

The Third Step in the Reconciliation Process

By Suzan Myhre, M.S.S.W.

Recently, I have been paying close attention to what happens in relationships when feelings get hurt, or anger is present. I have noticed that once an offense occurs (a breach in the connection between two people) the effort to reconnect and repair the breach often does not do what the repairer hopes it will. The repairer usually hopes that the injured will feel comforted and soothed by their actions, thus the repairer will often make an attempt at an apology within seconds of the offense. The repairer believes an apology is what the offended person wants to hear and needs to hear. But, in many circumstances, this does not ease the feelings of the offended. The apology does not seem to help the harmed. Why is this?? Didn't we all learn as kids to "say you're sorry" right away?? One reason is that the third step in the forgiveness process is skipped. When the third step gets skipped, the process does not work—something seems like it is missing.

Bill is a 13-year-old in a family of four. His sister Lizzy is 16 years old . Bill is typically awake before Lizzy in the morning and goes to the cupboard to get some cereal (his favorite meal of the day). When Lizzy wakes, she sees there is only 1/8 of a cup of Super Sugar Cereal left in the box. Lizzy feels very hurt and angry. She paid for half that cereal, and was consuming it with caution—to make it last, and now, the next day—it's almost gone!!!!

"MOM!" is Lizzy's plea for help. Mom can hear the distress in her voice, but has come to know that the cry is likely not associated with blood, but is a matter of a sibling breach. Lizzy is both hurt and angry. So, mom in all her wisdom does the 5 steps of forgiveness with Lizzy even though she herself does not need to apologize for what happened.

Step 1- I can see you are hurt and angry

Step 2- I want to address it, I am sorry this happened to you, BUT,

Step 3- FIRST I WANT TO LISTEN TO YOU TELL ME HOW THIS AFFECTED YOU.

Step 4- I feel sad that it happened, and I can understand why you feel so upset, and I encourage you to go talk to him about it (he needs to apologize after listening to you)

Step 5-Then he can do step 1,2,3, 4, and 5-- ask you if you will forgive him

Hopefully, when you as a parent, auntie, or friend do step 3—the person who is upset and offended will receive the care, concern and comfort you want to provide them, which will likely lower the intensity and rawness of their feelings. This will make it possible for them to feel cared for and listened to—to speak without interruption, to express all the reasons why this offense feels so particularly bad. I cannot think of one of us who does not desire being understood when we are in a situation like this. We

want to know the other is attentive, affirming of our reality—even if it is not the reality of the offender. All of us have been on both ends of this story. We have hurt other's feelings, and they have hurt us. We are all equal in sin and we are all forgiven by the Lord if we have asked for forgiveness.

When step 3 is practiced with care and sincerity, there is a restoration of attachment which is the repair part of relationship and vital to starting fresh. For every one of us we must tune into the commitment of step 3—“FIRST let me listen to how this hurt you”. This cannot be followed by a trick—“well, I didn’t mean to do it”. This last statement is defensiveness and has nothing to do with listening. Stick with just listening.

To review the steps:

I can see I’ve hurt you
I want to apologize but
First, I want to listen to you tell me about it
I am sorry for how I hurt you
Will you forgive me?

Ask the Lord into this part of your relationships. Pray that He leads you into truth and understanding in your connections with others. Fear not when you stumble or fall. God will pick you up and you will have another chance to try again.

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