



### **301: When Your Next Right Thing is to Apologize**

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 301. I'm an author, a spiritual director, and an occasional workshop leader. I live in the Piedmont of North Carolina with my family and through my work I've helped thousands of spiritually thoughtful people overcome decision fatigue so that they can discern their next right thing in faith, work, and life. You are enjoying this podcast ad free because of the generous support of the subscribers to the Soul Minimalist on Substack. You can learn more and subscribe at [emilypfreeman.substack.com](http://emilypfreeman.substack.com), where we'll continue the conversation about discernment and decision-making for anyone who wants to move beyond the pro-con list. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or if you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful, but also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for discerning your next right thing.

Today's question. What do we do when we realize our next right thing is to apologize? And how do we do it in a way that the person we're apologizing to will know that we're sincere? I'm so glad to welcome who I call the apology expert. Bestselling author, TEDx speaker, leadership consultant and psychologist, Dr. Jennifer Thomas. Jennifer is the co-author of *The Five Apology Languages* with Dr. Gary Chapman. And together they've also written a book in partnership with Paul White called *Making Things Right at Work*. With a PhD in clinical psychology and community psychology from the University of Maryland, Jennifer helps readers and leaders know the right things to say to keep growing. If you're curious about why the last apology you gave fell flat, or if you wonder why you just don't believe people when they're apologizing to you, today's conversation will hopefully provide valuable insight for your next right apologetic thing. Listen in.

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Emily P. Freeman: Well, I want to extend a warm welcome to you. Dr. Jennifer Thomas, thank you so much for being here on The Next Right Thing.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Oh, I'm so glad to be able to be with you.

Emily P. Freeman: Well, listener, just so you know, we are sitting here in my warm, sunny office here in the morning, light streaming through, hoping for a beautiful new day. But let

me just say that is not always how it feels when we realize that our next right thing is to apologize. And by the way, I call Dr. Jennifer Thomas Jen because she's a friend of mine in real life. And she said I could, right?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Right.

Emily P. Freeman: So Jennifer might come out, but it's probably going to be Jen, but we're all going to be okay with it. Anytime I see a public apology by a politician, an actor, an athlete, I always think of you and I wonder what does Jen think about their apology? You are to me the apology expert. And I would love if you would start out by sharing with us how that came to be.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Well, I say that I'm an accidental author. I was a psychologist in private practice when my husband and I had a disagreement one evening and I had an idea about apologies and how we did work it through and an insight that came from it where I said, this might be helpful to other people. So basically what happened was I made a mistake and JT was frustrated by it and I tossed out a simple, "Oh, I'm sorry," but it wasn't enough for him in that case. And usually he's pretty easygoing and so I was surprised that it was not working. But what I did was I got curious about why didn't that really land with him or why was he still frustrated? And what he said was he was frustrated because he just wished I would apologize. But you see-

Emily P. Freeman: But you did.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: I did. I said I was sorry. I think a lot of people can relate to that where it just didn't even register in his mind at all. And so I told him, "Well, I said the word I was sorry. Was there something else that you wanted to hear?" And here I'd like to pause and I'd like to invite your readers to think about what JT might've wanted. Because chances are that your answer is going to be your primary apology language. And what he said was, "I wanted you to say you were wrong." And so I said, "Okay. I was wrong." To me, they were synonyms. But I filed it away because we'd been married a number of years at that time, and this guy didn't come with an instruction book, but here he was letting me know a script for a good apology that I hadn't been aware of at all.

And so I thought about it some more and wrote it down, and I realized that we all probably have scripts for apologies, and they probably come from our parents or our teachers. Those magic words that are going to get us out of the doghouse. And so I began to look into what might those things be that we want to hear. And at the same time, it occurred to me that it's like Gary Chapman's five love languages where they could be knocking themselves out trying to show us love, but if they don't do it in the way that we are waiting to receive, we're going to miss it. And so I saw a direct connection there and I got curious about whether Gary Chapman had ever thought of that. And I knew him a little bit through work and so I sat on the idea for about six months, but eventually I made the phone call and he invited me to

come over and meet with him and I shared this idea and he found it really interesting and so we began to do some research together on what people really want to hear from you when you mess up.

