**TRQ\_Apologies.mp3**

Ad as of 8/13/22 --

**Vanessa:** Hi everybody! Before we start today’s episode we have a couple of *very* exciting announcements.

**Casper:** Mostly that you can join Vanessa and me on a Harry Potter & the Sacred Text pilgrimage in April of 2023. And we would love to have you join us! We are going to be reading book 4, The Goblet of Fire. It is going to be in England, we are going to go walking, we’re gonna be reading, we’re gonna be talking, we’re gonna be resting, it’s gonna be lovely.

**Vanessa:** And then, go on a Pride and Prejudice pilgrimage, also in April 2023. And that is going to be with the amazing Margaret H Wilson, whom I am sure many of you know from her newsletter, from her podcast, from Pop Culture Happy Hour, she is an incredible critical thinker, and host, and anyone on this pilgrimage is just really lucky to be with her. So you can find out more about both of those by going to readingandwalkingwith.com.

**Casper:** And then! From June 9th to June 11th of next year, we are hosting our first ever in person summer camp experience. Think amazing people, think fire side chats, think amazing activities, think beautiful nature, think meeting new friends you didn’t know you had yet, think meeting old friends in person having met them on the discord before. We’re so excited to gather our community in upstate newyork for 48 hours of liveshows, workshops, singing, swimming, and all sorts of great fun. And we would love love love to have you join us.

**Vanessa:** You can find out more about camp by going to notsorryworks.com.

**Casper:** And if you book your ticket by September 15th, use the code ‘earlybird’ and you’ll get 10% off your ticket price. We can’t wait to see you go to notsorryworks.com to join us for camp!

\*Intro music\*

**Voicemail** [00:00:00] Hi Vanessa and Casper. And I was super intrigued when I saw your prompt for voicemails, about a good apology. And I once got an excellent apology from someone who I'm not friends with and didn't particularly get along with. And it was just really interesting because they would be not someone I would have anticipated a great apology from. And so, I am an immigrant in America, so I am Irish. And while being a white immigrant brings so much privilege, there is lots of times that being Irish in America is super other, like alienating and difficult. And so one thing that really bothers me is all of the drunk Irish jokes all the time. And so I don't drink. And I have a long history of trauma due to alcoholism in my family, and it's deeply unfunny for me, the constant drunk jokes. And so this person on my first day at work asked me, I was getting a cup of tea, and they asked if I was making it Irish? And it was coming up to the holidays and it was coming up to Christmas. And someone asked me, someone else asked me if I was homesick and I was deeply, deeply homesick at this point and very sad that I was not going to be going home for Christmas. And this person made a joke about drunk people and fiddle music or something. Anyway, I just kind of didn't have a big tantrum, but I just sort of left the situation. And later they came by my office and apologized, and they just apologized really succinctly and authentically without looking to me to make them feel better or going on and on about why it was okay that they did it or anything. It was just a very excellent apology. And afterwards I felt like I had been apologized to and I didn't feel like I had been forced to make someone feel better. It was wonderful.

\*Intro music\*

**Vanessa** [00:01:51] I'm Vanessa Zoltan.

**Casper** [00:01:53] And I'm Casper ter Kuile.

**Vanessa** [00:01:54] And this is the real question. So, Casper, I'm going to tell you a story that really embarrasses me is what is going to happen.

**Casper** [00:02:19] Those are my favorite Vanessa stories.

**Vanessa** [00:02:21] Yeah, I know you love that. So, when I was 26, I was living in New York with one of my college very close friends. We'll call her Sara. And Sara, like, got a sense of self, from her birthday. She grew up with a lot of siblings, and her mom made a really big deal out of birthdays. And like, she was either loved or not loved, based on her birthday. [Caper “Woof” noise] And so I made like the biggest deal out of her birthday. Breakfast pancakes and made her a lunch to take to work and arranged a surprise dinner. Right. Like went allllll out on her birthday. And then shortly after her birthday, she moved away to go to grad school and she had a really hard transition. So we were on the phone every day. She was calling all the time. We were on aim, you know, chatting all the time. And then she started doing well in school. I started hearing from her class and that's fine. And then it became my birthday. And mind you, I don't feel like a tremendous amount of pressure about my birthday. Birthdays aren't everyone's thing. And so if someone forgets my birthday, I'm like, “You don't care. That's fine.” Someone remembers my birthday. It feels really nice. And like, I love hearing from people I love. Like, that's fun. And like, who doesn't love a present, you know? But, like, it's not as important to me as it is to her. Well my birthday came, my boyfriend at the time, like, threw me a little party. It was lovely. I heard from people, but I did not hear from Sara. And I was like, Huh, she's going to be embarrassed tomorrow when she calls me. And then I just like, don't hear from Sara and I don't hear from Sara. And then Sara has boy troubles and I hear from Sara. And I just, like, lost it. I was so mad. I was like, look, I did all of this effort in, like, your birthday. And being super supportive of you, and now it seems like it's all about you. And you didn't even call me for my birthday, and she was like, Oh, my God, you're right. I'm so sorry. And so far in the story, I feel like fine, with how I behaved. But I was like, What are you sorry *for*? [Casper laughter] I was like, not satisfied with that apology. And I think looking back, maybe what I wanted to hear was like, I've been so self-absorbed and like, our friendship is unbalanced and I'm going to fix that. Like some really big, this is how I'm going to do better thing. And I've been thinking about that because lately there's been a lot of rhetoric about public apologies. Right? Like, oh, Kevin Hart said something homophobic ten years ago and like his apology wasn't good enough and it was *not* good enough. And so he gets kicked off from hosting the Oscars, or we just like comb over apologies, right? Like politicians apologies and and are like, this is a good apology and this is a bad apology. And I just wonder if there's like actually a general rule for what's a good apology, because publicly we seem to think that there is. Right? That the good apology publicly is the unjustified blanket apology. It's “I was racist. I'm sorry. There's no excuse. I'm going to go in a corner and think about what I did.” And like, that is the good apology. But that is not the apology I wanted from Sara. That is the apology Sara offered me. And it did like nothing for me. And so the question I'm bringing today is like, what is a good apology? And like, Is it situational? In which case none of us are ever set up for success to like, give a good apology? Is it conversational? Is it blanket? And like, I should just learn to accept blanket apologies. What is a good apology or like, what is an apology for?

