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Briefing 30: Tuesday 15th September, 2020.

Dear friends,

Elton John once sang that 'sorry seems to be the hardest word.' And that does seem to be the case. Very often if public figures are caught doing something illegal, stupid or immoral, what flows from their mouths is not '*I'm sorry. I was wrong.*' But a long list of excuses and reasons why they did as they did. '*I was under a great deal of pressure at the time. I'd had too much to drink. I was given bad advice. Somebody made me do it!*' In fact, often they speak for ages and ages without ever saying the word sorry.

Then there are other times when people say sorry for the hurt that they have caused, or the difficulty they have caused for their colleagues, or the embarrassment they have brought to their families, without ever apologising for the act itself! That is using the word sorry to mean something entirely different. That's expressing regret for the consequences of their actions, not apologising for the actions themselves. Again, that is not an apology. It's not saying sorry. So why is sorry often the hardest word?

I think it is because the word sorry includes with it a clear admittance of wrongdoing or of moral failure. Saying sorry means that they have admitted doing something that they ought not to have done, and that implies weakness, that there is something wrong not just with what they've done, but with them.

Sadly though, we can't simply point the finger at others. Christians too, can struggle to admit their sin, and fail to take full responsibility for it. And that's strange, because right there, in the middle of the Lord's Prayer, comes the line '**forgive us our sins.**' Saying sorry to God, asking for his forgiveness, is fundamental to being in relationship with God and being a Christian. Yet still we try and excuse ourselves. Still we try and blame others for our failings.

But if we come to God with that attitude and try and justify our own actions, we will go away having not been forgiven. Receiving forgiveness from God requires a full confession to God of our wrongdoing. It means admitting the wrongness of what we have done and taking full responsibility for it.

Perhaps it's the fear of the consequences of admitting our guilt and asking for forgiveness that stops us saying the words. For a politician at risk of losing their job, or a sportsman at risk of losing their sponsors, that kind of admission of weakness and failure can be very costly. But the failure to ask for God's forgiveness is far more costly still.

For the unbeliever, the failure to come to God in full confession and to ask for God's forgiveness is to stay outside God's kingdom and to remain eternally condemned. For the believer, the failure to come to God and confess our continued failure to live as we should and to ask for his forgiveness, leads to us missing out on the intimacy of a warm relationship with our Heavenly Father. What's more without true confession we will never change, nor grow in faith, nor grow in holiness. Those things all begin when we say and mean this part of the Lord's Prayer.

What's more, in both cases the failure to ask for God's forgiveness is self-destructive and means that we miss out on God's grace. God will never turn a repentant sinner away. He is more willing to forgive than we are to ask. His mercy is new every morning. His love is unceasing. And no matter how often we fail, still the promise of Scripture is that when we confess our sins, God is faithful to his promises, and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The blood of Jesus is powerful enough to wash away every sin. So let's not fail to confess our failings, deliberate or accidental. Let's be honest before God and receive his liberating pardon, and draw close to him again.

How might you pray 'forgive us our sins? Why not start with something like this...

Heavenly Father, I confess that I have sinned against you in my thoughts, my words and my deeds. There are good things I haven't done which I should have done. There are many things I shouldn't have done, which I have. By your Holy Spirit, bring them to mind now that I might name them before you now...

I'm sorry for them all. Please forgive me. I know I don't deserve it, but Jesus died in my place, taking the punishment I rightly deserve from my sin. Wash me clean, change my heart, and help me to live differently and not to fall into the same sins again and again. Thank you for hearing my prayer and for your forgiveness. Amen.

OTHER NEWS:

RE-OPENING OF ST NICHOLAS: Thank you to everyone who gave up their time to steward, welcome, or serve refreshments to the large number of people who visited the church on Saturday. It was a brilliant day!

HARVEST FLOWERS: A huge thank you to everyone who contributed to making both churches look and smell so wonderful last weekend! You all did a fantastic job!

MEN'S VIRTUAL BREAKFAST: If you want an invite to this Saturday's virtual men's breakfast, please contact Mike Wilton on mikewilton@hotmail.com

WOMEN'S AFTER BREAKFAST COFFEE ZOOM: If you want an invite to the virtual women's after breakfast coffee zoom on Saturday 26th September, please contact Judy Brown on mrsvicar16@gmail.com

BIBLE READING MARATHON! Thank you to all of the 48 people who took part in the marathon – reading the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. We finished on Friday night just before 10 PM!

PRAY WITH US! Next Tuesday morning we'll be praying again via ZOOM from 7am-8am. Contact Dave for a link.

EXPLORING CHRISTIANITY: Over the autumn, we are planning to run another course for people to explore the Christian faith. The Identity Course (*more information here:* <http://www.identitycourse.com/index.asp>) works through the gospel of John to explore who Jesus was, why he came and what it means to follow him. The 7 interactive sessions also cover some of the big questions people ask, such as why does God allow suffering, how can I believe the Bible and why do I have to go to church? For more information, please email me.

HARVEST DONATIONS TO JIMMY AND KATIA: if you attend St Nicholas Church and forgot to bring a donation to Jimmy and Katia, as part of our Harvest Thanksgiving. You can do that this Sunday. Simply put your donation in an envelope marked Jimmy and Katia and place in the offering box as you come into church.

SATURDAY AT 6PM: For a chance to receive a small prize (there will be just 1), simply send the words 'I've read the notice,' to revdmbrown@gmail.com by 6 PM on Saturday 19th of September.

THIS SUNDAY'S SERVICES: The 9:30am service at St Nicholas will be a shorter Service of the Word, followed by our APCM. The service at St Mary's Graveley at 11:30am will be taken by Rev Andy Thomas, the rural Dean. This will be a short service of Holy Communion. The theme this week is what to expect when we share the good news of Jesus, with the main reading being Matthew 10:16 – 42. Why not read it before you come.

If you are yet to book in, you can do so here: <https://forms.gle/7n7YFdo9kg1dpfYt5> If you're not able to make it, do make sure you join us either live on Facebook or catch up later.

ARE YOU BEING CALLED TO SERVE IN THESE WAYS?

CHURCH CLEANERS: Could you join the rota of people who will Hoover and dust inside the worship space at St Nicholas Church? (email Stephen.bamford@talktalk.net) or the rota to clean the kitchen, toilets and parish rooms? (contact Judy on mrsvicar16@gmail.com) Each clean should take no longer than 2 hours.

WEBSITE MANAGERS: St Mary's AND St Nicholas both need website managers, to keep our websites and 'a church near you' sites functioning and our information up-to-date and to develop our on-line presence. If this is you, please speak to me.

BENSON AND MIYA: Benson and Miya, well-known to the St Nicholas Church family, will be starting their training at All Nations Christian College this month. They've sent a prayer letter and I've asked if I can pass it on. They said yes so the link is here: <https://prayforbenensonandmiya.wordpress.com/> If you'd like to support them, either financially or in prayer, do get in touch with them directly.

REMINDER: ANNUAL PAROCHIAL CHURCH MEETINGS: St Nicholas APCM will be after church on Sunday 20th September and St Mary's APCM on the Sunday after, 27th September. Please pray for those presenting reports and those standing for election.

There will be a short further update on Friday. Until then, may God bless you and your families.

Yours in Christ,

Dave