

Contents of Set

*Loving Your Spouse
When You Feel Like Walking Away*

Anger

When Sorry Isn't Enough

loving your
spouse



when you
feel like
walking away

REAL HELP FOR DESPERATE
HEARTS IN DIFFICULT MARRIAGES

GARY CHAPMAN

NORTHFIELD PUBLISHING

CHICAGO

Contents

Introduction	9
PART 1: WHEN YOU'RE DESPERATE	
1. The Valley of Pain	15
2. Where You Start: Attitude and Actions	25
3. Why Did He Do That?	39
PART 2: APATHETIC SPOUSES	
4. The Irresponsible Spouse	53
5. The Workaholic Spouse	71
6. The Depressed Spouse	85
PART 3: ABUSIVE SPOUSES	
7. The Controlling Spouse	105
8. The Verbally Abusive Spouse	123
9. The Physically Abusive Spouse	137
10. The Sexually Abused / Sexually Abusive Spouse	153
PART 4: DISCONNECTED SPOUSES	
11. The Uncommunicative Spouse	175
12. The Unfaithful Spouse	191
13. The Alcoholic / Drug-Abusing Spouse	211
A FINAL WORD	
There's Hope	227
Notes	235
Acknowledgments	239

The Valley of Pain

Thousands of couples are struggling in their marriages. Maybe you are one of them. You could write a book titled *How to Be Married and Miserable*. Some of you have been married for five years and others for twenty-five years. You entered marriage with the same high hopes with which most of us said, “I do.” You never intended to be miserable; in fact, you dreamed that in marriage you would be supremely happy. Some of you were happy before you got married and anticipated that marriage would simply enhance your already exciting life. Others entered marriage with a deeply dysfunctional history. Your hope was that in marriage you would finally discover meaning and happiness.

In every case, a man and woman anticipated that marriage would be a road leading upward, that whatever life had been to that point, it would get better after marriage.

Your experience, though, has been that since the mountain-top celebration of the wedding, the road has wound downward. There have been a few peaks of enjoyment and a few curves that offered a promising vista. But the vista later turned out to be a

mirage, and the marital road again turned downward. For a long time, you have lived in the valley of pain, emptiness, and frustration. You live in a desperate marriage.

You probably really don't want to divorce. For many of you, religious beliefs discourage you from taking that exit. For others, the children strongly motivate you to keep your marriage together. Still others find enough moments of happiness or support to keep alive your hopes for a better marriage.

You sincerely hope that things will get better. Many of you feel that you have tried to deal with the issues that have kept you and your spouse from marital unity. Most are discouraged with the results. If you have gone for counseling, it has not been very productive. If you have read books, you have read them alone, wishing that your spouse could hear what the distant author is saying and be moved to change. Some of you have tried the calm, cool, straightforward method of gentle confrontation. Your spouse has responded with silence. In desperation some of you have tried yelling and screaming. Your pain has been so intense that you have actually lost control trying to express it. In some cases your loud cries for help have prompted your spouse to launch a counter-attack. In other cases your spouse has simply withdrawn.

The problems with which you and other married couples grapple cannot be solved by having a nice chat. Nor do the problems melt under the sunny cheer of pious platitudes. These problems, like cancer, eat away at the vitality of a marriage. The issues vary from couple to couple, but the intensity of the pain runs deep for all.

Through the pages of this book, I will take you behind closed doors into the privacy of my counseling office and let you listen as husbands and wives share their painful situations. I also invite you to listen to what people tell me at the marriage seminars I lead across the country. (I have changed names and details to

protect these people.) I urge you to believe that there is hope for your hard marriage.

HOPE FOR THE DESPERATE

In this book I will talk about how to deal with a spouse who is irresponsible or a workaholic; a spouse who is controlling, uncommunicative; verbally, physically, or sexually abusive; unfaithful or depressed; a spouse who is an alcoholic or drug abuser. For all of these situations—and others—you can find solutions that may preserve your marriage.

I am under no illusion that I can provide a magic formula to bring healing to all such marriages. However, I do believe, based on my own experience in counseling, research in the field, and sound moral principles, that there is hope for the hardest of marriages.

I believe that in every troubled marriage, one or both partners can take positive steps that have the potential for changing the emotional climate in a marriage. In due time, spouses can find answers to their problems. For most couples, ultimate solutions will depend not only on their own actions but also on the support of the religious and therapeutic community in their city. But I will say it again: There is hope for lasting solutions in troubled marriages.

