

This mountain culture is not direct. When asked a rude, direct question it is all together appropriate just to smile and look away—avoid and hide. What should Sharla do? I thought a little bit and decided to break all the rules. "I think you are in the wrong. You have just threatened to break a vow you made to your husband, the vow to be married until you die. I think you should ask for his forgiveness no matter what wrong he has done to you." She looked at me, horrified. "I have never apologized to my husband in the five years we've been married. Asking for forgiveness would mean being weak and losing face. For what it's worth, I have never apologized to anyone in my entire life. I need to be strong or people will run over me."

Breaking more rules, I said, "Forget your face! What's more important, your face or your marriage?" We went on to talk about forgiveness and what it means. I told her that I would not be married today were it not for those three simple words, "I am sorry."

Sharla disappeared for a few hours. When she came back she had tears in her eyes, tears of joy. "I said I'm sorry, and he said he loves me! It really works," she exclaimed. That evening as we sat around eating supper, she kept pulling out her cell phone to receive yet another proclamation of her husband's love via phone message.

Throughout the following year Sharla occasionally would tell me of the times she apologized to her husband. Her husband said, "I like it that you work for the foreigners. You have become a better wife." I thought this was great, but how was I to tell her about the Son, the source of all forgiveness, in a way she could understand? I soon received a chance.

Sharla has a beautiful three-year old son, and was toying around with the idea of a second child. She had signed a paper at the birth of her first child stating that she would bear only one child, thus giving her total medical coverage for her first-born. She did some checking around and found out that she would need to pay a fine of around \$1,300 in order to have a second child. This was a hardship her mother's heart saw as minimal in comparison to a second child. Sharla had been off birth control for over a year and was beginning to think it would be impossible for her to have a second child only to find out one day that she was pregnant! In the meantime she and her husband had taken out a large loan for a new home. Her husband was not happy with the announcement she gave to him with great joy. What should she do? My husband and I spent hours talking with her over options, and even considered adopting the child were she to keep it. In the end, to keep family harmony, she went along with her husband's wishes and had an abortion.

About two weeks later Sharla went into the hospital to have her blood screened for AIDS and Hepatitis. She came to me in tears. Her blood showed that she had recently contacted Hepatitis B. She was sure it had happened during the abortion—the doctors had used the same instruments on all four women having abortions at the same time as her.