dry cleaning or for the cost of a new shirt. What seems most appropriate to you?”
- _____ □ “This has taught me a hard lesson. You can bet that I’ll be even more careful in the future when serving guests.”

RECORDING AND INTERPRETING YOUR SCORE

Go back and count how many times you checked each of the individual shapes. Then, transfer those totals to the appropriate columns below. For example, if you checked eight times, then write the number 8 in the blank above the below.

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
◇	○	△	□	☆

As you may have guessed, each of the five shapes represents a certain language of apology. Thus, ◇ = Expressing Regret, ○ = Accepting Responsibility, △ = Making Restitution, □ = Genuinely Repenting, and ☆ = Requesting Forgiveness. Whichever shape you circled the most times while answering the twenty profile questions is your primary language of apology.

Obviously, the highest score possible for any of the individual languages is twenty. If you scored the same amount of points for two or more languages, then you may feel equally receptive to two or more of the apology languages.

The 5 Love Languages®

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STRENGTHEN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS.



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