

A Meaningful Apology

A meaningful apology can be the first step toward forgiveness. Colleen O'Connor writes in *The Denver Post*: "The successful apology dissolves anger and humiliation. It shows respect, builds trust, and helps prevent further misunderstanding. A sincere apology makes it much easier to forgive." And author Barbara Engel says that a true apology depends on the three Rs: regret, responsibility, and remedy.

In Jesus' account of the prodigal son, the headstrong young man who returned home after squandering his inheritance approached his father with humility and remorse: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21). He expressed regret for the pain he had caused, took responsibility for what he had done, and was prepared to work as a hired servant (v.19).

As Christians, we have a responsibility to repent and sincerely say "I'm sorry" whenever we wrong another person. In a spirit of humility and love, we can help those who need to forgive us by offering a genuine apology. A sincere apology doesn't compel others to forgive, but it's the right thing to do. We must take the first step on the pathway toward the freedom of forgiveness.

Forgiveness

It was the last weekend of the 1964 baseball season. Bill Valentine was umpiring a game between the Detroit Tigers and the New York Yankees. Dave Wickersham was pitching for Detroit, and he had 19 victories for the season. One more would be the hallmark of stardom. But it wasn't to be.

After a close play, Wickersham tapped the umpire on the shoulder to ask for a time-out. Touching an umpire is against the rules, so Valentine tossed Wickersham from the game, depriving him of his chance for a record 20-win season.

For the next 39 years, Valentine lived with a gnawing regret for booting the pitcher in that split-second decision. But he doesn't carry that regret anymore. In 2003, Wickersham wrote the umpire a letter, telling him he was right in his decision and that he held no hard feelings. That note lifted a great weight from Valentine's shoulders.

In Genesis 45, Joseph lifted the burden of guilt from his brothers for selling him into slavery, something far more serious than a simple misunderstanding. Yet he was willing to forgive them. Is there someone who needs to hear a forgiving word from you that would lift a burden of regret? Isn't it better to live without grudges and hard feelings? (Gen. 45:1-7)

Who Is My Neighbor?

When Fred Rogers received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, he wore a sweater and tie, just as he has for 30 years as host of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Instead of focusing on his career in public television, he talked to reporters about why we are on this earth--not to amass fortunes or win competitions or make great names for ourselves. The important things, he said, are the small, daily acts that make our world a better place. Is that what we consider important today? Do we consider the small things important enough to interrupt our plans, rearrange our schedules, tap into our bank accounts?

In Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luk3 10:29-37), a man who was considered racially, socially, and theologically inferior showed mercy to someone who was injured. Jesus commended this Samaritan outcast and said that he was a "neighbor" to the man in need. According to our Lord and Savior, the world is our neighborhood, and every person in it is our neighbor whom we should love as ourselves. Today, we will undoubtedly have an opportunity to show God's love, mercy, and kindness to someone in need. Let's do it, and make it a beautiful day for a neighbor.

21st Century Idolatry

If you were to spend 26 hours a week staring at the same object, what would you call that? If you were so mesmerized by what you saw that you couldn't tear yourself away from it, what would it become to you? If you let it change the way you think and act, would it be too powerful? If you let this object show and tell you things that you knew were wrong and that God didn't want you to be involved with, would it be replacing Him? Wouldn't that be called an idol?

The average American family spends 26 hours a week watching television. It certainly isn't the only idol we have in our society, but it's one of the most powerful. Other things that might be displacing our devotion to God are sports, money, work, hobbies, or even other people. Perhaps music or movies or the Internet has captured our devotion.

Idols come in various forms, and they can control our lives. When they do, we need to look again at God's anger with the Israelites to see what He thinks of idols. They served Baals and Asherahs (Judges 3:7), and "the anger of the Lord was hot" against them (v.8). Let's check our devotion. Have we given our allegiance to anything other than the Almighty God who created us? We should serve nothing but Him.

Count Your Blessings?

When I was a kid:

- My Mom pinched my arm where it really hurt to keep me awake during the sermon.
- I was made to do my Bible lessons BEFORE I could do ANYTHING else.
- I was never allowed to skip worship for school activities, work, or a runny nose (I had to be dying before Mom let me stay home!).
- I was to pay attention during the sermon, even if I sat by my friends, (a snap of Mom's fingers would make me aware of impending after-worship discipline).
- I wasn't excused to go to the restroom during worship; Mom knew I could 'wait' at home, so I had to 'wait' at services, too.
- I wasn't given a choice of what to wear; it was more than modest and less than out of style.
- I had to have all of my friends over so my Mom could see they were good examples, and I couldn't hang around them if she didn't approve.
- I wasn't allowed to back talk without getting my backside smacked.
- I had to say, "yes sir/ma'am" and "no sir/ma'am" to ALL of my elders.
- I was to obey the school rules or get in double trouble when I got home.

You are so lucky you don't have to live by such tough rules; or, are you?

(Parents, before you humorously dismiss the above as the too-strict child raising practices of the previous generation, please understand that in my 36 years as an evangelist, children raised that way more often than not obey the gospel while young and grow into active members of the Lord's church. And children raised without this kind of structure in their lives... I cannot say for certain, because I seldom see them as adults; they often leave the church when they leave home. A word to the wise may prevent future sorrow. --prb)