

## CRIBB<S> NOTE – May 9, 2010

There are some tough, three-worded sentences that are extremely timely and need to be remembered and recited these days. We are living through a special period of personal challenges and national dilemmas in which those sentences have the potential of making a positive difference.

On the short list are these three-worded sentences:

- I am sorry.
- You were right.
- I was wrong.
- I forgive you.
- I must apologize.
- I love you.

Each sentence presents appropriate application in situations many of us are facing. All of them are hard to say when we are sincere. To admit a mistake to someone is possibly the most difficult statement. It means taking responsibly for our actions and facing the consequences. Saying, “I am sorry,” requires a degree of maturity and confidence. It is said without expectation. We cannot calculate how it will be heard. It does not matter as long as we say it in truth.

“You were right,” means you are big enough to recognize another person’s value even when you differ in opinion or perspective. One of the most famous episodes of someone acknowledging another person’s very different point of view involved President Abraham Lincoln and General Ulysses S. Grant.

Grant had mapped out a military strategy during the Civil War to attack the Confederate Army near Vicksburg, Mississippi. Lincoln did not agree with Grant’s decision however he allowed the general to go forward. Grant’s plan was successful in breaking the Confederate’s supply lines. The Battle of Vicksburg was one of the most critical victories for the Union Army; possibly more important than Gettysburg.

When President Lincoln received General Grant at the White House, the President approached him and said, “I was wrong. You were right.” Clearly, it was a humbling and great moment.

Then, there is the ability to forgive someone who has wronged you. That takes unusual strength. Often the offense leaves deep scars and memories of a hurtful experience. Yet, forgiveness, ultimately, is not about the other person. It is a source of healing and moving your life forward.

Country singer Jon Michaels, who grew up in the San Fernando Valley, has a song that says, “Forgiveness is the greatest gift one can give oneself.”

When we forgive others our humanity is enlarged. It is not easy, but it makes living with our self a lot less difficult. In fact, forgiveness helps to wipe away pain and opens the door to positive possibilities and friendship.

Many years ago, a friend gave me good instruction about never asking someone ‘to accept my apology’. According to her counsel, it is impolite to offend someone else or cause harm and then ask that person for forgiveness. It is better to extend an apology without putting the burden on the other to accept it. Just say, “I must apologize,” and not request anything from the other party.

“I must apologize” is sufficient in conveying my expressed desire to own my inappropriate statement or behavior. It was my fault that led to the awkward, inconvenient events that followed my actions. I am compelled to apologize.

The last three-worded sentence on this short list, “I love you,” is sometimes dismissed as weak and unnecessary. It can be hard to say how you feel toward someone who is very special in your life. Yet, those three words can be the glue that keeps a relationship in tact. They are so precious that under most circumstances they are received with a joyful response and acts of reciprocity.

“I love you” can have a boomerang effect when said openly and honestly. At first you may feel vulnerable because your heart is completely exposed. But, the power of love can overcome whatever risk you take when you let your spouse or partner know how much she or he means to you.

These tough, three-worded sentences are not gimmicks or simple expressions. They are the substance of meaningful communication in times when we really need each other. Take a chance, practice saying a few of these sentences, and add some more to the list. Then, when it is necessary to step up, go ahead and say what needs to be said. It may make the difference between resolving a problem or allowing it to linger and fester.

-Pastor Art Cribbs