

The Anatomy of a Good 'I'm Sorry (and Why It Matters)

“You need to say, ‘I’m sorry’ to your sister.” I told my son.

He promptly took a deep breath and whined the words through his nose with his arms crossed and his eyes rolling into the back of his head.

“I’m sorrrrreeeeeeee.”

Heaven help us, no one felt resolution in that moment, not the offender, not the offeree and certainly not their mother.

I can’t be the only one who has looked her child in the eye and asked for an apology only to have him mutter the words under his breath and know that those words were not a turning of his heart but only external obedience. My boy didn’t own the weight of his error, and instead of rebuilding a bridge of communication and relationship that needed to be restored, the wedge was driven deeper.

This superficial “I’m sorry” does not meet the expectation of the Lord and fails to satisfy a human heart that needs to forgive. That’s because good apologies should have three components:

1. We must **identify the sin** or injury and why it doesn’t meet the standard of God.
2. We must **express sorrow** for injuring the other.
3. We express a desire to **make another choice** in the future.

This pattern, my friend, is how we say a good “I’m sorry,” and in terms of biblical truth this is the anatomy of true repentance. When we repent before the Lord, we come clean about our sin, own the truth that it has harmed our relationship, and consciously make a choice to head in the direction of the behavior and attitudes pleasing to the Lord.

The best way to teach my children forgiveness is to go first. I want my kids to say, “My mom taught me how to ask for and give forgiveness, but the way she modeled it is what stands out in my mind. She gave me a safe opportunity to learn how to forgive by asking me often for forgiveness when she fell short.”

It’s become so clear to me that teaching my children to ask for and extend forgiveness extends beyond relieving the emotions wrapped up in the situation. In fact, by asking my children to forgive *me*, we are cultivating in them the idea that home is the place where it is okay to fail and try again. Even if they blow it, arms will be open to receiving them, because home should be the safest place for our children to err and be restored.

As I wrapped my arms around my son and pulled his little body into my lap, I explained the three parts of a good “I’m sorry” and gave him a couple of minutes to process what I had just told him. Then, with tears in his eyes he turned to his sister and began again, this time with a heart that seemed truly remorseful. Without missing a beat, his sister leaned in for a hug and said, “I forgive you. Let’s play.”

It isn’t always this easy, but home is a place of forgiveness and the job of cultivating that environment belongs to me. To be real honest, it’s just plain BRAVE.

Have you ever been on the receiving end of an apology that left *you* unsatisfied? What was missing? Do you regularly model asking forgiveness of your children? What benefits are there to doing so?