Bob: Resolving conflict in marriage is an important skill to learn. It involves confession and seeking forgiveness. Dr. Gary Chapman says it’s a skill that does not come easily for a lot of people.

Gary: Some of us were taught by our parents not to apologize. In fact, our research indicates that about ten percent of the population almost never apologizes. Most of them are men; and they learned it from their fathers, who said to them, “Real men don’t apologize.”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, March 3rd. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I'm Bob Lepine. You'll find us online at FamilyLifeToday.com. There are some pretty specific do's and don'ts when it comes to seeking and granting forgiveness. We'll hear more about that today from Dr. Gary Chapman. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us for the Tuesday edition. I know it’s still chilly in most of the country, but we had some warmth and sunshine for a week a couple of weeks ago. We were on the Love Like You Mean It® marriage cruise with 5,500 of our closest friends. That was amazing; this was the biggest cruise ship we’ve been on.

Ann: But it didn’t feel crowded.

Bob: Yes.

Ann: There were so many people, but the ship was so big—it didn’t even feel like it.

Dave: The ship is still out there; it’s still coming in—it’s so long. [Laughter]

Bob: That’s right.

Dave: That thing is so—it’s just coming into port. [Laughter]

Bob: We’ve gotten off, but it hasn’t gotten completely in yet.

Dave: It was a long, long boat—and wide.
Ann: It was wonderful.

Bob: Part of what makes it wonderful is that we have the whole boat. Every line you’re in or whatever room you’re in, you start talking to the people next to you: “Where are you from? How did you hear about this?” It’s just like you’re talking to old friends!

Dave: Oh, yes. And they are really nice people!

Bob: Yes.

Dave: I didn’t meet anybody mean.

Ann: That’s because we’re all-in-the-sun people. Everything feels better in the sun. [Laughter]

Dave: I still have a tan; don’t I?

Ann: Yes, you—no, you don’t. [Laughter]

Bob: Your head’s been peeling a bit.

Dave: Yes, it is peeling.

Bob: We had a chance on the cruise to hear from Dr. Gary Chapman, and we want our listeners to hear a part of his message today. First of all, let me just remind you that we’re about 60 percent sold out for next year’s cruise. As a FamilyLife Today listener, if you’d like to join us, our team has put together a special offer that’s good until March 16. It’s the best offer we make all year; you save $300 per couple off the cost of your stateroom. You need to sign up before March 16 to take advantage of the special offer.

We expect the cruise may be sold out before the end of March; so if you’re, at all, interested in joining us on the 2021 Love Like You Mean It marriage cruise, go to FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Do it soon—reserve your spot now—call and get more information at 1-800-FL-TODAY.

Alright; we are going to hear, as I said, the first part of a message from the cruise from Dr. Gary Chapman, who is, of course, the author of The Five Love Languages. He’s the author of dozens of books. He spoke to us about how important it is for us to learn the fine art—as he says it: “Learn to speak the language of apology.”

[Recorded Message]

Gary: I want to jump right in tonight. I want to suggest that there’s two essentials to long-term healthy marriages. Number one is: “We have to keep love and appreciation in
the marriage,”—that’s where the love language comes in. You can have a long-term marriage without that. We all know people who have been married for 30/40 years, but they’re like roommates; they don’t have a healthy marriage. They have a long-term marriage, but not a healthy marriage.

The second is essential is that: “We have to deal effectively with our failures.” The reason I say that is an essential is because none of us are perfect. We don’t have to be perfect to have a long-term healthy marriage, but we do have to deal effectively with our failures; that involves apologizing and forgiving.

Now, the Bible is very big on this topic:

Listen to these words; this is Proverbs 28, verse 13: “He who conceals his sins does not prosper. But he who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” That’s true of our relationship with God, but it’s also true on the human level.

Listen to these words; Isaiah 59, verse 2: “Your iniquities have separated you from your God. Your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear.” When we sin against God, we create a barrier between us and God. Until we confess, the barrier remains there.

