



How to Make a Real Apology

Phony apologies in pop-culture abound (think Johnny Depp and Amber Heard and their less-than-sincere apology to Australia over the Pistol and Boo incident, or Kanye West's sound-bite apology to Taylor Swift). Nobody wants to receive a phony apology. More importantly, households and communities cannot be truly healthy unless people learn how to make a real apology.

Saying sorry and really meaning "sorry" is also a fundamental way to create a healthy church environment.

Our English word "apology" is defined commonly as follows:

- ✧ *Latin*: apo = 'away', logia = 'sayings'
'a statement defending one's views or actions'
- ✧ *Oxford Dictionary (noun)*
'a regretful acknowledgement of an offence or failure e.g. we owe you an apology'

In Biblical ancient Greek that lies behind our English Bibles two prominent and related words add special weight to what a real apology might look like:

- ✧ "Repent" - *metanoeo* (Greek)
"to change one's mind" (e.g. Lk. 15:10 joy in heaven; 17:3 if there is repentance, forgive your brother or sister)
- ✧ Sorry - *metamelomai* (Greek)
"to regret or show remorse" (e.g. Matt. 27:3 Judas; 2 Cor. 7:8 godly sorrow)

Bible Study

Real Apologies, according to the examples and teaching in the Bible, involve

1. a recognition of wrongdoing by omission or commission, and
2. a sense of true and godly remorse or regret that seeks change

Biblical lessons

Joseph and his brothers – recognition of wrongdoing

The story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis tells of 11 brothers who conspired against the favorite son of Jacob. Years later, when Joseph had become an official in Pharaoh's courts in Egypt and his brothers, imagining him dead at their own hands years before, one day came to stand before him, begging for their very lives due to a great famine in Palestine.



When the brothers realized it was their "dead" brother standing before them with their fate in his hands, they realized too that **their wrongdoing was their undoing.**

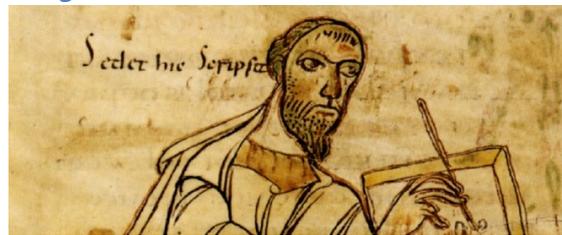
“Surely we are ‘being punished’ because of our brother. We saw how ‘distressed’ he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but ‘we would not listen’; that’s why this ‘distress’ has come upon us” (Gen 42:21).

- “being punished” comes from a Hebrew phrase: “very guilty”. They came to realize what had been scaring, stifling and strangling them for the past twenty years.

Though their penitence took 20 years to mature, and only under duress, they recognized their wrong. Joseph not only forgave his brothers in words, he treated them kindly. He loved them, hugged them and kissed them and helped them with their needs – a miracle of grace.

Corinthians – godly sorrow that leads to change

In 2 Corinthians chapter 7, the Apostle Paul wrote to the members of house churches there in Greece about “godly sorrow” – a state of mind that prepares the way for someone to act in a more godly way in future:



“For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.” (2 Cor. 7:10)

Paul had written a more severe letter to correct moral and ethical wrongdoing in the church. He later worried he had hurt their feelings. But upon reflection realized that it produced in them a **godly regret** for their actions and they showed their apology to be real by amending their lives.

God calls us not only to an honest apology that regrets wrong, but that desires an active amendment of attitude and behavior.

Jesus’ parable – seek mercy

Jesus told a story of a “righteous” religious leader and a “sinful” public official both entering the temple to pray. It’s recorded for us in Luke 18:8-14.



He reveals another key element of a real apology. The religious leader of the story boasted about all his good works and superiority over others. In Luke 18:13-14 we read...

“But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.’

The one expected to be right with God, the religious one, had the wrong idea. The unexpected one, the one hated by his fellow Jews, harbored no illusions about himself as a bribing, cheating pariah of society. By his action and words he displayed that he knew he had no claim on God's favor. His apology literally says '**propitiate** for me, a sinner.' That is, "...forgive me my sins based on your goodness O God, not mine- make me one with you by your grace."

Biblical human history shares the origin of phony apologies. Genesis chapter 3 depicts it through the blame shifting behavior of Adam and Eve.

- "I'm sorry, but the snake told me it was okay to eat that."
- "I'm sorry, but the woman you made gave me some to eat."

Psalm 38 is an interesting counterpoint. In one verse it expresses the simplicity of a real apology: "I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin."

Real Apologies

The aim of a good apology is to be able to live in harmonious relationships with God and with others. **It's about healthy community.**

A real apology does not...

- *...blame the one you hurt*
This is not an apology: "I'm sorry my words hurt your feelings but you were really getting on my nerves."
- *...accuse the other person of being too sensitive*
This is not an apology: "I'm sorry you were offended by my actions."
- *...make excuses for your offense*
This is not an apology: "I'm sorry I hit you but I was tired and hungry."
- *...make promises you cannot keep*
This is not an apology: "I'm sorry and I promise to never hurt you again."

Note the steps on screen for a **real apology** -

1. *...admit that you were wrong.* This is a real apology: "I was wrong."
2. *...accept responsibility for offending the other person.* This is a real apology: "I was wrong to treat you like I did."
3. *...recognize the pain you caused the one you hurt.* This is a real apology: "I was wrong to say what I said. I should not have hurt you like that."
4. *...keep the message simple.* This is a real apology: "I was wrong to disrespect you as I did. I must have hurt your feelings. Will you forgive me?"

5. ...ask what you can do to repair the damage done. Nothing may be possible, but let the victim recommend.

Learning to truly say sorry is one of the keys to opening the way for God's grace to abound in our relationships.

Steve Webster, 2016