

HOW TO APOLOGIZE – AND MEAN IT

[WHAT REPENTANCE TRULY LOOKS LIKE]

People don't often stop to consider that repentance and reconciliation are siblings. Unless your sin(s) is only against God, it also involves other people. When we truly repent, we need to make things right with people. This often involves apologizing, accepting an apology, forgiving and asking for forgiveness. It's a lie to think you can get real with God and not be real with people. Consider Jesus' summary of life in **Mark 12:30-31**:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second [commandment] is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is **no other commandment greater than these.**" (ESV)

You've got to learn how to genuinely apologize, accept an apology, forgive and accept forgiveness. Here's how:

1. HUMBLE YOURSELF, PRAY, SEEK GOD'S FACE AND TURN.

This is where it all begins. If you really spend time with God in humble prayer, and read His Word, He will so convince and empower you to do what is right that the following steps will fall into place. Put first things first. Spend time with God, get His heart and mind on the matter, and He will enable you to do what is right as you seek to honor Him.

2. SAY "I'M SORRY...WOULD YOU PLEASE FORGIVE ME?" BE COURAGEOUS AND SINCERE. DO IT.

Go to the person/people to whom you need to apologize and actually say "**I am sorry, I was wrong (and whatever else may apply).**" Then say, "**Would you please forgive me?**" These words are powerful – and very important because they demonstrate repentance and ownership of your causing the offense(s). The best way to apologize is to reflect on your sin, repent of it and then be honest. The more you get into the practice of being honest with God, and honest with yourself, the easier it will be to become honest with people. And, you will find that others will begin to see your authenticity and respond in kind.

3. MAKE IT UNCONDITIONAL.

Leave the consequences to God, not your imagination or the opinions of people. God knows when an apology is sincere and when it is not. Don't apologize with preconditions. Your reward in apologizing is doing what is right before God and people, not that it will be recognized or applauded by people. If you wait for people to approve or respond in a preconceived way, you will set yourself up for discouragement. Just do what is right, without conditions, and trust God.

4. DON'T JUST APOLOGIZE – DO SOMETHING BIBLICAL.

If you have gossiped, slandered, lied or stolen, you may very well need to do more than simply apologize to the people you sinned against. You should ask for their forgiveness. There may be consequences to you when you confess to a lie or something you've said or done that is not in accordance with God's Word. But God honors truth and honesty. To not do what is right would be to allow a wrong to continue, and that is also sin. Do what is right and trust God for the consequences. Many people get stuck in life for no other reason than not doing what they know, deep down, needs to be done.

5. ASK GOD TO CHANGE YOUR HEART.

It's possible to ask forgiveness, and even walk a new way, while the heart and thoughts are still holding on to the old patterns of living and thinking.

In the book *Steps to Christ* we are told:

“Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. We shall not renounce sin unless we see its sinfulness; until we turn away from it in heart, there will be no real change in the life.

“There are many who fail to understand the true nature of repentance. Multitudes sorrow that they have sinned and even make an outward reformation because they fear that their wrongdoing will bring suffering upon themselves. But this is not repentance in the Bible sense. They lament the suffering rather than the sin. Such was the grief of Esau when he saw that the birthright was lost to him forever. Balaam, terrified by the angel standing in his pathway with drawn sword, acknowledged his guilt lest he should lose his life; but there was no genuine repentance for sin, no conversion of purpose, no abhorrence of evil. Judas Iscariot, after betraying his Lord, exclaimed, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” Matthew 27:4.

“The confession was forced from his guilty soul by an awful sense of condemnation and a fearful looking for of judgment. The consequences that were to result to him filled him with terror, but there was no deep, heartbreaking grief in his soul, that he had betrayed the spotless Son of God and denied the Holy One of Israel. Pharaoh, when suffering under the judgments of God, acknowledged his sin in order to escape further punishment, but returned to his defiance of Heaven as soon as the plagues were stayed. These all lamented the results of sin, but did not sorrow for the sin itself.

“But when the heart yields to the influence of the Spirit of God, the conscience will be quickened, and the sinner will discern something of the depth and sacredness of God's holy law, the foundation of His government in

heaven and on earth. The “Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” illumines the secret chambers of the soul, and the hidden things of darkness are made manifest. John 1:9. Conviction takes hold upon the mind and heart. The sinner has a sense of the righteousness of Jehovah and feels the terror of appearing, in his own guilt and uncleanness, before the Searcher of hearts. He sees the love of God, the beauty of holiness, the joy of purity; he longs to be cleansed and to be restored to communion with Heaven.” – *Steps to Christ*, p. 23-24

6. DON'T GET DISCOURAGED.

Apologizing may be difficult and also new for you. ***Congratulations!*** That is what repentance is about, turning to a new way of living and stepping out of the comfort zone. Others may not believe you at first, especially if you have a habit of acting certain ways. But as you walk with God you will develop a new reputation with people. Keep doing what is right, and don't let others comments discourage you along the way.

7. TRUST GOD—ALL THE WAY.

Remember this simple saying: “**The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe**” (Proverbs 29:25, NIV). At the end of the day, you'll either follow God or people. Follow God, and leave the consequences to Him. Someday, perhaps sooner than you think, you'll be glad you did. You'll experience a freedom and joy that only comes from truly trusting God.

HOW TO SEEK AND FOLLOW GOD – FOR THE RIGHT REASONS

It's incredibly important that we seek God for the right reason – simply because He is worthy. When we seek God for this reason alone, our motive is as pure and mature as possible – and God will reward us with the enjoyment of His presence and rich fellowship with Himself. Be careful you are not seeking God just because you want a solution.

Here are a few important things to remember this week, as you **humble yourself, pray, seek God's face** and **turn from your sin** (repent):

1. God alone is the solution to all your problems, desires and success. When you satisfy yourself in God, you have enough. Remember that we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).
2. Beware of demanding or expecting that God do things your way—or in your timing. The methods and timing of God are up to Him. Your job is to **humble** yourself, **pray, seek Him** and **turn** from your sin. Leave the consequences up to God.

3. A lifestyle of humility, prayer, seeking God and turning from sin is something that is developed over time. Your participation in the NWR is a huge step in the right direction toward this goal.
4. Choosing to **not** be humble, to not pray, to not seek God and to not turn from your sin will always result in negative consequences. The best thing you can do for yourself is agree with God about the truth. The truth will set you free (see John 8:32).

Consider **Jeremiah 29:13-14**:

“You will seek me and find me, **when you seek me with all your heart.** I will be found by you, declares the Lord...” (ESV)

Consider that no one who has ever resisted God came out a winner. The same is true in each of our lives. No one can resist God and win. Consider **James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5**:

“Therefore it says, **“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”** (ESV)

You can have as much of God’s grace as you are willing to receive. God’s unlimited supply is offered to you in proportion to your humility. The more humble you are, the more you genuinely depend upon Him in every area of your life, the more of His grace (undeserved favor) you will experience.

Finally, let **James 4:8-10** encourage you:

“Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and **purify** your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.”** (ESV)

*Taken from “The Personal and Family Action Guide.” The National Week of Repentance
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(Steps to Christ quote was inserted on page 2 for emphasis!)*