

“I’m Sorry”

by John VanSloten

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This week I watched an old Thanksgiving episode of the Simpsons entitled ‘Bart Vs Thanksgiving’. This particular show dealt with the theme of ‘apologizing’. Something that has to happen a lot in the Simpson household! The story begins with the very dysfunctional Simpsons family gathering together for their thanksgiving meal. It begins with **Homer** doing the couch potato thing, caring more about football than family time. Then Marge’s **two sisters** arrive, both with big pots of food. They brought the food because Marge’s turkey is always too dry! This, of course, sets Marge off... Why do they always do this to her? Then Homer greets his two inlaws with a kiss. (To which they respond with great disdain) **“So insincere! I don’t know how she puts up with him!”** Next, Marge’s **mother** arrives and the first words out of her mouth are these, **“I have larengitis so I’ll just say one thing... You never do anything right!”**.

Ah.... family life at Thanksgiving! Yet the strife of this day had only just begun! For days Lisa had been working on a thanksgiving centrepiece and as she presents it to the family, this happens **(CLIP #2 - 8:06 - 9:13 Freeze on screaming Lisa)** Destroyed Lisa goes after Bart! How could he care so little? She was devastated. And Bart... well he won a one way ticket to his room... with his mom informing him that he’d ruined Thanksgiving! He was also left with the admonition that he could stay in his room until he apologized. Bart’s stubborn reply was that he would never apologize! PAUSE... What a family scene eh? Sort of made me empathize with Homer as he prayed this thanksgiving prayer... **(CLIP #3 - 9:50 - 10:23 ...Worst prayer yet!)** And then the show goes on... attempting to work out this tension between a broken and angry Lisa and a stubborn and unrepentant Bart. Lisa attempts to work it out through poetry in her journal... and Bart tries running away. Eventually he does make his way home and is ready to say sorry. But then as he holds his hand to the front door knob... He runs a dream scenario of how his family will respond. At first they’re happy to see him but then they turn ugly... Blaming him for all their problems. This fantasy leads Bart to turn away and head up onto the roof of his house. There after a long search for the heart to apologize, he hears Lisa crying through a roof vent... he calls to her and this scene unfolds... **(CLIP #4 - 20:45 - 22:12 Freeze on house...)** And so the Simpsons reconcile, ready to go on to a new episode!

A simple apology... and it had the power to bring healing and restoration to a relationship. Apologizing was the key that opened the door to forgiveness which then

precipitated reconciliation. Apologizing allows the hurt party to begin to let go of their pain. And it helps us start to release our guilt and shame. This one little relational tool, saying **"I'm Sorry"**, has the power to resolve so many of the relational dysfunctions we live with. Within our families... between our families... within factions... parties... even nations... Sorry can be a powerful gift for healing. One writer quoted this, **"The Talmud declares that God created repentance before he created the universe. He wisely knew that humans would make a lot of mistakes and have a lot of apologizing to do along the way."** Aaron Lazare, Psychology Today

As I watched this episode of the Simpsons I couldn't help but come to the conclusion that one reason the show has been so successful is the fact that it so closely mirrors reality. A mother or mother in law that says, "You never do anything right." Husbands who are laggards. Siblings who don't say things straight up but do 'not so subtle' things behind your back. Parents messing up in parenting... Children messing up in childrening. To varying extents, this is reality! Relationships are messed up. Brokenness is rampant. I'm sure each of us can relate in some way! And so to counter this brokenness this one little episode offers the answer for healing... The apology.

Sounds simple right! And yet apologizing is not an easy thing at all. It's hard to do and often goes undone. PAUSE... **Why is that? What is it about apologizing that makes it so hard?** This week I thought about that question and as I read a few articles... came up with this list which I'll go over real quick>> **Why 'Sorry' is such a struggle...**

1. Our success orientation We live in a world where we're called to be winners. We're called to perfectionists... to have it all together. Let's face it... that message is all over our culture! And it's created an environment where saying sorry is seen as weak... as a failure. And so people hold back... they don't want to admit they blew it!