ARE YOU A CAPTIVE TO MYTHS?

First, you have to look hard at what you believe—which is a part of what I call practicing *reality living*. Reality living begins by identifying myths that have held you captive. Then it accepts them for what they are—myths, not truths. You can break their bonds as you begin to base your actions on truth rather than myth.

Reality living means that you take responsibility for your own thoughts, feelings, and actions. It requires you to appraise

your life situation honestly and refuse to shift the blame for your unhappiness to others.

Look at the following four statements. Answer them honestly with *true* or *false*.

1. My environment determines my state of mind.
2. People cannot change.
3. In a desperate marriage, I have only two options—resigning myself to a life of misery or getting out of the marriage.
4. Some situations are hopeless—and my situation is one of these.

If you answered “true” to any of these statements, please read on. In fact, all four statements are false. Unfortunately, many people in desperate marriages base their lives on these commonly held myths.

Those who accept any of the four myths above will act accordingly, so that their actions become a part of the problem rather than a part of the solution. Let’s look at the outcome of accepting and acting on each of these myths.

Myth Number One: My environment determines my state of mind. The commonly held view of our day is that we are all victims of our environment. This myth is expressed in the following statements:

“If I grew up in a loving, supportive family, I will be a loving, supportive person.”

“If I grew up in a dysfunctional family, then I am destined to failure in relationships.”

“If I am married to an alcoholic husband, I will live a miserable life.”

“My emotional state depends on the actions of my spouse.”

This kind of approach to life renders anyone helpless in a hostile environment. It prompts feelings of hopelessness and often leads to depression. In a desperate marriage, this victim mentality leads a spouse to conclude, “My life is miserable, and my only hope is the death of my spouse or divorce.” Many people daydream of both.

Your environment certainly affects who you are, but it does not control you. Rather than being a helpless victim, you can overcome an environment thick with obstacles, whether blindness (Helen Keller) or polio (Franklin Roosevelt) or racism (too many to name) or an alcoholic parent whose abuse has stayed with you and impacted your marriage. Your environment may influence you, but it need not dictate or destroy your marriage and your life.

Myth Number Two: People cannot change. This myth asserts that once people reach adulthood, personality traits and behavior patterns are set in concrete. Those who believe this myth reason that if a spouse has demonstrated a certain behavior for a long period of time, he or she will continue to act this way.

A wife assumes that her husband, who was sexually active with multiple partners before marriage and sexually unfaithful after marriage, is addicted to this behavior and cannot change.

A husband assumes that his wife, who has been irresponsible in money management for the first fifteen years of marriage, will always be financially irresponsible.

If you accept this myth as truth, you will experience feelings of futility and hopelessness. The fact is, you can go to any library and find biographies of people—adults—who have made radical

changes in their behavior patterns. Saint Augustine once lived for pleasure and thought his desires were inescapable. The late Charles Colson, following a conversion while in prison, repented of his wrongdoing in the Watergate scandal and launched an international agency to offer prisoners spiritual help.

People can and do change, and often the changes are dramatic.

Myth Number Three: In a troubled marriage, I have only two options—resigning myself to a life of misery or getting out of the marriage. Those who believe this myth limit their horizons to two equally devastating alternatives and then become a prisoner of that choice. Thousands of people live in self-made prisons because they believe this myth of limited choices.

Shannon and David believed this myth. For fifteen years they

*Don't simply
settle for misery
or divorce.*

experienced misery and contemplated divorce, but as they left my office after six months of counseling, David said, “I used to leave your office with rage in my heart toward Shannon. Today I leave realizing what a wonderful wife I have.”

A smile spread across Shannon's face as she spoke. “Dr. Chapman, I never dreamed that I could love him again and we could have the marriage we have.”

Obviously, Shannon and David broke the bonds of this myth. You can do the same. Do not let yourself believe that you have only two options in a desperate marriage. Don't simply settle for misery or divorce.

Myth Number Four: Some situations are hopeless—and my situation is one of these. The person who accepts this myth believes: Perhaps there is hope for others, but my marriage is hopeless. The

hurt is too deep. The damage is irreversible. There is no hope. This kind of thinking leads to depression and sometimes suicide.

I listened with tears as Lisa, a thirty-five-year-old mother, shared her story of watching her father murder her mother and then turn the gun on himself. Lisa was ten when she experienced this tragedy. No doubt her father felt his situation was hopeless.

You may have struggled in your marriage for years. You may feel that nothing you have tried has worked. You may even have had people tell you that your marriage is hopeless. Don't let yourself believe that. Your marriage is not beyond hope.