Listen to what Jesus said about this; this is Matthew 5, verse 23: “If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go be reconciled with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift.” He’s pretty big on this whole matter of dealing with our failures.

Let me ask the question: “Where do we learn to apologize?”—typically, from our parents. Little Johnny pushes his sister down the stairs; and mother says: “Johnny! Don’t do that to your sister! Go tell her you’re sorry.” Little Johnny says, “I sorry,” even if he’s not. He’s 23 now; he’s married; he offends his wife. What will he say?—“I sorry.”

Some of us were taught by our parents not to apologize. In fact, our research indicates that about ten percent of the population almost never apologizes. Most of them are men; and they learned it from their fathers, who said to them, “Real men don’t apologize.” I want to say to those guys: “You probably had a good dad, but he had bad information. Real men do apologize.”

We typically are taught, most of us, some manner of apologizing to our spouse. The question we’re asking in our mind, when someone’s apologizing to us, is: “Are they sincere?” If we judge them to be sincere, it’s fairly easy to forgive; but if we think they’re just trying to whitewash things, it’s more difficult to forgive.
My co-author in the book I wrote on this topic and I did two years of research, trying to find out: “What does a sincere apology look like? How would you recognize it if you heard it or you saw it?” We asked thousands of people, all over the country, two questions: “When you apologize, what do you typically say or do?” Second question: “When someone apologizes to you, what do you want to hear them say and do?”

Their answers fell into five categories. I promise you—we were not looking for five. I like five, but we were not looking for five. We call them “the five languages of apology.” Just as we have a love language, we also have an apology language. I want to share these with you. Incidentally, all of them are found in the Bible, which leads me to say: “Anything you discover in social research, if it’s really true, it will never contradict the Bible. In fact, most of the time, you will find it illustrated in the Bible.”

Let me list these for you. I want you to think in terms, as I do this, of what you consider to be a sincere apology. Number one—and these are in no particular order—number one is: “Expressing regret”:

“I’m sorry that I came home an hour-and-a-half late, and we missed the program. I know you wanted to go.”

“I’m sorry that I lost my temper and yelled at you.”

Don’t every use the words, “I’m sorry” alone; tell them what you’re sorry for. If you just say to your spouse, “I’m sorry,” they may well be thinking: “You certainly are! [Laughter] Is there anything else you want to say?” You think you’re apologizing; they think you’re giving a character report. Tell them what you’re sorry for, and don’t ever add the word, “but…—“I’m sorry that I lost my temper and yelled at you; but if you had not…then I would not…” Now, you’re not longer apologizing; you’re now blaming them for your poor behavior.

Some of you may have that habit, so let me tell you how to break it. The next time you hear yourself say to your spouse or anyone else, “I’m sorry that I dah dah dah; but” you stop right there and say, “Excuse me; erase the ‘but.’” You will not erase it, but three times, and you’ll break that habit.

This is illustrated in the prodigal son; listen to this—Luke, Chapter 15, verse 21—he comes back home to his father. He says, “I’m no longer worthy to be called your son. Dad, if you could just give me a job on the farm.” Do you sense his regret? In this language, we’re trying to communicate to the other person, “I feel badly about what I did. I’m hurting because I hurt you.”

Psalm 51:17; listen to what David says: “A broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” I don’t care what you’ve done. You come to God with a broken heart over what you’ve done—regretting what you’ve done and how it’s hurt other people—God is
always ready to forgive you. Typically, on the human plane, that’s what we’re trying to do; we’re trying to communicate how we regret what we did.

Number two is: “Accepting responsibility”: “I was wrong. I take full responsibility.” Some of us have trouble admitting that we were wrong. I remember, years ago when our children were little, I got up one morning and I said to Karolyn, “Honey, where’s my briefcase?” She said, “I haven’t seen it.” I said: “Karolyn, think! I know where it was; who else would have moved it?!” She said, “Gary, I haven’t seen your briefcase.”