2. Our insecurities Another reason sorry is so hard is the fact that many **cannot** admit they blew it! Many people are so insecure they are unable to apologize. The way I see it, apologizing in the right way, takes a great deal of inner strength. You really need to know who you are to genuinely say sorry. I think a lot of people don't know who they are and therefore lack the self identity and strength to effectively say "I'm sorry."

3. Our fear of botching an apology This is another insecurity that often inhibits an apology. Many people fear that they'll blow it. They fear that apologizing in the wrong way will make an already bad situation worse. **"Jim, I'm sorry for calling you the**

office wimp... Its just that you really have the spine of snail... And you're testosterone levels seem to be in the 10th percentile... And every time I see you quiver I'm appalled..." Now we may not botch it that bad... but I'm sure we've all walked away from apology attempts wishing we'd never began the endeavor.

4. Our fear of the premature apology Related to #3 is this point. You read about it a lot lately... Where the courts restrict a perpetrator from apologizing to her victim prematurely. The thinking in doing this is that premature apologies can often add insult to injury. Sometimes its just too soon to say I'm sorry. Some times we need to wait for the offended party to process their hurt before we step in to relieve our guilt.

Sometimes our guilt dump can make it even worse for them. And so knowing that this does happen, people often delay their apology... sometimes forever!

5. Our fear of apology rejection This is a biggy! Its like Bart's fantasy of everyone blaming him for everything once he opens the apology door. And I think we all share that fear. Here we work up the muster to apologize... get past all our fears and insecurities... and then the offended party rejects our apology! That's tough! And Scary! I want to say sorry but they may abuse me in response... they may reject my very vulnerable peace offering.

6. Our egocentricity I got this point from a psychology today article. The writer notes that many people are so into themselves that they often do not realize that they have offended another. They don't realize that there is a need for forgiveness! Can you imagine that? (As every partner in the place elbows their significant other!) Fact is, sometimes we don't see that we've hurt another ... and so we have a blind spot to the need for an apology.

7. Our problem with pride Last reason why saying sorry is hard is our pride. This is the biggy for me. Apologizing take humility and humility is the opposite of pride. Sometimes we are just too stubborn to give in! Or we're so blinded by our pride that we never see ourselves being wrong! Sometimes we're so filled with ourselves that there is not room for remorse toward another. That's the problem of pride... And it's a huge sorry stopper!

OK, those are 7 reasons.... Take a minute and rate yourself on each. 1 is the lowest (not a problem for you) and 5 is the highest (its a problem) How big of an issue are each of these things for you? **PAUSE....** Now add up your points... And look at your rating... **PAUSE**

0-7 - You're either really good or in denial!

8-14 - You can be my friend anytime!

15-21 - You're human!

22-28 - Better listen hard to then next part of the message

29-35 - We're sorry!

Now, wherever you finished on the scale, I think we can all admit that there is room for improvement. So for the rest of this morning's talk we're going to look at how to get better at apologizing. Best way I know to do that is to better understand how an apology really works. NOTES> **The Anatomy of an Effective Apology**

a) **Acknowledges reality** The first thing that needs to happen for an apology to be sincere and genuine is that reality must be grasped! That happens in several ways;

1. Need to admit your guilt - Need to say, "Yes, this is my fault" ... You need to get by all your rationalizations.... all the 'ya buts' that you'll want to add as caveats to your apology... and honestly admit you blew it! The key to apologetic sincerity is

contriteness... you need to really know and feel the gravity of your mistake. You need to know the difference between, "I'm sorry" (with a genuine tone) and "I said I'm sorry!" (Gruff, impatient tone). See the difference? Humble honesty is key here!

2. Need to name the offence - This is hard! I think we understand the true nature of the hurt we've caused to the degree that we are able to be specific with naming the offense. If we can't name it, we should not be apologizing for it! In order to sincerely apologize we need to be brutally honest about what we've done. Ask questions like... What specifically happened? (Details of what I said...did) Why did I do it? (Acknowledge your hurtful motives! Absentmindedness... whatever) How did that person I hurt feel? (This hard... But that's what Bart did and it worked... It got his heart into the right place!)