This book will explore the nature of problems in desperate marriages and encourage you to dismiss these myths and take steps toward healing rather than sinking deeper into the misery of such relationships. But first, let's look at what has become a rather popular approach to such major marital problems, namely the exit-marked divorce.

WHY NOT JUST WALK AWAY?

Ours has been called the "Throwaway Society." We buy our food in beautiful containers, which we then throw away. Our cars and tech devices quickly become obsolete. We give our furniture to the secondhand shop not because it is no longer functional, but because it is no longer in style. We even "throw away" unwanted pregnancies. We sustain business relationships only so long as they are profitable to the bottom line. Thus, it is no shock that our society has come to accept the concept of a "throwaway marriage." If you are no longer happy with your spouse, and your relationship has run on hard times, the easy thing is to abandon the relationship and start over.

I wish that I could recommend divorce as an option. When I listen to the deeply pained people in my office and at my seminars,

my natural response is to cry, “Get out, get out, get out! Abandon the loser and get on with your life.” That would certainly be my approach if I had purchased bad stock. I would get out before the stock fell further. But a spouse is not stock. A spouse is a person—a person with emotions, personality, desires, and frustrations; a person to whom you were deeply attracted at one point in your life; a person for whom you had warm feelings and genuine care. So deeply were the two of you attracted to each other that you made a public commitment of your lives to each other “so long as we both shall live.” Now you have a history together. You may even have parented children together.

No one can walk away from a spouse as easily as he or she can sell bad stock. Indeed, talk to most adults who have chosen divorce as the answer, and you will find the divorce was preceded by months of intense inner struggle, and that the whole ordeal is still viewed as a deeply painful experience.

Kristin was sitting in my office two years after her divorce from Dave. “Our marriage was bad,” she said, “but our divorce is even worse. I still have all the responsibilities I had when we were married, and now I have less time and less money. When we were married, I worked part-time to help out with the bills. Now I have to work full-time, which gives me less time with the girls. When I am at home, I seem to be more irritable. I find myself snapping at the girls when they don’t respond immediately to my requests.”

Thousands of divorced moms can identify with Kristin. Divorce doesn’t treat them fairly. The stresses of meeting the physical and emotional needs of their children seem overwhelming at times.

Not all who undergo divorce experience such hardship; yet all find the adjustments painful, even when they remarry.

Michael was all smiles when he said to me, “I finally met the love of my life. We’re going to get married in June. I’ve never

been happier. She has two kids, and I think they're great. When I was going through my divorce, I never dreamed that I would be happy again. I now believe that I'm about to get my life back on track."

Michael had been divorced for three years at the time of our conversation. However, six months after his marriage to Kelly, he was back in my office, complaining about his inability to get along with Kelly and her children.

"It's like I'm an outsider," he said. "She always puts the kids before me. And when I try to discipline them, she takes their side against me. I can't spend a dime without her approval. I've never been so miserable in my life. How did I let myself get into this mess?" Michael is experiencing the common struggles of establishing a "blended family."

And what about the children who watch their parents divorce? In her book, *Generation Ex*, author and child of multiple divorces Jen Abbas writes candidly:

As I entered adulthood anticipating my hard-earned independence, I was stunned to discover that my parents' divorces seemed to affect me *more* each year, not less. Even though I was successful academically and professionally, I found myself becoming more insecure each year about my emotional abilities. As I began to see my friends marry, I started to question my ability to successfully create and maintain intimate relationships, especially my own future marriage. I began to see how the marriages—and divorces—of my parents had influenced my relationships, especially when it came to trust. And when it came to love, I was paralyzed because what I wanted so desperately was that which I feared the most.¹

Through the years I have counseled enough divorced persons to know that while divorce removes some pressures, it creates a host of others. I am not naive enough to suggest that divorce can be eliminated from the human landscape. I am saying, however, that divorce should be the last possible alternative. It should be preceded by every effort at reconciling differences, dealing with issues, and solving problems. Far too many couples in our society have opted for divorce too soon and at too great a price. I believe that many divorced couples could have reconciled if they had sought and found proper help. Thus, the focus of this book about difficult marriages is not on divorce but on something I believe offers far more hope—reality living.

Reality living, which begins by recognizing the myths and continues by rejecting those myths, ends up embracing the positive actions that one individual can take to stimulate constructive change in a relationship. In the next chapter I will give you the basic principles of this approach, and in the following chapters I will show you how to apply these principles to really hard marriages—which, as you will see, take many forms.