I said, “Karolyn, I have to get these kids to school!” I got the kids in the car; I drove them to school; I was kind to the kids: “Have a nice day; dah-dah-dah-dah.” But when I drove from the school to the church, where my office is, I was thinking: “How could I have married such a scatter-brained woman? I mean, this time, she’s lost my briefcase. I don’t know what I’m going to do!”

When I got to church, I did not go in by all of the secretaries and administrative assistants; I went in the back door to my office. Folks, when you’ve sinned, you don’t want to see people. I walked in, and there was my briefcase. [Laughter] I called her—I said: “Hi, babe. I found my briefcase.” She didn’t say anything; she knew there ought to be more to it than that. [Laughter] I said, “I’m sorry for the way I talked to you. I was [stammers] wrong.” I didn’t say it was easy!

Let’s just see if you can say those words: “I was wrong.” Let’s try it out loud: “I—was—wrong.” Some of you had trouble even on a dry run!—admitting that we’re wrong.

My son was in the kitchen with me; he was probably six or seven years old. He accidentally knocked a glass off the table; it hit the floor and broke. I turned and looked at him; and he said, “It did it by itself!” [Laughter] I said, “Derek, let’s say that a different way: ‘I accidentally knocked the glass off the table.’” He said [sobbing], “I accidentally knocked the glass off the table!” It’s not a sin to accidently knock a glass off the table; I’m just trying to teach him how to accept responsibility for his behavior—what he did—being willing to acknowledge what he did.

Listen to this—also from the prodigal son; Luke 15, verse 21/same verse—he says to his father, “I have sinned against heaven and against you.” Incidentally, if you’ve sinned against your spouse, you’ve sinned against God. The Bible says to be kind of one another; and we’re not kind—we’ve sinned against God. We need to confess to God and our spouse. First John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive our sins.” The word, “confess,” means to “agree with.” If we agree with God that we have sinned, then God is fully willing to forgive us.

Then, number three is: “Making restitution or offering to make restitution”: “What can I do to make this right?” I know you guys would never do this, but let’s say you forget your anniversary—no flowers, no candy, no dinner—nothing. You’re sitting there that
night, you look over on the couch; and she’s crying. You say, “Honey, what’s wrong?!” She says, “I can’t believe you don’t know what’s wrong!”

It dawns on you; I doubt that “I’m sorry,” is going to hack it. But if you say: “Honey, I am so sorry. On Monday, I thought about making reservations and, then, I forgot about it. Oh, honey, I am so sorry. I have blown it big time. Oh, honey; oh, honey; but-but-but-but look, honey. I know we can’t do anything tonight, but we can still—we can still celebrate. What can I do to make it up to you? What can I do?” She doesn’t have an idea. “Sign me up for the next year on this cruise,”—she’d probably do that!—yeah, yeah, yeah!

Number four is: “Genuinely repenting or expressing the desire to change.” I shared this with a lady in my office—she said: “Gary, I could give you a perfect example of that. Several years ago, when our baby was little, my husband was taking care of the baby; and I was doing some other stuff. The baby was crying. He did everything he could to get the baby to stop crying, and he lost his temper. He picked up our baby, and started shaking our baby. When he did, I grabbed the baby and said, ‘Don’t do that to our baby!’ I ran to the bedroom, just sobbing.”

She said: “Ten minutes later, he knocked on the door. He said [sobbing], ‘Honey, I can’t believe I did that! You know I love our baby. Can we talk and get a plan, so I won’t do that again?’” She said, “Gary, I sensed he was so sincere that I freely forgave him, even though what he did was horrible.” You see, when she sensed the desire to change his behavior, she sensed his sincerity.

See, when we apologize—and then next week or next month we do the same thing again, and we apologize again; and then we do the same thing the next time; and the same thing the next time; the same thing the next time—our spouse is thinking, “How could you be sincere when you make no effort to change the behavior?”