This is the critical first step in saying sorry. You need to acknowledge reality.

b) **Communicates remorse** Doing step 'a' without doing step 'b' is not an apology. An apology only become effective when it is communicated clearly to the offended party. Until the confession is made, the apologetic transaction remains incomplete. Now there are some rules on engagement that apply in this situation.

1. Speak clearly - What I mean here is say everything you've realized in step one above. Especially the acknowledgement of how that person must feel. ie: "I can see how my words undermined your confidence... Or...

I understand how rejected you feel when I said, "I hate you sometimes".

I realize how abandoned you feel when I storm out of the house like that!"

2. Speak at the right time - This, of course, is very hard to discern! You need to know yourself (do you normally procrastinate? Or rush in too quick?) And you need to

know the person you're talking too! No use rushing in before the time is right. It rarely works.

3. Speak in the right way - What I'm referring to here is the medium for communication. For some situations, verbal contact is right... for others... like a long term rift... a letter may work better (can be written and re-written and read and re-read). In severe instances a mediator may even be required. For some touch may be important... for others it may be entirely wrong!

Whatever the situation, be wary of how you say your apology. Try to say it clearly, at the right time and in the right way!

c) **Trusts enough to take the risk** This point sort of runs parallel with 'b' above. In order to effectively communicate an apology you need to muster up enough trust so that you can be totally honest and vulnerable. That trust can be either a trust that they'll receive your apology graciously... Or it can be a trust that believes that regardless of their response... saying sorry is still the best thing for this situation... I need to say it... and hopefully they will receive it... but even if they don't its our best chance of bringing some sort of healing.

Now the question becomes, "Can an apology be effective if it does not result in forgiveness?" I'm not sure. In a sense it can bring some relief from guilt and shame... But do we need to hear, "I forgive you" to seal the deal? Part of me says, "Yes we do!"... But we need to understand that even if it doesn't come. Sorry can still be the right action to be undertaken.

d) **Receives the forgiveness (when offered)** The next step, if forgiveness is offered in response to your apology is receiving the forgiveness. Now this may seem to be a rather obvious point. Of course you receive the forgiveness! But I don't think that's always true! Sometimes, even though the offended party forgives us, we don't, or can't forgive ourselves. And in some sort of warped way we end up hurting the person again by not accepting their gift of forgiveness.

The key tool for receiving forgiveness is believing. Its really all about having the faith that the forgiver can and chooses to free you! Some of us just don't have the faith to do that! Some of believe that some of the things we've done can never be forgiven. Even if forgiveness were offered, we shun it.... or we fail to fully and deeply appropriate it! I think there's a big reason some of us struggle with this.... We'll get to it in a few minutes!

e) **Results in future change** The last step of an effective apologetic process is change! This is the tough part of the process!!!! If I say sorry to

my wife about something I did and then repeat my offense the very next day... What effect will that have on my apology? It nullifies it right? It disqualifies it! How sorry could I really have been if 24 hours later I commit the exact same offense?

True contriteness must result in some change. And the operative word is some. None of will ever be perfect, but I think its fair to say that once we go through a real 'sorry/forgiveness/reconciliation process, that process should be transformative! Who you are should be impacted by the reconciling power of saying sorry. And especially through the gracious power of forgiveness!...

Now, I've got more to say on this point... but first I want you to grade yourself and tally your marks... Only this time.... Listen to these instructions... This time, don't rate yourself based on your mortal relationships.... Don't think about your family or friends or past friends... Instead, think about your relationship with God! **LONG PAUSE...**

A. How much **reality have you acknowledged** in your relationship with him? Are you honest about the times you ignore him? The times you've run away? Turned your back? About how you live so much of life without even giving him a second thought? Do you ever think about how it must feel to be God, seeing his creations, us... Treat him this way? The God of the universe... all powerful... Eternal... the source of all love... Ever confessed the pride in you that makes you want to be the god of your life? To run your own show... To follow your agenda? Ever resonated with the words of Paul... **"All have sinned and fall short of God's glorious standard" Romans 3:23**

B. And what about communicating with him about this relational problem? Ever told him you're sorry? Ever named your shortfalls? Ever had a good cry together over a big mistake you've made? Ever cried out words similar to the OT king David... after he slept with another man's wife and then had him killed? **"Have mercy on me Oh God!... blot out the stain of my sins... wash me clean from my guilt... for I recognize my shameful deeds- they haunt me day and night. Against you, and you only have I sinned. I've done what's evil in your sight." Psalm 51:1-4**

