



## Study 3

# HOW TO BE FORGIVEN

## Objectives

1. To appreciate the importance of a genuine apology.
2. To be able to hold repeat offenders seeking forgiveness to account.
3. To understand how to truly apologise.
4. To help others find forgiveness.

As the young pastor settled into his pastorate, other pastors soon heard that he was pastorally helping people with an experience well beyond his years. Some of these pastors, with churches hours away from his, began referring troubled couples to him. One of these young couples had already separated. As the pastor listened to their sad story of how they had drifted apart, he spoke to them about a road map, as he called it, for how they could rebuild their relationship. But then something was disclosed that changed everything. By his own admission, he was now out of his depth after what was disclosed. He was unable to save this marriage despite his best efforts. And this would not be the last marriage that he would be unable to save. Despite his less than perfect track-record, for some reason, troubled couples still came to him asking for his help to heal their marriages. Perhaps it was his frustration, or perhaps it was his desire to learn from others more experienced than him, either way, he had been on a quest to discover how he might become more effective in helping strained marriage.

After a shelf load of books, several training seminars, and casual conversations with more experienced pastors, he discovered what he needed to know and began to implement it in his marriage counselling. One of the main things he discovered was how the power of an apology could be the catalyst for healing a broken marriage (and any other relationship).

## The Power of the Apology

As mentioned in our last study, an *apology* is much more than simply saying *I'm sorry*. To illustrate what constitutes a genuine apology, let's consider one of its examples in the Gospel of Luke.

1. Read Luke 19:1-10.

(i) What had Zacchaeus probably done? (19:2) \_\_\_\_\_

(ii) How might the community treated Zacchaeus? (19:7) \_\_\_\_\_

(iii) In what way was Zacchaeus's statement in 19:8 an apology? \_\_\_\_\_

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 (iv) In what way was Christ's statement to Zacchaeus in 19:5 and vs 9-10 a *transaction* of forgiveness? \_\_\_\_\_

Zacchaeus would have almost certainly been shunned by his community. Luke tells us that Zacchaeus was "a chief tax collector and was rich" (19:2). The reason that Jewish tax collectors were so despised—especially *Chief* tax collectors— was not just that they siding with their invaders and oppressors, but that they were infamously corrupt by their over-taxing of their fellow Jews.

2. Only the offended can forgive an offender. In what way was Jesus qualified to forgive Zacchaeus?

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3. How did Zacchaeus's statement in Luke 19:8 reveal that he knew who he had wronged?

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4. Read Leviticus 19:17-18. How does this passage describe how God's people are to forgive?

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## Forgiving Repeat Offenders

If you are a *repeat offender*, you will probably find being forgiven by those you have offended very difficult to obtain. Marriage counsellor, Dr. Gary Chapman, says that this is especially the case within a marriage between a husband and wife. While your hurt spouse may not seek revenge for what you have done, they will be increasingly unlikely to *transact* the forgiveness necessary to fully restore the relationship.

Some will raise the question, “How can I continue to forgive my spouse when he/she does the same thing over and over again?” Peter raised this question: “Lord, how many times could my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not as many as seven . . . but 70 times seven” (Matt. 18:21–22). Obviously, there is room to question one’s sincerity if he commits the same failure that often, but Jesus indicates that we do not have the ability to judge another’s sincerity. Jesus says that if they confess, we are to forgive.

Gary Chapman, *Covenant Marriage: Building Communication & Intimacy*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003, 31–32.

The repeat offender should not be surprised that if they continue to offend, their spouse will increasingly withdraw from them because trust between them will have been eroded.

## Making A Genuine Apology

The expression, “I’m sorry” is an appropriate response to someone who has told you that they recently lost a family member, because it conveys *sorrow*. Sorrow is a component of empathy which is important for all emotionally healthy people to experience. But sorrow doesn’t *repair* a loss or rectify damage done. To achieve this requires an *apology*. There are five key components to an apology. These include:

- (1) C \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ n - a humble acknowledgement of wrong-doing toward the offended.
- (2) L \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ g - humbly without excusing or justifying yourself in a manner that invites the offended to speak openly and frankly.
- (3) E \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ y - expressing to the offended the hurt/injury you have caused in a manner that shows you were listening what they said and also

what they conveyed (this requires a good deal of emotional intelligence to express back the offended the ways they must have felt as a result of being offended).

- (4) A \_\_\_\_\_ g - sincerely seek the offended person’s mercy with an appeal to be forgiven.
- (5) R \_\_\_\_\_ n - the hurt caused may have resulted in financial or property loss which needs to be recompensed. Whenever there has been a wound that you have caused to another person, you must accept that trust between you has been eroded and will take a persistent demonstration over time of trustworthiness for it to be restored.

A genuine apology is an act of love. Genuine forgiveness is also an act of love. Because an apology is appealing to the offended person’s *mercy* it does not mean that the offended person *must* forgive after you have apologised. When trust has been so damaged and eroded between people, the offended may withhold their forgiveness for a time as a test of sincerity to ascertain how serious the apology was.

- 5. If the offended person does not immediately express their forgiveness to the offender after they have apologised, what should the offender do?

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- 6. In what way does Colossians 3:12-14 inform both the offender and the offended about forgiveness?

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- 7. What does Mark 11:25 instruct the offended to do, even when there is no contrition or apology from the offender?

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*Amen.*