Emily P. Freeman: First of all, kudos to you for making that call. I think a lot of us may have just thought, someone should look into this. Someone should really research apology languages. But you did it and I'm so glad you did.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Thanks.

Emily P. Freeman: I'm curious if when you had that initial conversation with him, had that ever occurred to him before about how love language and apology language that there actually was an apology language?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Yeah. He said people come to him often with book ideas, and he said he had never thought about this at all. But we together coined the term apology languages and ended up writing the book together called *The Five Apology Languages*. And what he says is that it stands shoulder to shoulder beside *The Five Love Languages* as the two essentials for healthy relationships. What he said as it was being released is, "Jennifer, the love languages, they're great, they're helpful, a lot of people use them and yet to keep our love tanks full, we have to be able to resolve the conflicts that are going to inevitably come up." And so he said, "Thank you for this idea. It's a really important way for us to be able to remove those barriers that come about through conflict and through the apology languages to let our love languages shine through so that our relationships are satisfying."

Emily P. Freeman: It's such an excellent reminder. Especially here on *The Next Right Thing*, we often talk about decision-making, about discernment, about what is my next right thing? And we often think of it in terms of with an individualistic mindset or even maybe those in my immediate family. But I think this conversation really brings in the communal and reminding that my next right thing does not exist in a vacuum as much as I sometimes wish that it could. And the thing is, is when it comes to my next right thing, sometimes we bump up against barriers or to what our next thing is, even if we know it's our next deeply right thing because there is this relational conflict. And it could even be like you said with you and JT, you're trying to resolve it, but you're hitting a wall and you can't figure out how to get around it because apologized, but it's not working. And so I think that you've already expressed why this is important, but I'm curious before we get into, because I do really want to get into what are those five languages of apology, but first, what are some of the common mistakes you see us making or you've been making, or I'm sure I've been making when we think we have apologized? What are some of the things we do or say or mindsets that we have that you see over and over again?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas:

Yeah. That's so important. I'm really glad that you asked about that. The first thing is

sometimes our body language really stinks.

Emily P. Freeman: Oh, yeah.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: And when I ask people to think about what did JT want to hear from you, many people will say, "Well, maybe your body language wasn't good. Maybe it was like, I'm sorry, but maybe you seemed defensive." And those are really common mistakes that we make. So when people say, "I've tried everything I can to make this relationship right. There's nothing I can do. Nothing is working.", I want to give people hope that if they can avoid some of these common mistakes that we make and try the new thing that we're talking about with apology languages, that they might be able to finally get some traction. So another thing that people do where they shoot themselves in the foot is they will apologize and then say but.

Emily P. Freeman: Oh, no.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Yeah. And we know that that erases everything that you just said in terms of apology, and now they're about to tell you what they really think and feel.

Emily P. Freeman: Or what they think you did.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Yes. Exactly. So they may be shifting the blame and telling you why it was really your fault or often people want us to share the responsibility. And what I tell people is, if you're going to offer an apology, don't make the mistake of expecting them to meet you there or apologize back to you. Your apology needs to stand on its own. And when we hear apologies, the question that we have in our heads is this. Is this a sincere apology or are they just trying to get out of the doghouse? The sincerity comes up over and over. And I believe that people are sincere for the most part, but there are things that get in the way of that like these habits of excusing ourselves or trying to share responsibility. But if people will say, "You know what? I really do want to apologize and whether they're going to apologize back to me or not, this is the right thing for me to do and it will stand on its own."

Emily P. Freeman: Stand on its own. That's good. That's a good reminder. And I'm also just thinking of my own life. There are certain ways of apologizing, and I guess we'll get into this with the five languages because there are certain ways when I apologize that are easier for me to express than others in the same way that there are ones that I want to hear more than others. Do you find that there's an apology language that we tend to go to that might not be our own?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: We believe that just as with the five love languages that we tend to give what we want to receive. So if you're in a relationship with people ... We're not just talking about at home, but also in the workplace or with friendships, people who you see all the time. You might want to make note when they apologize of what they tend to say and chances are that they are waiting for that from you as well.

