

# THE ART OF APOLOGIZING

- DOROTHY GRECO
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My husband and I both have strong opinions and strong wills. This has resulted in lots of conflicts and hurt feelings over our 25 years together. After we got married, it quickly became apparent that in order to sustain peace and stay connected, we had to hone the art of apologizing.

Though the word apology, as we know it, does not exist in the New Testament, an absence of the specific word does not indicate an absence of the concept. Scripture provides lessons for how to do this well and demonstrates that there is more to making an apology than what we often hear in popular culture.

Take what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

*If you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.* (Matthew 5:23-24)

This and other passages have guided my husband and me as we figured out how to navigate the inevitable mistakes, disagreements, and hurtful words that are part of every marriage. Here's our short list on how to apologize well:

1. **Be self-reflective.** "If you suddenly remember" implicates that we should set aside time on a regular basis to prayerfully explore whether or not we have hurt our spouse (or anyone else). This should not lead to morose self-reflection or incessant apologizing. If you can't get through the day without saying *I'm sorry* repeatedly, hold-off for 24 hours and try to determine if you actually did something wrong or merely feel guilty.
2. **Initiate.** The responsibility is on you, the offender, to apologize. No waiting for your spouse to bring up the offense.
3. **Don't procrastinate.** In Ephesians, Paul writes, "And 'don't sin by letting anger control you.' Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil." (Ephesians 4:25-27) His sage advice about not letting the sun go down on our anger could be taken literally or symbolically. Either way, the bottom line is for us to not delay. If you feel convicted about a wrong you committed years ago, same rules apply. There's no statute of limitations here. If you remember, chances are your spouse does too.
4. **When confronted, tell the truth.** The apostle Paul doesn't mince words to the Ephesian believers: "Stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body." We lie because we fear the repercussions of being honest. And when we legitimately blow it, there are all kinds of potential implications, most of which involve loss (for example: loss of a job, loss of respect, and loss of trust). The truth always prevails and when it does, previous obfuscations or untruths make it much more difficult to make amends.
5. **Take full responsibility for your mistake.** What we often hear in the media is actually a non-apology apology. "I am sorry if you felt hurt. That was not my intention." Our boys were great at this when they were young; "I'm sorry for giving you a bloody nose but I didn't mean it." Remove the words *if* and *but* from your apology because they transfer

responsibility from us to the offended. It doesn't really matter if you didn't mean it. You did or said it. Own it and don't blame anyone else for your actions or words.

6. **Words matters.** Which would you prefer to hear? "I am sorry that I over-reacted and spoke harshly to you and the kids?" Or, "Sorry. I'm just having a bad day." The second option is better than nothing but we help the offended to forgive us when we specify our errors.
7. **Tone also matters.** Remember the inflection used when playing the board game Sorry? (Slightly gleeful and definitely not repentant.) Avoid using that tone at all cost. It will have the opposite effect that you want.
8. **A face to face apology with eye contact works best.** (James 5:16) Yes, it's humiliating but that's part of the point.
9. **Don't try to control the others' response.** Allow them to express their hurt, anger, or disappointment. Seeing their reaction helps us to feel remorse and prevent us from making the same mistake again.
10. **Work for reconciliation.** The Peacemakers Ministry believes, "Because God has reconciled us to himself through Christ, Christians can be reconciled to one another." In order for true reconciliation to happen, we must endeavor to change those behaviors and attitudes which hurt our spouse in the first place. Ask your spouse questions such as, "Is there anything I can do to make things right between us?" Not only will such gestures help them to believe your sincerity, but your marriage relationship will actually deepen and become more vulnerable.

An authentic, proactive apology has the power to diffuse anger, re-establish dialogue, and bring tremendous healing. As followers of Christ, let's not allow the enemy to drive a wedge between us simply because we're too lazy or stubborn to do this well.

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Tagged: apology, communication, conflict

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## ABOUT DOROTHY GRECO

Dorothy Littell Greco spends her days writing about faith, encouraging others as they pursue Jesus, making photographs of beautiful things, and trying to love her family well. You can find more of her Words & Images on her website, or by following her on Facebook, Twitter, or Pinterest.

