

On repentance for complicity by Steve Paddon

The following is a letter I have sent in late May to our CA overseers on to try and help them understand why specific apologies are needed, from each one who has made decisions that have harmed others - to the ones they harmed. To date, this has been flatly rejected as necessary. Generic, non-descript apologies do not repair trust, and this letter was an attempt to illustrate this point. This letter was written based on the example of Nathan's message to David, so I attempted to use that as the example.

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There's a small, poor rural town that has a very underfunded school. So much so that there is no bus system, and many families must drive their children a long way to school. A man in the town decides he's willing and able to help with this. He tells his best friend that he wants to help with this problem, and his friend is very supportive and offers to help him in any way he can. So the man gets financial help from his best friend and buys a bus. While the man has never driven something as large as a bus before, he figures it's similar to driving a pickup which he does regularly. So he starts busing kids to and from school for free. The town is very happy with this man's efforts.

One day he's a bit late starting his route and is going nearly 50 mph as he comes into the school zone. While the posted speed limit he last saw was still 45 mph, the school zone signs are evident as he speeds down the street. Just then, two children step into a crosswalk unexpectedly in front of him. He slams on the brakes, but the bus is much bigger than his pickup and needs a much larger stopping distance at that speed. He realizes he's not going to be able to stop in time. So he decides his best option is to swerve to avoid hitting the two children. He swerves and grazes both of them, badly injuring them, but they survive. However, the swerving bus careens over the sidewalk and plows through a wall. Behind the wall, there is a crowd of children, and he kills 10 of them, including those of his best friend.

His friend is devastated and angry. His beloved children are gone forever. The man understands his friend's sorrow, but he doesn't understand his friend's anger. It wasn't his fault, as he didn't know the speed limit was 25 mph in a school zone -

something he only learned after the accident. He also didn't know until later that driving a bus required a different driver's license and test to prove he understood how to handle a larger vehicle. He believes his ignorance of the laws and lack of training on how to drive a bus makes him innocent of the lost lives. He believes in his heart that if he had known those things, he would have obeyed the laws and all of those children would be alive today.

Now he wants to continue providing the bus service for the children that remain at the school, and assures the community that he will first get a Class C license and make sure he learns the various speed limit laws. He believes this is the path forward that the community should accept, as there's still very much a need for this service. Getting the bus service back up and running is paramount, and he is anxious to get back to that effort. He wants his best friend back, but his best friend avoids him; not understanding what to do there, he neglects his friend and focuses on moving the bus service forward.

What do we think about this man? He had only good intentions. He did everything as well as he could, based on what he understood. Is he a good and honorable man who just made a few mistakes?

The parents are all angry, and tell him they would never trust using his bus service again, even if he proves he's an excellent, law-abiding driver after getting training. They mercilessly vent their anger at him, mourning their lost children.

His best friend believes the man loved him and his children on the day of the accident, and never would intentionally harm them. The friend is eventually able to forgive the man, even though the man never asks his friend for forgiveness. The man grieves for the tragedy befallen his friend, but this provides no comfort for the friend. Every time the friend sees the man, he's overcome with grief and simply weeps for his lost children. So friend feels he has no choice but to avoid the man, to spare himself from grief. When the state brings charges against the man, the friend finds no comfort in this either, instead only brings him more grief; any conviction won't bring his children back, nor will it repair his old friendship.

The man's attention becomes focused on defending himself against the state, which charges him with manslaughter, drawing his time and energy away from considering

the needs of his friend as well as restarting the bus service. His friend's life is a mess; his wife blames him for assisting the man's efforts that ultimately killed their children. He is wracked with his own guilt for not ensuring his friend had the proper training before helping him buy the bus. He loses his job, as he cannot focus on his work. Their marriage falls apart, as they cannot afford counseling, and the man doesn't offer to help his friend and his wife get help.

Over time, the man slowly understands more of the severity that his actions have caused his friend. Yet, he's still unable to give his friend what his friend needs to heal, which is to bring him his regret (grief, mourning, sorrow, remorse, sharing in pain) and ask him for forgiveness – focus his efforts on helping his friend in any way he can. The man fears doing this would aid the state's case against him, and would also slow his efforts at getting his bus service going again.

As time passes the friend's pain slowly heals, but their friendship is never able to go back to how it once was. His friend's life was forever changed, and the friend had no choice but to embark on a journey on his own to find his peace, as there was not path to find it within his old friendship.

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In this story, the bus driver is anyone in authority who moved around child abusers who went on to abuse more children. And the best friend is those of us who had their children directly harmed or were put at risk of harm due to lack of transparency of known perpetrators. The children are, of course, our children.

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We have also been asked for grace and patience for things that weren't yet understood. However, ignorance doesn't apply here. Americans are taught early in school that "Ignorance of the law is not a defense". So that's what man's laws say, but what does God say about ignorance equaling innocence? If we reference Leviticus 5:17, it's clear God also does not accept that ignorance removes guilt either. Guilt requires repentance, whether the harm was intentional or not. Repentance requires asking forgiveness from all those who've been wronged. Some

say that repentance is between them and God; so it is. But without remorse shown to those harmed, how are we to trust that remorse is even felt at all?

Breaches of trust are very difficult to repair, but they can be if those harmed believe the one whose actions harmed them is truly sorrowful for the pain they caused. Without that, there is simply no foundation upon which that trust can be reestablished. If the breach of trust is ever to be repaired, the call for specific apologies from each complicit individual must be heeded.

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