Emily P. Freeman: Well let's get into those five languages and let's start with expressing regret. Tell us about that.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Yeah. This is my reflexive one. This is saying, I'm sorry. And sometimes people say women have a problem with over apologizing, and we do get into that in the five apology languages. How we cheapen our apologies if we say I'm sorry for everything. But when we're sincerely expressing regret, we're going to be specific about what we're sorry about and we're focusing here on feelings. So trying to get into the other person's shoes about specifically, how did I make you feel bad or frustrated or angry or worried about me like if I didn't show up? And so listing out what you're sorry about is the way to let people know that it involves your heart. Letting them know, I'm sad in my heart that I created these bad feelings for you. And I also encourage people don't make the mistake of making it about you. So you want to quickly move to you probably felt disappointed or dismayed or discouraged, all the D words. And talking about how if you can add on something about your commitment to them and how you care about them, that's a powerful way to wrap up an apology.

And my favorite lead in to an apology is actually to say I apologize. That lets them know that you're not trying to pass the blame onto them. And then any of the five apology languages can be used next after that. And what we say is that as with the five love languages, most people like all five apology languages. And you could actually think of them as steps to a complete apology. Five steps to really know that hopefully if your body language was good and you didn't go into the butts that you have given a thorough apology. They also give you a way to know when you might be finished.

Emily P. Freeman: Oh, that's good. That's so good. I have a million questions follow up. One is, are these languages in order of the percentage of people who speak that apology language?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Great question. We looked at that after our book was released. I was just curious about which is the most popular both for the apology languages and the love languages.

Emily P. Freeman: Sure.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: And so I've got the results now and they haven't been published yet.

Emily P. Freeman: Okay. Hot off the press.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Yes. But I'll let you know that coincidentally, they are in decreasing order of importance to most people.

Emily P. Freeman: Okay. So the highest percentage of people want to hear you express regret when apologizing.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Yes. And then an equally high number of people want the second one.

Emily P. Freeman: Which is?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Which is accepting responsibility or saying I was wrong.

Emily P. Freeman: I was wrong.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: And that is very important to my groom. It also happens to be important to my co-author, Gary Chapman.

Emily P. Freeman: Oh, well that's something interesting to know. I guess when you write a book together, you need to know how to apologize.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Know how to apologize. Exactly. And I think the idea resonated with him, not just from his work, but he said that his lovely wife, Carolyn, tends to say I'm sorry quickly just like I do so we had the same pattern going on in each of our homes. But when we say I was wrong, basically what we're doing is pleading guilty. If we were in a court of law, I'm saying, "Yep, I did that. No excuses. I'm not trying to deny it anymore. My bad." And again, you want to be specific about what you did wrong. It so gets on my nerves when people say I apologize for what I did, or I'm sorry for what I did.

Emily P. Freeman: Like they literally say what I did.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Yes.

Emily P. Freeman: But they don't say specifically.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Right. So when you are specific, you can say, it was wrong of me to, and then fill in the blank. And that's going to show more of your sincerity when you lay out where you went off track. And I've noticed as we looked at these five languages that they progress from past to present and future. So the first two are really about the past and the offense, and they're similar. We might bounce back and forth between the two. But we're really talking about what we did or didn't do and how it offended or disappointed the other person. And then we're trying to figure out how can we let them know that we want to remove the barrier that we created with that mistake?

Emily P. Freeman: Something it seems like we hear a lot of people who are making public apologies, which I want to ask you more about this. It seems like we hear a lot of, I'm sorry if that was offensive, for example. Which on a scale of one to 10, how would you grade that apology?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: That makes it a non-apology when you say if, just like when you say but, and so we give zero credit for I'm sorry if.



Emily P. Freeman: Zero credit.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: And that's a hard one because people may sincerely want to apologize, but they need to sharpen that skill and be able to say, "I understand that I was offensive. I understand that I need to do better at this, and I apologize."