ANGER

TAMING A
POWERFUL
EMOTION

Gary Chapman

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C O N T E N T S

Introduction: Our Angry World	9
1. Where Does Anger Come From?	15
2. When Anger Can Do Good	25
3. When You're Angry for Good Reason	35
4. When Anger Is Wrong	57
5. How to Handle "Bad" Anger	67
6. Explosions and Implosions	81
7. The Anger That Lasts for Years	97
8. What about Forgiveness?	113
9. When You Are Angry at Your Spouse	129
10. Helping Children Handle Anger	143
11. When You Are Angry at God	163
12. "I'm Angry at Myself"	175
13. Confronting an Angry Person	189
Afterword	203
Notes	207
Acknowledgments	209
Personal Anger Assessment	211



CHAPTER 1

WHERE DOES ANGER COME FROM?

Perhaps you can identify with Brooke.

Brooke, the mother of two preschoolers, loved her husband, Glen, an up-and-coming attorney. The couple had been married eight years. Brooke was a certified public accountant but had chosen to put her career on hold until the children started school.

“I think I made a mistake,” she told me. “I don’t think I am cut out to be a mother. I always wanted children, but now that I’ve got them, I don’t like the way I treat them. And I don’t like what they do to me. I don’t ever remember being angry or losing my temper before I had children. I always considered myself to be in control of my emotions. But I have to admit, I have often lost it with my kids. I hate myself when I do that.”

“What do you do when you lose it with the children?” I inquired.

“Different things,” she said. “Sometimes I yell at them. Sometimes I spank them really hard. The other day I picked up Ginger and shook her. That really scared me. I had seen on television just the day before a report of a mother who actually killed her child by shaking her. I don’t want to hurt my children. I love them, but I just lose control. I wish Glen would keep the kids and give me a break, but he is so stressed in his job that he says he doesn’t feel like caring for them. I think maybe I should go back to work and let someone else take care of the children.”

As I talked further with Brooke, I discovered that she was angry not only with her children’s behavior but also with Glen for giving her so little help. She was angry at herself for choosing to be a full-time mom, and ultimately she was angry with God for allowing her to be a mother. “He should have known that I wouldn’t be able to handle this,” she said.

By now Brooke was crying. To be honest, I felt like crying too, as I remembered the hundreds of mothers who have passed through my office over the years, feeling guilty, feeling alone, not liking their kids or themselves very much.

Then there was Rich, who came to my office well dressed, but I noticed his right foot was shoeless. I soon found out why.

“I’ve got to have help,” he began. “I’ve known for a long time that my anger was getting out of control, but Saturday was the last straw. For fifteen minutes, I tried to get my lawnmower started. I checked the gas, I checked the oil, I put in a new sparkplug, and still it wouldn’t start. Finally, I got so exasperated that I stepped back and kicked the thing. I broke two toes and cut a third. Sitting on the steps in pain, I said to myself, ‘That was really stupid.’”

“I’m embarrassed. I can’t tell people what really happened, so

I've been saying, 'I had an accident with a lawnmower.'

"This is not the first time I've lost my temper," he continued. "I've said some pretty nasty things to my wife and children in the past. I don't think I have ever physically abused them, but I've come close."

In the course of our conversation I discovered that Rich was highly educated, holding an MBA degree. He was married with two children, profitably employed, and owned a nice house in suburbia. Rich was an active member of his church and well respected in the community. Yet he had a habit of "blowing his cool."

Thousands of men can readily identify with Rich. Unfortunately, many of them are not as honest as he, and even fewer of them are willing to reach out for help.

Rich, with his broken toes, and Brooke, with her broken heart, are dealing with very different challenges. However, what they hold in common is the human experience of intense anger and their inability to handle it. Both knew that their anger had led them to inappropriate

behavior, but neither knew what to do about it. Thus, they suffered physically and emotionally from their destructive responses to anger—and their loved ones were suffering too.

ANGER IS THE OPPOSITE OF THE FEELING OF LOVE. LOVE DRAWS YOU TOWARD THE PERSON; ANGER SETS YOU AGAINST THE PERSON.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE GET ANGRY?

People of all ages and social status experience anger. Brian, a high school student, is angry at the teacher who gave him a D on his report card. Liz, Brian's teacher, is angry with her ex for failing to send the child-support checks on time. Maria, an eighty-five-year-

old grandmother, is angry with her oldest son, who seldom comes to see her; her son, Alex, is angry in general because he can't find a job and feels rejected by society. Marvin, a pastor, is angry with church leadership who always shoot down his best ideas. Bethany is only three years old, but she is angry with her mother, who took away her favorite toy.

