



# ROD AND STAFF: TOOLS FOR A SHEPHERD

...But I said “Sorry”! Or why some apologies don’t succeed.

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Have you ever been left wondering why your apology seemed to land on deaf ears or why someone you are giving counsel to could say, “He always brings me flowers when we have a fight but never apologizes to me”? This issue’s topic is about apology – more specifically *The Five Languages of Apology* (written by Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas). I recommend reading the book for a full grasp of the topic, but I will distill the basics for you here, so you may start using them even before understanding the details.

The premise is that each of us tends to hold one or two main elements as important in recognizing an apology. Generally, what we hold as important in receiving an apology is what we will include when we will apologize to others. There are five main elements of a full apology and so, if a person only uses two out of five, it is rather ineffective if the other party is primarily receptive to one of the other three that you did not use. Unless you truly understand the other person’s language, an apology that incorporates all five elements is the only safe way to assure you are communicating.

## The five basic elements are:

- 1. Expressing Regret:** *I am sorry.* Those three words are a great place to start. They are more powerful when they have something specific attached, like “I am sorry for \_\_,” because it demonstrates understanding of how the person was affected.
- 2. Accepting Responsibility:** *I was wrong.* The ability to humble ourselves by confessing what we have done shows the other person that we are not just blaming others.
- 3. Making Restitution:** *What can I do to make things right?* Demonstrating the desire to repay, repair something (trust, dignity, actual physical objects) that was damaged through one’s action. The form this may take can vary based somewhat on the person’s love language. For example, restitution by sending home flowers may not be received as well by someone whose top love language is quality time. However, flowers and an evening devoted to spending focused time together could be highly restorative.
- 4. Genuine Repentance:** *I will try not to do that again.* Rebuild the relational trust by presenting a plan for how we will avoid causing the same hurt again. What are you going to try to do different from this point forward?
- 5. Requesting Forgiveness:** *Please, will you forgive me?* It communicates the desire to have the relationship fully restored and reiterates recognition of having done something wrong. This also puts the future of the relationship into the hands of the offended person, because it is their decision to grant that forgiveness.

## Some Suggestions:

Think of a recent scenario where an offense was committed and resolved. Practice writing out an apology for that offense that includes all five elements.

Talk with your spouse, family member or a friend about what part of an apology is most important to them. A great topic for group discussion.