Emily P. Freeman: What about making restitution? This is the third language.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: So here we're moving up to the present tense, and I'm saying, "Emily, I want to make you whole again." Often it might involve some money. If we're at a restaurant and the dinner's really late, we're looking for some restitution. Are they going to give us free dessert?

Emily P. Freeman: Yeah, true. Right.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Are they going to give us a discount off our bill? But when we're not in the restaurant or customer service situation, we still want for them to make it right. And so what this might look like in a parenting setting is a parent might say, "You know what? I appreciate your words I'm sorry and I was wrong, but talk is cheap. Those two are all about words. I want to see that you're going to fix what you did. So maybe if you kids were roughhousing and you knocked over a plant, then your amends will be to clean that up." And I do have a passion for helping people teach kids to apologize well, and to avoid these mistakes that we make. And so this is about telling them, for some people just saying the words, it goes a long way but for other people, they're going to be waiting for you to take an action to show them that you really do want to make amends to them, and you want to set things right again.

Emily P. Freeman: How would you differentiate between making restitution and the next one, which is planned change?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Yeah. Planned change, it does have some similarities. This one is about preventing a recurrence of the problem. And so when I am trying to keep them straight in my mind I think about, okay, well now we're moving to the future.

Emily P. Freeman: Sure. Yeah.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: So we're saying that was not good, and maybe this has happened a couple of times before. I've really got to get my act together. And part of my apology is going to be letting them know I'm going to put some guardrails in place so that I can't keep disappointing them in this way.

Emily P. Freeman:

I'll take steps to prevent a recurrence. That's helpful. Even when you talk about the knocking

over the plant, I'm going to fix that problem, which is making restitution, then I'm going to make it so it doesn't happen again.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: That's right. So if they were throwing the ball when the plant got knocked over, then they might say, "We're going to have a new rule. We're going to remind each other that we don't play ball in the living room and we're going to go outside to do that." Or some other way so that risk isn't there. Because when people make a mistake or let us down, we can be forgiving the first time round or maybe even the second and the third, but we all run out of patience at some point.

I can remember a time back in one of my prior office settings when I was working as a psychologist, one of our administrative assistants would receive phone calls from clients who were canceling, but she would forget to erase them from our book or delete that appointment space. And so you can imagine I come out looking for that client to be in the waiting room and they're not there. And then the admin would say, "Oh gosh." Forehead smack. "They called the other day. They're out of town." And then launches into the apology. Well, after a few times of that, I am less gracious each time and I'm getting annoyed. And what I really need to hear as one of her steps of apology is how she's going to manage to take the phone call that they're going out of town and delete the appointment from my calendar before she goes on to the next task. And so having her talk that through and what she was going to change and her habits helped me to be less frustrated, and it actually did change her behavior over time.

Emily P. Freeman: Do you find that your own apology language that you want to hear apologies differently at home versus at work?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: We think that there's some of that. Yes. In fact, our other co-author is Paul White, and he co-wrote a book called *Making Things Right at Work* with us. And he said he feels like there's a big difference in what he's looking for at home and at work. And so he tends to think of apology languages as steps to a complete apology. And those steps do vary for him depending on where he is and also, we all want to see our apology language mainly if two things are true. One is if it's a repeated mistake, and two is if it's serious. So if it's just a little trip up, I don't require all five and you probably wouldn't either. But when those two things are true, someone can use two or three of the apology languages and if they haven't used my main one, I'm going to notice the absence of it.

So getting back to our statistics and how popular are these as we go, the first two, saying I was wrong and I'm sorry, got 40% each of the first place votes. So that'll work for 80% of the people. But then the next two add about 10% each. So for that 10% that's waiting to see how you're going to change the plan and prevent a reoccurrence, if you haven't covered that for them, they're going to feel like, "Well, Jen, you were just getting warmed up on this apology, but why did you stop short of bringing a new plan into place?"



Emily P. Freeman: Well, and that brings us to the final one, which I'm guessing is the one that's the least percentage of people, but still important, which is requesting forgiveness.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Right. So for our people who've been doing the math, it's like, well, you have 0% left. And actually, one of those tens is a seven. The preventing a reoccurrence is a seven, and that leaves us 3% of people who really want to be asked, will you please forgive me?