For some people, this is what they’re waiting for. If you don’t express the desire to change your behavior—that’s what repent means: “to turn around: leave the behavior; turn in the other direction.” Listen to these words; Acts 2, verse 38: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins.” Repentance is big in the mind of God. We don’t even enter the kingdom until we learn to repent of our sins to God.

Then number five is actually: “Requesting forgiveness”: “Will you forgive me? I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me.” For some people, this is what they’re waiting for. I have to be honest; this one was not on my radar. I thought: “If I was apologizing in any manner, wouldn’t you know that I want to be forgiven? Why would I be apologizing?”

My co-author shared this with her mother. Her mother said: “I can give you an example of that at work. I have a friend at work; we’ve been friends for 15 years,”—I mean, close friends—“I noticed the last few days, she’d been a little cold; so I said to her on a break,
‘Is everything alright between you and me?’ Incidentally, that’s the way friends talk; if you think something’s wrong in the relationship, you ask.

Her friend said: “Do you know one of the things that bothers me about you? You don’t ever apologize.” Her mother said, “I was shocked!” She said, “What do you mean?” [The friend] said, “Do you remember two weeks ago, when you did dah-dah-dah-dah-dah?” She said, “Yes, I do remember that; but I told you I was sorry.” The lady said, “I know, but you didn’t ask me to forgive you.” Her mother said, “I was shocked again”; [she] said: “Let me ask you to forgive me, because I value our relationship. Will you please forgive me?” The lady said, “Sure!” It wasn’t that she did not want to forgive her; it was, in her mind, her mother had not apologized.

We have different ideas about what an apology means. Listen to what David said to God about his own sin; Psalm 51, verse 2: “Blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin.” Three different ways David is asking God to forgive him. Very biblical to ask God to forgive you; and very biblical to ask your spouse, or whomever you have harmed, to forgive you.

What I’m saying is this: “Each of us has a primary apology language. Just like we have a primary love language, we have a primary apology language.” You may never have thought about this before; but if you look back on your relationship, very likely, in your mind, you can look back to times when your spouse was apologizing. To you, it seemed rather lame; it seemed insincere to you. Chances are because they were apologizing in the way they had learned to apologize, but you were waiting for them to apologize in the way you learned to apologize. Your language was different from their language.

If you want to communicate your sincerity, we must learn to speak the other person’s language. Just as you have to learn to speak their love language, you have to learn to speak their apology language.

I was sharing this with a singles group before we ever published the book. Incidentally, the title of the book is When Sorry Isn’t Enough. A couple came up to me after the event. I found out later they were engaged to each other. He said to me, “I’m not real glad I came to this thing tonight.” I said: “Really?” I said, “Why?” He said: “Well, we sat back there and talked about what she considered to be a sincere apology. She told me that she wanted me to say, ‘I’m sorry.’ I’ve never said those words; I don’t know if I can say those words. What’s that going to mean when we get married?”

I said, “Well, Carl,”—his name was Carl—I said, “Carl, have you ever done anything in your whole life that you’ve regretted?” He stood there a minute; and he said: “Well, yeah, yeah, yeah. When my momma died, I came home for the funeral. I went out to the bar the night before the funeral, and I was just going to get a beer. I ended up getting drunk. The next morning at my mother’s funeral, I had such a hangover that I don’t remember anything that happened at my mother’s funeral. I’ve always felt like I let her
down because Momma was always on my case about drinking too much. I’ve always regretted that.”

I said, “Well, Carl, if you could talk to your mother right now, what would you say?” He said [sobbing]: “I’d tell her, ‘Momma, I’m sorry for what I did! I didn’t mean to get drunk! I really didn’t mean to. Momma, I’m so sorry for what I did! I hope you forgive me, Momma, because I love you so much, Momma. I’m just so sorry for what I did!’” I said, “Carl, you know what you just did?!” He said, “Yes, I told my Momma that ‘I’m sorry’!”