C. And what about trusting him? Ever had to do that in a time of confession? Ever had to really... really hang it all out there with God? To the point where you worry whether ever he can offer forgiveness? Ever had to hang on one of God's promises... Like this OT one? **"I will heal their waywardness and love them freely..." Hosea 14:4-5**

D. Then, have you ever received his forgiveness?... Had your guilt washed away by his love. Heard> "I forgive you." "You're slate is clean again!" Have you

experienced the love of God in this way?... Have you held by a love that will never let you go? Can you resonate with the Apostle Pauls' words, "And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from [God's] love. Death can't and life can't. The angels can't and demons can't. Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow, and even the powers of hell can't keep God's love away. Whether we are high above the sky or in the deepest ocean, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38-39 Have you ever trusted in that kind of love? Received the forgiveness that that kind of love offers?

Lastly.... has your life been changed because of his forgiveness. Is there a new you that 's growing because of your reconciled relationship with him?.... have you been>> "transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:2 as the apostle Paul writes? Has your life been forever changed by an experience of his love?

PAUSE.... Rate yourself in your relationship with Him. How real has the reconciliation process with God been? And the reason I ask this is that I think we can only really know how to say sorry down here.... (in our families/relationships) if we've gone through the process with God. The best chance we have for true and lasting earthly healing is the participation in and reception of healing from above! I think if we get our apology right this way (UP/DOWN)... Then we can get it right this way...

Once I've said the biggest sorry of my life ... to him... Its seems that I can see the other sorries from a new perspective. They seem more doable. The Bible calls the Big sorry with God... repentance.... Acknowledging of guilt, our need for God.... Confessing it to him... trusting and believing that he will forgive and then being changed... into a newness of life unlike any other. That's what reconciliation with God is like. That's what the bible means when it speaks of repentance... Saying sorry to God.

This reality is what Jesus was referring to when he said,

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near.

Repent and believe the good news!"

Jesus in Mark 1:15

MESSAGE OUTLINE

1. **SIMPSON's Intro** - story/conclusion... lesson on saying sorry
2. **Psychological segway**... Truths/struggles/etc.... Reasons why we struggle... Why its hard... Reinforce the need!! (Benefits).... **But main inhibitor>> unreconciled life with God!** << Big sorry makes the smaller ones more doable!
3. **Biblical response** on repentance... (NB is demonstrating the process very clearly and concisely!)
4. **Conclusion** - Anne Lamott quote???

INTRODUCTION

- Saying sorry has the power to heal broken relationships... the most powerful tool!
- apologies generate/initiate the powerhouse of forgiveness

WHY Apologizing is hard...

1. Our world of success.... you're a winner makes it antithetical! (Concession is failure)
2. Huge insecurity which inhibits our ability to be strong enough to say I'm sorry.
3. Potential to botch apology - in way said>> which often makes things worse!
4. Fear of apology not being accepted!
5. We're too proud to humble ourselves!
6. We're so egocentric that we do not see the need (recognize the offense!)
7. We're afraid we may trivialize the offended/offense (too soon... bring up again... hurt the person a second time!) (Use as a 'get out of jail free' card!)

WHY we need to do it...

1. Releases forgiveness and personal freedom is gained (view of self freed!)
2. Reconciliation is possible 9though not guaranteed!
3. Ends the other person's pain... Frees them from anger, etc...

“The Talmud declares that God created repentance before he created the universe. He wisely knew that humans would make a lot of mistakes and have a lot of apologizing to do along the way.”

Aaron Lazare, Psychology Today

“What makes apologizing work is the exchange of shame and power between the offender and the offended”

Aaron Lazare, Psychology Today

^ this exchange occurs through the medium of Grace through Christ! Shame of a bad choice for the power of forgiveness

“The apology is a statement that the harmony of the group is more important than the victory of the individual.”

Aaron Lazare, Psychology Today

ie: DeKlerk in S. Africa... RC church in Canada...

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