Emily P. Freeman: Wow. Yeah.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: And Gary Chapman and I sat and talked about this for quite a while, and he said, "I would never think to say that in an apology." And I agree, it wasn't in my script. But I've had people come up to me after I've spoken at events and they say, "You know what? I'm in that 3%." And sometimes they have tears in their eyes and they say, "I've been told you're not a very forgiving person when what you've explained to me is I just need to hear an extra thing that most people aren't offering and now I know how to ask for it."

Emily P. Freeman: Well, I took the quiz.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Oh, good.

Emily P. Freeman: And the highest score you could get on any one was a 10. So when you do the quiz, the back of the book ... I'm sure there's probably one online too, I'm guessing, but the back of the book is great. I got a nine on accepting responsibility. To me, I'm like, well, yeah. Because of course that's my-

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Right. What else is there?

Emily P. Freeman: What else is there? If you admit that what you did was wrong and you're taking responsibility for it, I'm golden. Well, almost. Because my next highest one was planned change. Because that's one reason I wanted to know the difference between making restitution but planned change. It's not only do I want to know that you're willing to fix it now, I want to make sure you're going to fix it later. Not do it again. But that requesting forgiveness one, I am uninterested in ... Not like I would be angry if someone was apologizing and ask me to forgive them, but it's not on my radar at all. Now that I think about it, I might be a little put out. Is that real? Is that a thing?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Yeah. People will say, that's a tricky one because what puts us out is if we feel put on the spot to hurry up and forgive them.

Emily P. Freeman: Yes.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: And so in the chapter on this in *The Five Apology Languages*, we go

into that and how you've got to leave the ball in the court of the one who's forgiving you. And you cannot rush it because if you do that, you're undermining the sincerity that we believe you feel. You're going to drain that right out of there. And some people will use different words that are a little softer and don't have that sense of I demand that you forgive me now. Like in a celebrity apology, years ago when Lance Armstrong admitted that he had been using performance enhancing drugs ... A very interesting story. If you look at what actually made him crack, it was his kids and his son saying, "Dad, the kids were saying you used drugs, but I defended you." And that was the last straw for Lance Armstrong. And he said, "No, I'm going to make this public apology." And so what he said at the end of his apology was, "I hope that my fans can someday find it in their hearts to forgive me." And I think that's a really nice way to represent this fifth apology language while leaving the timeline in the other person's hands.

Emily P. Freeman: Sure. That someday, it leaves a lot of room and it feels generous to the one receiving it. Recognizing that it might be a while if ever.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Exactly. And Emily, another thing we say about this one is it can be scary as the apologizer to ask someone for forgiveness. Because symbolically, you're getting down on one knee and humbly asking them to carry the burden of a mistake that you made. Forgiveness is a transaction where I say, "Will you carry this debt or pay it off for me?" And they say, "Yes, I will." And what that means is I can't erase what you did, but I'm not going to throw it up in your face. And out of my commitment to you and my love or respect for you, I'm willing to set this aside and move forward with you. And while we hope apologies will get us forgiveness as we go forward, we have to recognize that they may not. What they do is they open the doorway to the possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Emily P. Freeman: You mentioned Lance Armstrong. Are there any public apologies or ones that maybe some of us would remember that you either or both think we're done really well or you have some notes you'd like to give?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Well, another one that I analyzed at great length was Tiger Woods' public apology where he was making mistakes at home and behind the wheel. And the apology, I'd give a five star rating if they hit all five for these celebrity apologies. And he did hit all five. But the caveat is he has a PR team. And so I always try to recognize that maybe none of us can give an apology as good as Tiger Woods because we don't have a PR firm behind us. But if people want to be sure that they've covered everything they need to, we think covering all five apology languages gives people the best shot at not leaving out something that the other one is waiting to hear.