A year later, they came to my marriage seminar, a Saturday morning. They walked down the aisle; they were married now. Carl said, “Dr. Chapman, I don’t know if you remember me.” I said, “Carl, I’d never forget you, man.” [Laughter] He said, “Well, we’re married now.” I said to her, “Does Carl know how to say, ‘I’m sorry’?” She said, “Dr. Chapman, he does.” I said, “Does he speak your love language?” She said, “He does.” Then I asked the other way around: “Yes.”

We can learn to speak any of these languages. Just like we can learn another love language that we didn’t receive as a child, we can learn another apology language we did not receive as a child.

[Studio]

Bob: We’ve been listening to, actually, the first part of a message from Dr. Gary Chapman on speaking the language of apology. I’ll just mention—if you’d like to hear the entire message—he went on for another 15/20 minutes—you can go to FamilyLifeToday.com, and the entire message is available there. What a great reminder that we’ve got to be good at apology and forgiveness. I remember/I think it was Billy Graham’s wife, who said, “A great marriage is the union of two great forgivers.”

Ann: That’s good.

Bob: If we know how to forgive and give grace in marriage, it changes the complexion of everything.

Ann: Okay; I have a question for you, Bob. For you and Mary Ann, who has the easier time asking forgiveness and apologizing?

Bob: I think she would say I have the easier time asking for forgiveness, but she wonders how cheap it is; right? [Laughter] When I say, “I’m sorry; will you forgive me for that?” She’s like, “Are you really sorry?” because it comes easily or quickly. That’s a fair thing to ask: “Am I really sorry?” or “Am I just trying to make peace real quickly?” Real forgiveness and real apologies are serious business.

Dave: Who do you think is easier for us? That’s what I want to know.
Ann: I’m embarrassed to say this—Dave marked on his calendar the first time I apologized and admitted that I was wrong, because it was—

Dave: I think it was year nine of our marriage. [Laughter] It wasn’t that far, but—

Ann: I had a hard time—it’s pride. I had a hard time admitting that I was wrong.

Dave: Not anymore. It took me awhile to say that, but not anymore. She’s quick to ask forgiveness.

Bob: I would hope that listeners would go back and re-listen to what they just heard today and just ask the question, “How do I do?” Maybe this is something you listen to together and say, “How are we doing at this?” Again, this makes all the difference in the world in the strength and health of your marriage.

I’ll tell you what helps the strength and health of your marriage is to get a chance to get away, whether it’s to a Weekend to Remember® marriage getaway, or to join us on the cruise next year, Valentine’s week. We’re going to be heading out from Puerto Rico. We’re going to be going to St. Martin; we’re going to be going to Aruba. I can’t even say the names of these other islands we’re going. [Laughter] It’s a great trip for next year. We’re about 60 percent full.

Ann: I was talking to someone on the deck in the sun. They were from Minnesota; they said: “We have never done this. We heard about it on Facebook®,” and “Next year, we’re bringing the whole family.”

Bob: We expect this is going to sell out over the next 30 days. Right now, for FamilyLife Today listeners, if you want to reserve a spot on the 2021 cruise, you need to do it quickly. If you do it before March 16, you’ll save $300 per couple off your stateroom. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to find out more about the 2021 Love Like You Mean It marriage cruise, or call to reserve a spot at 1-800-FL-TODAY. Again, the website: FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY,”—say, “I want to reserve a spot on the Love Like You Mean It marriage cruise for next year.”

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to take you to a session on the cruise where we, together with Dr. Juli Slattery, Gary Chapman, Ron Deal, Charlie and Kirstie Dates—we answered questions from cruisers—questions they had about marriage and family. Some of the questions were pretty stout; I mean, they were asking some pretty serious questions. You’ll hear that dialogue—the Q&A questions—from the cruise tomorrow. I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, who got some help from James Youngblood, and we should say Justin Adams, too; don’t you think? On behalf of our
hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I'm Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

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