

I Was Wrong

By [Davon Cook](#)

Forgiveness doesn't happen overnight; it's a journey, and the hardest may be getting started. One party being willing to admit its part in the rift can get the journey underway. For some of us, the three hardest words to say are: *I was wrong*. I find it easier to say these words in purely professional situations where I take ownership of my fault or mistake. But in personal relationships where there is history and emotion (as in, your family business situation!), it's somehow much harder to do. I find myself rationalizing that I acted in a certain way in *response* to a previous difficult encounter. But that first step of vulnerability—admitting I was at fault, or at least that I was some portion of the problem—is helpful before meaningful forgiveness can occur.

Wrongs come in all shapes and sizes. Some are small, and perhaps humorous in retrospect. I'm thinking of the time I ignored Lance's direction not to fly a certain small, unreliable airline and thereby arrived at my client meeting half a day late! Others are large and life-altering, and they take much more time and healing to reconcile.

And sometimes the "wrong" is unintentional. Sometimes it is being absent when needed, or overlooking someone's struggle or hurt, or not proactively thinking how we could help but just being too busy to notice. In a situation of low trust, an *unintentional* wrong can be perceived as a quite intentional hurt. Yet when it's brought to our attention and the disappointment or hurt is expressed, the need to recognize our fault is just as important.

It takes confidence in self and our own worth to be able to admit mistakes, yet doing so is a sign of emotional intelligence. If you're someone who struggles to get those three words out, can you acknowledge "I didn't handle that well"? Or can you show remorse by your actions and demeanor in future interactions? That's the first step to meaningful forgiveness. And it's a good lesson to review as we head into the season of Thanksgiving.

Admitting Fault: A Biblical Story

By [Dr. Bill Long](#)

Davon has skillfully pointed out how difficult it is to admit fault, especially in a family or family business situation. The weight of the past, need to justify oneself, unwillingness to give the advantage to the other, and continuing resentment may make admitting fault and receiving forgiveness a rare experience.

The Biblical story of Joseph and his brothers gives us a privileged glimpse into the emotional dynamics of admitting fault and receiving forgiveness. At the end of the story (Genesis 50), after their father Jacob has died, the brothers worry that Joseph will exact revenge on them for their earlier mistreatment of him by throwing him into a pit and then handing him over to some international traders. In their vulnerability, they speak to Joseph.

Appealing to the authority of their deceased father Jacob, the brothers say, "Now, therefore, please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father" (Gen 50:17). They don't even have the courage at this point to claim they are Joseph's brothers—all they do is entreat his forgiveness because



of their common religious faith. They call what they did a “crime,” though other translations use the word “transgression” or “sins.” They know they were wrong. They own their fault in unambiguous language.

Once they take responsibility for fault, Joseph really only has a few alternatives in response. He can indeed take advantage of their vulnerability and increase pressure on his brothers, but he does two things instead. The first is that he weeps: “And Joseph wept when they spoke to him” (50:17). The honest confession of fault triggered something deep within Joseph. Then, a few verses later, he interprets all of this in light of God’s purpose for their family: “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good...” (50:20). Willingness to admit fault not only brought the family together but it enabled a new understanding of family in the light of God’s gracious purpose. As Thanksgiving is nigh, consider where you have erred, and whether admitting a fault might be something you ought to do this year.

Admit Fault? Are You Kidding?

By [Lance Woodbury](#)

Davon looked at admitting fault from a practical perspective, while Bill uses a lesson from a Biblical teaching. Both authors suggest that being vulnerable and admitting fault are prerequisites to forgiveness. But what if we don’t feel like admitting fault? What are the consequences of *not admitting* we were wrong with what we said, how we behaved, or the decision we made?

We may avoid fault because we feel we did no wrong. But, we may also feel things might spin out of our control if we do admit we were wrong. Perhaps our ability to meet our original goals becomes more difficult if we acknowledge we’ve stumbled.

But what is it that provides a sense of emotional well-being in life? Is it more money or more land? More business opportunities or the next deal? More protection from the world or avoidance of difficult issues? A feeling of full control over everything we touch?

No, we all know unhappy people with more than enough material possessions who feel empty inside. We all know people whose attempts to control result only in more chaos. We all know people who spend their days among teams of people but suffer from a deep-seated sense of isolation and loneliness. **Emotional well-being comes from having supportive relationships with others while feeling a sense of purpose or contribution to something larger than ourselves or to someone else.**

Not admitting fault diminishes our relationships by creating a barrier to feeling loved and accepted by others. It gets in the way of being in a relationship with someone close to us. Avoidance of fault also clouds our sense of purpose or contribution. We become focused on looking back and arguing, justifying or denying what we did or didn’t do and why we were right, instead of looking forward at opportunities to make changes for the better, to improve our families and our businesses.

Sometimes the impetus to admit we’ve been wrong, to “see the log that is in our own eye,” comes from realizing what happens if we *don’t* own up to our shortcomings. For each of us, being wrong is bound to happen. But *staying wrong* — and consequently not practicing forgiveness — is what gets in the way of a better family business.