Emily P. Freeman: Right. You mentioned the PR team. I do think this book and the five languages serve as a pretty good PR team at least to think about how might others be receiving this. It might not be the same way I would receive it. I think about sometimes on Instagram or on Facebook, you'll see people who are offering a public apology. They'll like

share their notes app. A screenshot of apology they typed out in a notes app. And I feel like somewhere, I remember you saying don't make an apology via text. Friends don't let friends text apologies. Because you are missing the vocal tone, you're missing the body language. What else are we missing when we offer apologies that way?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Exactly. That was in my TEDx talk that I gave. And it just came to me as I was talking that day about how important it is for us to show others the respect of being willing to pick up the phone or go and be with them in person. And we need to hold ourselves accountable to that. Or if you're talking with a friend or a coworker who's going to offer an apology and maybe they're starting to write a text, I think it would be a really caring thing to do to say, "Wait a minute. When are you going to see them? Or could you make a way to see them soon so that you can give this to them in person?" And some of us resist it. I totally understand. We may think better if we can write it out. And so for them, I say you can go ahead and write it out, but go in person and read it to them or refer to your notes if you get stuck. Because the time that you take to do that, maybe even to prepare it ahead, and then to go and read it in person is going to underscore how sincere you are.

Emily P. Freeman: That's good. I have a few more questions for you, Dr. Jennifer Thomas.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Lay it on me.

Emily P. Freeman: Most of this has been about individual responsibility. And I'm curious, in what ways does the conversation change when we talk about systemic wrongs and what apology and restitution looks like in that situation?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Yeah. My training is in both clinical psychology and community psychology. And so I'm glad you're asking about this because I do think that especially in this day and age where we have huge political divides and then we're seeing wars being fought ... One of the former popes, I think it was Pope John Paul II. He said, "War opens the gates of hell." It's hard for me to even look at what is going on. Look at it between my fingers with my hands over my eyes, because I want to be a responsible citizen and aware of what's going on and supporting causes who can help over there in practical ways, both peacemaking and helping those who are being hurt by war, but it's not my specialty. I would point people who want to read more on this to Everett Worthington. He is a professor now retired from VCU, who has written quite a bit on forgiveness and he's worked in Africa with the Racial Justice Commission. And I do think that it is such an important area for those of us who are interested in removing barriers of all types to be willing to look at the world stage and at the same time, one of my passions is to help us not only do that, but to bring it home and to look at ourselves. And so that's why I appreciate you shining a light on this topic of mine.

That we can be doing peacemaking in our own circles and as we are in the workplace. I work with some teams where they want to all take the profile and then we help them post the list in the break room or online in a note space where everyone can access it and learn how to

give an apology that's going to let them know that you know what stands out to them and what you can't leave out. And so you have a little bit of a cliff notes to help you. And also, I hope that people take away from today a tip that they can use if you have children or grandchildren in your life that you can teach them. Maybe all apologies, don't need to start with, I'm sorry like mine have. Maybe I could teach them apologies, start with I apologize. And then also having them be able to speak all five languages of apology. Because when you're fluent in every one of those dialects, that's going to make a difference for them of being able to break through those barriers and keep their relationships on track.

Emily P. Freeman: Final question, in thinking about discernment when it comes to making apologies. You mentioned this a little bit at the beginning and I wanted to follow up here at the end. What would you say to the chronic apologizer and how can we discern if and when a true apology is needed?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Okay. So the question is maybe things have been awkward with someone and I'm wondering, did I do something wrong? Do I need to apologize? And this often happens where it's not as clear as someone saying, "You really offended me. I need an apology." But we just notice maybe the time between their text replies is spreading out, or when we see them, they're quiet or maybe they're doing things with other people and we're seeing it online that they're not inviting us. All of those are really hard things. And I think trauma comes from that. Friendships are not easy. And so we do want to equip people to be able to maybe have awkward conversations about these things. So I would suggest often saying to the person, I've missed seeing you, or it seems like maybe there's some tension between us. Am I reading that right? And talking about what might be between you two as an obstacle.

