



Life Actually By Kari Kampakis

It's never too late to say 'I'm sorry'

While driving my kids to school one day, I told them it was almost time for an annual lake trip our family takes with friends we see once a year.

Everyone got super-excited — except my youngest daughter. With a little prodding she admitted she was scared to go because of an argument she'd had the previous year with a girl her age. It was a silly fight, and she regretted how she acted.

"It's okay," I told her. "This is your chance to tell her you're sorry. It's never too late to say 'I'm sorry.' I have a friend who just apologized for a mistake she feels she made over 20 years ago."

When our lake trip came up again in conversation a few days later, my youngest daughter had a different reaction. This time her enthusiasm matched her sisters', and with a glowing smile she declared:

"Yes! I can't wait to apologize to that girl!"

Her eagerness caught me off-guard, because who looks forward to apologizing? Who anticipates that interaction rather than fearing it or dreading it? A child, that is who. An innocent child

with a heart so pure that pride cannot take root.

My daughter did apologize, and immediately the girl replied, "It's okay. I was acting a little crazy too." They put the silly fight behind them and had a blast all weekend long. And as I thought about their reconciliation — how easily it came for both of them — I realized this is what Jesus meant when He said to be like children. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see the Lord (Matthew 5:8).

It's a different story for adults, isn't it? When we apologize, it's often through gritted teeth or with a pit in our stomach. We may ask for forgiveness but not really be sorry. What should be black and white often fades into shades of gray when we justify our behavior, make excuses, hold grudges, or stubbornly refuse to admit that maybe, just maybe, we were wrong.

There's a saying in addiction recovery programs to "sweep your side of the street." It's a phrase about accountability — and taking responsibility for your choices. If there's a mess in front of you, you clean it up. If you hurt someone, you ask for forgiveness. Whether they accept your apology isn't the point because you

can't force anyone to forgive. That issue gets settled on their side of their street. It's out of your control and something they deal with on their timetable.

Some people in our world will spend a lifetime waiting for an apology that never comes. Other people want to apologize, yet they believe it is too late due. After all the time that's passed, an apology would be hard and awkward. It might not be wanted or received. I believe a late apology is better than no apology at all if it is sincere. If your heart is in the right place, it's worth taking the risk.

Remorse sometimes doesn't hit us until an event is over and done. Whether it's a situation like my daughter's, where the memory of a wrongdoing stays buried until the next encounter, or a situation like my friend's, where getting older and wiser makes you realize the gravity of past mistakes, it's important to trust those feelings of unrest and unsettled business. God created us all for reconciliation, to humbly right the wrongs that weigh heavy on our hearts.

Unlike my daughter, I've never been excited to issue an apology. I'm still a work-in-progress when it comes to

admitting mistakes and forgiving the wrongs done to me. What I'm learning, though, is that reluctance here is typically a matter of pride. The way to get rid of pride is to name it, face it, and sweep it out of the way.

All of us have people in our lives who deserve an apology or two. Whether we hurt them consciously or accidentally, last week or 20 years ago, we hold a lot of power to help their wounds heal.

And just as it's never too late to say, "I'm sorry," it's also never too late to reply, "I forgive you." On both ends of the interaction, you give each other a gift — a gift that children give away freely, and one that we as adults can humbly learn to embrace.

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