# HOW TO KEEP YOUR MARRIAGE TOGETHER WHEN LIFE IS FALLING APART

- CLARISSA SIDHOM
- ARTICLES, ISSUES, MARRIED, RELATIONSHIPS
  - 0 COMMENTS
  - JUNE 22, 2016



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## SHARES

My husband and I just celebrated 5 years of marriage—and when I look back, I smile, remembering lots of laughter, sweet conversations, the birth of our first baby, and even the bliss of curling up on the couch and watching a stupid movie far too late on a Friday night.

**But I also remember what I'd sometimes rather forget.**

These last 5 years have contained more life changes than some people I know have gone through in their entire lives. New jobs, new careers even, new cities, new health problems, cancer scares—the list goes on.

Whenever life is falling apart (or even just changing), your marriage reaches a subconscious fork in the road. It's not always as black and white as getting divorced or staying together.

*Marriage is an everyday decision to fight for OR forget about intimacy.*

TWEET THIS!

I'm not just talking about, you know, "intimacy." I'm talking about choosing to cultivate friendship with your spouse even when you're tempted to zone out in front of the TV or your Instagram feed. It's choosing *to* argue when you've already dealt with enough today and it'd be easier to ignore the issue and let him win... even though that apparent victory will build a bigger and bigger wall between you until you wake up one day and don't know each other anymore.

And it's choosing to support your spouse and his or her decision-making even on the days you simply don't like each other very much... Because when everyone else has turned their back, you realize all you have is each other- and if you're not careful, you really won't even have that.

**I don't think most people say "I do" intending to have an affair or destroy their marriage. It's just that when the ice breaks, they find themselves drifting apart on two separate blocks.**

We have to choose to fight for intimacy- every moment of every day. Because if you're not pushing forward, the devil's pushing you backward... and he likes for you to live dangerously close to the edge.

*But how do we prepare ourselves for the battle?*

**1. To strengthen your marriage, you must strengthen your relationship with God.**

"Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:11).

*The devil wants nothing more than to rip apart marriage, because it is literally an earthly picture of Christ's love for us.*

TWEET THIS!

If you're not growing in your relationship with God, your spiritual armor isn't there to protect you when you're attacked from all sides- and you will be. Prayer, studying your Bible, and worshipping the Lord will all strengthen your Christian walk- and I highly recommend doing these things WITH your spouse!

## **2. To strengthen your marriage, you must strengthen your friendship.**

Do you and your spouse live totally separate lives? While it's certainly ok not to be gung ho about everything your spouse does (anyone else ecstatic when football season is over?), it can grow you together to express interest in the things he or she gets most excited about. While I'll never be a football fan, I'll admit that I can tolerate it so much more now that I had my husband explain the game to me- and he was more than thrilled! But it's not just about hobbies- never forget to invest time in your relationship. **Make date night a sacred part of your household- a time every week that you set aside specifically to reconnect among the craziness.**

## **3. To strengthen your marriage, you must always remember the love that brought you together.**

We can all remember the butterflies when we first fell in love. Infatuation is a crazy thing- every little aspect of your boyfriend or girlfriend was absolutely, positively perfect- until you got married! Then those cute little quirks got slightly annoying... and then suddenly *super* annoying.

It seems to happen to every marriage- your eyes used to light up when he entered the room, but now you have two kids and one on the way, a messy home, and you can't wait to get some HELP around here! Things sure do change- and it's easy to become bitter or apathetic toward your spouse.

## **That's why it's crucial to always remember what drew the two of you together.**

Remember that first kiss. Remember what he said to you as he was proposing. Remember the dress she had on the night you realized you couldn't spend life without her. And thank God for the treasure He's blessed you with- it definitely helps your perspective when somebody just *can't* seem to get his socks into the hamper.

**Choose to fight. Choose to love forever.**

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Tagged: advice, authentic womanhood, Christian marriage, how to stay married, intimacy, marriage problems, practical, spiritual warfare, unity, when marriage is hard

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## ABOUT CLARISSA SIDHOM

Clarissa Sidhom was radically saved from a childhood of abuse and insecurity, and now she's passionate about helping women become authentic Christ-followers who use their life story for God's glory! She's been married to a pastor for 5 years and has an adorable baby boy. Read more at her blog, [Authentic Womanhood](#), and join her on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).