And there are some off-ramps there. Maybe they're going to say, "Oh no, nothing's wrong." And then that's a relief and you all are good to go. But for the times when they say, "Yeah, you have let me down," or, "I have felt like you've upset me, you've offended me." It might be something as simple as it seems like I'm not your priority and I've gotten tired of reaching out to you. And so then we have an opportunity to talk about that commitment we have to them and going through the apology languages so that they'll know that we really want to take that obstacle and get it out of the way if in fact it is a relationship that we want to foster.

Emily P. Freeman: Which is a key part of this whole conversation.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas:

That's right. And then another place where it gets thorny in here is what if they did come and ask me for an apology or demand an apology, or I heard from a third person that they want an apology, but I don't think I did anything wrong? And that's where I want to underscore the point we touched on earlier that that is not the place to offer an apology if you don't think you did anything wrong. And there's controversy about this, but this is the

line we take in *The Five Apology Languages* is in that case, what you need to do is have a conversation with them and validate them where you can. So saying, "Well, tell me more." And okay, "I didn't know that you experienced that situation that way, or I didn't know you heard that thing about me. It actually isn't true. Maybe someone told you I said something I didn't. Let me take a minute to correct that." And then a helpful phrase that we can use sometimes when someone wants an apology, but we don't think we owe it, is I wish. So that's a little tool that we can use where they can feel validated, but we can also be true to our principle of not lying.

Emily P. Freeman: Right. So how would you finish that sentence I wish?

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Yeah. So I would say, "Oh gosh. I don't remember it that way at all. I wish I could remember it more clearly." Or I might say, "I do remember that whole situation. I think there was another whole thing going on. I think this is where the confusion is. I wish I could unwind it and replay it or watch a video of what happened, because if I were you and it happened that way, I'd be really upset too."

Emily P. Freeman: Oh, that's a good line right there. Recognizing that if you were telling the same story they were telling you would feel the same way.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Right. So we're validating and we're saying a word that sounds like I'm sorry, which is, I really wish I could make this all better. It could also be, I wish I could get us back to where we were in our friendship or in our marriage or in our family because we were in a better place before. And all of that points to our commitment to them. And then just underscoring that as you wind it down to say, and I'm not going anywhere.

Emily P. Freeman: That's a nice line.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Yeah. And I hope we can keep talking things through with this honesty because you're so important to me.

Emily P. Freeman: Amen, sister. I have been wanting to do this episode for many, many months, and I'm so glad that we found the time to sit down and do it. I would love it if you would close us out by reading just a short excerpt from *The Five Apology Languages*.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: I'd be glad to. This comes from one of the later chapters in our book, and the chapter title is *Truly Sorry, Truly Forgiven*. "If apologizing were a way of life, no walls would be built, relationships would be authentic. Certainly people would fail, but the failures would be dealt with in an open and honest manner. Regret would be expressed, responsibility would be accepted, restitution would be made. Planned change or changes would be our intention, and we would stand humbly and say, I need somebody to forgive me. I believe in most cases, if we learn to apologize effectively, we would be genuinely forgiven."

Emily P. Freeman: Dr. Thomas, thank you for joining us today.

Dr. Jennifer Thomas: Thank you.

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Thanks for listening to episode 301 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope this simple practice of learning to apologize can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow. Because while it's true, this is a podcast about making decisions, it's also about making a life.

What a joy it was to have a conversation with my in real life friend, Jen. I hope you'll pick up a copy of *The Five Apology Languages, The Secret to Healthy Relationships* by Gary Chapman and Jennifer Thomas, or their new book written alongside Paul White called *Making Things Right at Work*. Visit Dr. Jennifer Thomas to learn more about her and her books and her speaking and coaching availability. Don't miss that. Again, that's [drjenniferthomas.com](http://drjenniferthomas.com) to learn more.

As always, you can find me on Instagram at Emily P. Freeman or online at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com) where you can find a transcript of this and every episode. Thanks to the team at Immutible who faithfully edits and mixes our sound, and to Ashley Sherlock, who creates our show notes and keeps this podcast organized. Well in closing, I wanted to read a few more words from *The Five Apology Languages*. "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." Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.