But what do we mean by anger? The dictionary describes *anger* as “a strong passion or emotion of displeasure, and usually antagonism, excited by a sense of injury or insult.”¹ Although we normally think of anger as an emotion, it is in reality a cluster of emotions involving the body, the mind, and the will.

And we don't sit down and say, “I think I will now experience anger.” Anger is a *response* to some event or situation in life that causes us irritation, frustration, pain, or other displeasure. Thousands of events and situations have the potential for provoking anger. An elderly relative makes a tactless comment about your child's weight. The guy behind you on the expressway follows too closely. A friend is always posting political rants on Facebook. Your father was always angry about something when you were growing up, and now you have trouble managing your own anger.

Anger is fed by feelings of disappointment, hurt, rejection, and embarrassment. Anger pits you against the person, place, or thing that sparked the emotion. It is the opposite of the feeling of love. Love draws you toward the person; anger sets you against the person.

But the mind is also active from the very beginning. For example, if Becky asks her husband, Tim, to mow the lawn while she takes the kids shopping, and she comes home hours later and the grass is still shaggy, she may think, *If he cared, he would mow the lawn. He knows how much it means to me. I don't ask for much. What*

was he doing instead? What HE wanted to do. How selfish. But Tim responds inwardly, *Look at everything else I've been doing! I sealed the deck, took out the garbage, and walked the dog. What does she want?*

Meanwhile, Ken sits simmering in his department's conference room while Corey, his manager, tells him his numbers are down this quarter; and if he doesn't start producing, the company might have to let him go. *It's because I'm over fifty,* Ken thinks. *They're trying to get rid of all the old guys. Corey is what, about thirty-five? What does he know?*

Becky, Tim, and Ken are all experiencing strong negative emotions—in their minds. But there's more. The body also gets in on the experience of anger. The body's autonomic nervous system “gets the adrenaline flowing.” Depending upon the level of anger, any or all of the following may happen physically. The adrenal glands release two hormones: epinephrine (adrenaline) and norepinephrine (noradrenaline). These two chemicals seem to give people the arousal, the tenseness, the excitement, the heat of anger, and in turn these hormones affect the heart rate, blood pressure, lung function, and digestive tract activity.² So as Ken sits in the conference room listening to his boss, he can feel his face flushing, his stomach churning, and his fists clenching. It is these physiological changes that give people the feeling of being overwhelmed by anger and being unable to control it.

Then the anger spills over into action: Brooke shakes her preschooler, Bethany throws a tantrum, Rich kicks the lawnmower, and Ken returns to his cubicle and starts to compose a furious email.

We can't control our bodily reactions; however, we *can* control our mental and physical responses to anger. We'll look at that in upcoming chapters.

WHY ANGER?

But first, let's look again at the roots of anger: where it comes from and why we experience it.

I believe that the human capacity for anger is rooted in the nature of God. Please do not think that I am being disrespectful of God. On the contrary, I stand in deep reverence of God when I suggest that human anger is rooted in the divine nature. Further, I am not suggesting that anger is an essential part of the nature of God. I am suggesting that anger derives from two aspects of God's divine nature: God's holiness and God's love.

The Scriptures proclaim that God is holy. (See, for example, 1 Peter 1:16; Leviticus 11:44–45.) The word *holy* means “set apart from sin.” Whether we are talking about God the Father, God the Son, or God the Spirit, there is no sin in the nature of God. The New Testament writer said of Jesus that He “faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

A second fundamental characteristic of the nature of God is love. The apostle John summarized the whole teaching of Scripture when he said simply, “God *is* love” (1 John 4:8, italics added). Love is not to be equated with God; rather, in His essential nature God is loving. This is not simply the New Testament concept of God. From beginning to end, the Scriptures reveal God as committed to the well-being of His creatures. It is God's nature to love.

It is from these two divine characteristics that God's anger is derived. Please note: The Scriptures never say, “God is anger.” That statement is not, in fact, true. Anger is not a part of the essential nature of God. However, the Bible often indicates that God *experiences* anger. The word *anger* is found 455 times in the Old Testament; 375 of these refer to God's anger. In fact, the psalmist

said, “God is angry with the wicked every day” (Psalm 7:11 KJV).

