



Week 1 - Forgiveness

Check-In

How are you? Where have you seen Christ working in your life in the last week? And... given the adorable puppy in our graphic for this series... are you a dog person or a cat person? Milo or Otis? Large or small? Long or short hair? Inside or outside pets? Purina or Alpo?

Opening Prayer

God of Reconciliation, as we explore an area of our lives that can be difficult to reflect upon, give us the strength and wisdom to see your path and find the power of seeking forgiveness.

Intro

"I'm sorry." It's not a comfortable phrase. It means we've messed up. It means we've done something wrong. It means we've probably hurt someone we love. So... when it comes to apologies, we either avoid it or we do it poorly, and the relationship remains strained. But as

followers of Christ, we are called to seek forgiveness and reconciliation. So, how do we improve at apologies? That's what we'll look at through this series... how to get better at saying, "I'm sorry."

Let's assess: What's your Apology M.O.? Are you one who wakes up saying, "I'm sorry," apologizing for anything and everything, even when you haven't done anything wrong? Or are you "conflict avoidant," thinking that if you just ignore it, it will go away? Or... do you have this apologizing thing down?

Scripture: Matthew 5:23-24 MSG

Jesus knew that seeking reconciliation, apologizing and forgiving, is not a natural act for us. For eons, we've been governed by systems that seek justice and fair punishment for injury. If we are wronged, we want retribution. And if we committed the crime, we expect consequences. But Jesus, in this scripture, perhaps for the first time in human history, suggests an alternative. Maybe we can reconcile relationships instead of seeking revenge. Perhaps we can humble ourselves enough to ask for forgiveness instead of letting the relationship wither. So, in his famous "Sermon on the Mount," he gives us this example...

"²³⁻²⁴ If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you,

abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.”

When an offense occurs, it causes a distance in our relationships. This distance can become bitterness, and that resentment can harden our hearts toward that person. The offense has become a barrier between us and them, and the relationship is fractured. But rather than simply discard that person from our lives, God has given us a tool called, “forgiveness,” that can break down this barrier. So, this Scripture was Jesus’s way of saying, “your relationships matter. The people in your life matter. And the health of your relationships with those folks are vital to your own health, too. So, reconcile them.” But as we know, this is sometimes easier said than done.

Why is apologizing difficult? What gets in the way of making an honest and sincere attempt to seek forgiveness for an injury you’ve committed? What would make it easier?

Reflection

But Jesus doesn’t just leave us with this command, he gives us a process for making the apology. First, he says, “if you suddenly remember.” What does it take to remember that you’ve hurt someone? Well, it takes...

Step 1: Self-reflection

We don't particularly like self-reflection, do we? It means we have to turn the spotlight on ourselves and assess what we've done wrong. That's never pleasant. And if that wasn't enough, there's more. He then says, "leave immediately, go to this friend." We'd like to stop with step 1. "Hey, I did some self-reflection and admitted to myself that I did something wrong. Isn't that enough?" Nope. You have to swallow the pride-pill and...

Step 2: Humbly Go

Humility stinks almost as much as self-reflection. But if we are going to reconcile the relationships that matter to us, we actually have to tuck-tail, put on the puppy-dog eyes, and humbly and sincerely go to the person we've wronged. We'll pause here and ask the question...

Discuss these steps. Which of these two is harder for you? How do you feel in either step of the process? Feel free to give an example if you're comfortable doing so.

Closing

Jesus gives one more step in the process. He says, “make things right.” Not only are we called to reflect on our actions, and go to the person we’ve wrong, we’re called to...

Step 3: Reconcile

This might be the hardest step of all. And yet, in the coming weeks, we’ll look at 5 “languages” of apology, utilizing Gary Chapman’s book, “The 5 Apology Languages,” to help us get better at this step. Buy the book. Start reading. Because as we learn the “art of an apology” we can get better at reconciling our relationships when they are damaged. We can improve at saying, “I’m sorry.”

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations. Close in prayer.