God’s anger was not limited to Old Testament times. Read the life of Jesus, and you will see numerous occasions where Jesus demonstrated anger. (For example, see Mark 3:1–5; John 2:13–17.) *Because* God is holy and *because* God is love, God necessarily experiences anger. His love seeks only the good of His creatures. His holiness stands forever against sin. All of God’s moral laws are based upon His holiness and His love; that is, they are always aligned with what is right, and they are always for the good of His creatures.

God desires humans to do what is right and enjoy the benefits. He said to ancient Israel, “Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster. For I command you this day to love the LORD your God and to keep his commands, decrees, and regulations by walking in his ways. If you do this, you will live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you and the land you are about to enter and occupy” (Deuteronomy 30:15–16).

Knowing the detrimental effects of man’s sin, God’s anger is kindled. It is God’s concern for justice and righteousness (both of which grow out of His holiness and His love) that stir God’s anger. Thus, when God sees evil, anger is His logical response to injustice or unrighteousness.

THE SCRIPTURES NEVER SAY, “GOD IS ANGER.”

“THAT’S NOT RIGHT”

So what does all of this have to do with human anger? The Scriptures say that we are made “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27). Though that image was marred by the fall, it was not erased. People still bear

the imprint of God's image deep within their souls. Thus, even though we are fallen, we still have some concern for justice and rightness. Find the most pagan man you know and follow him for a week, and you will hear him make such statements as: "That's not right. He shouldn't do that to her. She treated him wrongly." Steal his car and see if he expresses anger. Slander his daughter or wife or girlfriend and you will find that suddenly he is an extremely moral creature, condemning your action outright.

Listen to the young child who is beginning to put words into sentences, and you will soon hear the child say, "That's not fair, Mommy." Where did the child obtain that moral judgment? I suggest that it is stamped deep within his nature, tempered by parental teaching, to be sure, but the child knows when he or she has been wronged and will express it freely.

Anger, then, is the emotion that arises whenever we encounter what we perceive to be wrong. The emotional, physiological, and cognitive dimensions of anger leap to the front burner of our experience when we encounter injustice.

Why does a wife experience anger toward her husband? Because in her mind he has disappointed, embarrassed, humiliated, or rejected her. In short, he has "done her wrong." Why do teenagers experience anger toward parents? Because the teenager perceives that the parents have been unfair, unloving, unkind—that the parents have done wrong. Why does a man kick his lawnmower? Because the lawnmower is not "working right." The machine, or its manufacturer, has done him wrong. Why do drivers honk their horns when the traffic light turns green? Because they reason that the person in front of them "*should* be paying attention to the light and not texting and should have accelerated two seconds earlier."

Try to remember the last time you experienced anger and ask the question: Why did I get angry? Chances are your answer will mention some injustice. Someone or something did not treat you fairly. Something was wrong. Your anger may have been directed toward a person, an object, a situation, yourself, or God, but in every instance someone or something treated you wrongly. We are not discussing whether your perception of wrong is valid or invalid. We will deal with that in a later chapter. What we are establishing is that anger originates in the perception that something is wrong and that this sense of morality (some things are right and some things are wrong) finds its root in the fact that we are created in the image of a God who is holy and has established moral law for the good of His creatures.

Anger is not evil; anger is not sinful; anger is not a part of our fallen nature; anger is not Satan at work in our lives. Quite the contrary. Anger is evidence that we are made in God's image; it demonstrates that we still have some concern for justice and righteousness in spite of our fallen estate. The capacity for anger is strong evidence that we are more than mere animals. It reveals our concern for rightness, justice, and fairness. The experience of anger is evidence of our nobility, not our depravity.

We should thank God for our capacity to experience anger. When one ceases to experience anger, one has lost her sense of moral concern. Without moral concern, the world would be a dreadful place indeed. That brings us to our second major question: What is the purpose of anger? More to the point, what is *God's* purpose for human anger?

A man is about as big as
the things that make him angry.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

When Sorry Isn't Enough

MAKING THINGS RIGHT WITH THOSE YOU LOVE

GARY CHAPMAN and
JENNIFER THOMAS

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Contents

Introduction: Why This Is Important.....	9
1. Righting Wrongs.....	13
2. “I’m Sorry”: Expressing Regret.....	21
3. “I Was Wrong”: Accepting Responsibility.....	33
4. “How Can I Make It Right?”: Making Restitution.....	45
5. “I Want to Change”: Genuinely Repenting.....	59
6. “Can You Find It in Your Heart...”: Requesting Forgiveness.....	73
7. How Do You Say You’re Sorry?.....	83
8. What If You Don’t Want to Apologize?.....	93
9. Learning to Forgive.....	109
10. Healing Your Family Relationships.....	125
11. Choosing to Forgive Yourself.....	139
12. Truly Sorry, Truly Forgiven.....	149
Notes.....	155
Acknowledgments.....	159
Things <i>Not</i> to Say When Apologizing.....	161
Things to Say When Apologizing.....	162
The Apology Language Profile.....	165

Righting Wrongs

In a perfect world, there would be no need for apologies. But because the world is imperfect, we cannot survive without them. My academic background is the field of anthropology, the study of human culture. One of the clear conclusions of the anthropologist is that all people have a sense of morality: Some things are right, and some things are wrong. People are incurably moral. In psychology, it is often called the conscience. In theology, it may be referred to as the “sense of *ought*” or the imprint of the divine.

People are incurably moral.

It is true that the standard by which the conscience condemns or affirms is influenced by the culture. For example, in Eskimo (or Inuit) culture, if one is on a trek and runs out of food, it is perfectly permissible to enter the igloo of a stranger and eat whatever is available. In most other Western cultures, to enter an unoccupied house would be considered “breaking and entering,” an offense punishable as a crime. Although the standard of right will differ from culture to culture and sometimes within cultures, all people have a sense of right and wrong.

When one’s sense of right is violated, that person will experience anger.

He or she will feel wronged and resentful at the person who has violated their trust. The wrongful act stands as a barrier between the two people, and the relationship is fractured. They cannot, even if they desired, live as though the wrong had not been committed. Jack, whose brother swindled him years ago, says, “Things have never been the same between us.” Whatever the offense, something inside the offended calls for justice. It is these human realities that serve as the basis of all judicial systems.

A CRY FOR RECONCILIATION

While justice may bring some sense of satisfaction to the offended person, justice does not typically restore relationships. If an employee who is found stealing from the company is caught, tried, and fined or imprisoned, everyone says, “Justice has been served.” But the company is not likely to restore the employee to the original place of leadership. On the other hand, if an employee steals from the company but quickly takes responsibility for the error, reports that misdeed to the supervisor, expresses sincere regret, offers to pay for all inequities, and pleads for mercy, there is the possibility that the employee will be allowed to continue with the company.

Humankind has an amazing capacity to forgive. I remember a number of years ago visiting the town of Coventry, England. I stood in the shell of a cathedral that had been bombed by the Nazis in the Second

World War. I listened as the guide told the story of the new cathedral that rose beside the ruins. Some years after the war, a group of Germans had come and helped build the new cathedral as an act of contrition for the damages their fellow country-

men had inflicted. Everyone had agreed to allow the ruins to remain in the shadow of the new cathedral. Both structures were symbolic: the one of man’s inhumanity to man, the other of the power of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Something within us cries out for reconciliation when wrongdoing

The desire for reconciliation is often more potent than the desire for justice.

has fractured a relationship. The desire for reconciliation is often more potent than the desire for justice. The more intimate the relationship, the deeper the desire for reconciliation. When a husband treats his wife unfairly, in her hurt and anger she is pulled between a longing for justice and a desire for mercy. On the one hand, she wants him to pay for his wrongdoing; on the other hand, she wishes for reconciliation. It is his sincere apology that makes genuine reconciliation possible. If there is no apology, then her sense of morality pushes her to demand justice. Many times through the years, I have observed divorce proceedings and watched the judge seek to determine what was just. I have often wondered if sincere apologies would have changed the sad outcome.

I have looked into the eyes of teenage rage and wondered how different life would be if an abusive father had apologized. Without apologies, anger builds and pushes us to demand justice. When, as we see it, justice is not forthcoming, we often take matters into our own hands and seek revenge on those who have wronged us. Anger escalates and can end in violence. The man who walks into the office of his former employer and shoots his supervisor and three of his coworkers burns with a sense of injustice—to the point where only murderous revenge will right the wrong. Things might have been different had he had the courage to lovingly confront—and others had the courage to say, “I was wrong.”

CAN YOU FORGIVE WITHOUT AN APOLOGY?

Genuine forgiveness and reconciliation are two-person transactions that are enabled by apologies. Some, particularly within the Christian worldview, have taught forgiveness without an apology. They often quote the words of Jesus, “If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”¹ Thus, they say to the wife whose husband has been unfaithful and continues in his adulterous affair, “You must forgive him, or God will not forgive you.” Such an interpretation of Jesus’ teachings fails to reckon with the rest of the scriptural teachings on forgiveness. The Christian is instructed to forgive others in the same manner

When a pastor encourages a wife to forgive her erring husband while he still continues in his wrongdoing, the minister is requiring of the wife something that God Himself does not do.

that God forgives us. How does God forgive us? The Scriptures say that if we confess our sins, God will forgive our sins.² Nothing in the Old or New Testaments indicates that God forgives the sins of people who do not confess and repent of their sins.

When a pastor encourages a wife to forgive her erring husband while he still continues in his wrongdoing, the minister is requiring of the wife something that God Himself does not do. Jesus' teaching is that we are to be always willing to forgive, as God

is always willing to forgive, those who repent. Some will object to this idea, indicating that Jesus forgave those who were killing Him. But that is not what the Scriptures say. Rather, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."³ Jesus expressed His heart of compassion and His desire to see His murderers forgiven. That should be our desire and our prayer. But their forgiveness came later when they acknowledged that they had indeed killed the Son of God.⁴

Forgiveness without an apology is often encouraged for the benefit of the forgiver rather than the benefit of the offender. Such forgiveness does not lead to reconciliation. When there is no apology, the Christian is encouraged to release the person to God for justice⁵ and to release one's anger to God through forbearance.⁶

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great theologian who was martyred by the Nazis in a concentration camp in 1945, argued against the "preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance." He referred to such forgiveness as "cheap grace . . . which amounts to the justification of sin without the justification of the repentant sinner."⁷

Genuine forgiveness removes the barrier that was created by the offense and opens the door to restoring trust over time. If the relationship was warm and intimate before the offense, it can become loving again. If the relationship was simply one of casual acquaintance, it may grow to a deeper level through the dynamic process of forgiveness. If the offense

was created by an unknown person such as a rapist or a murderer, there was no relationship to be restored. If they have apologized and you have forgiven, each of you is free to go on living your lives, although the criminal will still face the judicial system created by the culture to deal with deviant behavior.

THE FIVE-GALLON CONTAINER

When we apologize, we accept responsibility for our behavior, seeking to make amends with the person who was offended. Genuine apology opens the door to the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation. Then we can continue to build the relationship. Without apology, the offense sits as a barrier, and the quality of the relationship is diminished. Good relationships are always marked by a willingness to apologize, forgive, and reconcile.

Sincere apologies also assuage a guilty conscience. Picture your conscience as a five-gallon container strapped to your back. Whenever you wrong another, it's like pouring a gallon of liquid into your conscience. Three or four wrongs and your conscience is getting full—and you are getting heavy. A full conscience leaves one with a sense of guilt and shame. The only way to effectively empty the conscience is to apologize to God and the person you offended. When this is done, you can look God in the face, you can look yourself in the mirror, and you can look the other person in their eyes; not because you are perfect but because you have been willing to take responsibility for your failure.

We may or may not have learned the art of apologizing when we were children. In healthy families, parents teach their children to apologize. However, many children grow up in dysfunctional families where hurt, anger, and bitterness are a way of life and no one ever apologizes.

WHAT REAL LOVE LOOKS LIKE

The good news is that the art of apology can be learned. What we have discovered in our research is that there are five fundamental aspects of

an apology. We call them the five languages of apology. Each of them is important. But for a particular individual, one or two of the languages may communicate more effectively than the others. The key to good relationships is learning the apology language of the other person and being willing to speak it. When you speak their primary language, you make it easier for them to genuinely forgive you. When you fail to speak their language, it makes forgiveness more difficult because they are not sure if you are genuinely apologizing.

Understanding and applying the five languages of an apology will greatly enhance all of your relationships.

In the next five chapters, we will explain the five languages. And in chapter 7, we will show you how to discover both your own and another person's primary apology language and how this can make your efforts at apologizing most productive.

Love often means saying you're sorry—over and over again. Real love will be marked by apologies by the offender and forgiveness by the offended. This is the path to restored, loving relationships. It all begins by learning to speak the right language of apology when you offend someone.

Talk About It

Here are a number of questions designed to spark interaction and stimulate thought. Share these with your spouse or close friend or in a small group, or use them for personal reflection.

Discuss the author's observation, "People are incurably moral."
Agree? Disagree?

Share a story you've heard or experience you've had showing humankind's "amazing capacity to forgive."

Those we care about most are those most affected by our apologies. Who are the people in your life who will be most affected by your learning in the area of apology?