**Casper** [00:06:02] Yeah, that's such a good question because is it about making the person who was wronged feel better? Is it about changing a material event? Right? Is she going to go and buy a present for you and send it even though it's three months late? Is it about the person acknowledging and saying out loud what they did wrong? Like, there's so many ways in which to look at that question and say, well, yes, it was successful at this, but it failed there. What actually makes for a good apology? I've never thought about it like this Vanessa, but this is a beautiful question and I think an important one because we all screw up. I mean, we *all* need to apologize at one point or another. For me, it's many times. So,…

**Vanessa** [00:06:41] So I was like many times a day.

**Casper** [00:06:43] Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

**Vanessa** [00:06:45] The other question is like, I was so ungracious. I'm still really good friends with Sara and I look back on that and I'm really embarrassed. I think that Sara and I had a lot of issues at the time. Like I do feel like she was leaning on me way too much looking back, but I let it become all about this, like birthday apology. And it was this like, I now have evidence that I have the upper hand and I am correct and I'm going to exploit an apology out of you. Right? And like, that's not what an apology is for. And I was so ungracious in receiving what was a genuine apology from her of a “I screwed up. I'm sorry. And I'm not going to make any excuses.” She didn't say, “I'm so busy with grad school, I have this new guy.” She was just like, “I'm sorry I messed up.” It was really lovely. And yet A) I don't think that was what I needed to hear. And B) I was just such a jerk about it. Like, I think half of an apology is in receiving it.

**Casper** [00:07:47] Well, you're also pointing to something which is about how an apology is staged. You know, I often think about forgiveness as something that doesn't just happen for me to be right. It takes time or there's a process. But usually I imagine that the apology is a one time event. And actually what you're pointing us to, at least in this situation with Sara, like she was on the phone with you when you said that, and so she didn't have time to prepare an apology. Like that, could have been part one, right? That that initial apology on the phone. And I wonder if you would have felt different if she had done other things when the phone call ended or maybe called again the next day and been like, I really want to apologize again, like just thinking about how the shape of an apology would also impact how it's received.

**Vanessa** [00:08:29] Yeah. And I just want to say, like, I don't think it's our job to always accept apologies and I certainly don't think it's always our job to forgive people. Right? [Right.] Apologies and forgiveness have to be separate from each other because when you offer an apology, you can't expect forgiveness.

**Casper** [00:08:46] And likewise, whether you forgive someone or not often has to be with or without an apology. So that's a really helpful frame for this conversation. Let's just focus on the side of the apology.

**Vanessa** [00:08:57] Right. Like what makes for a good apology? And what doesn't? Wow. This is like not going to have a clear answer at all.

**Casper** [00:09:04] Well, let's see what we find. You've brought two texts with you to help us wrestle with this question. So I'm kind of curious, what did you, what did you bring?

**Vanessa** [00:09:13] Casper the first text I am bringing today. It's from the film Dirty Dancing. So Dirty Dancing is a cross the railroad tracks love story. It was made in the eighties, but it takes place in 1963, right before the Kennedy assassination. I can recite the whole movie to you. But I wont. And Johnny Castle, played by Patrick Swayze. He is a working class guy who during the year works as a house painter. But over the summers is a dance instructor at Kellerman's, a Catskills like Jewish family summer camp.

**Patrick Swayze/Johnny Castle** [00:09:48] You don't understand the way it is. I mean, for somebody like me, last month I was eating jujubes to keep alive. This month, women are stuffing diamonds in my pockets. I'm balancing on shit that’s quick as that I could be down there again.

**Jennifer Gray/Baby** [00:09:58] No, that's not the way it is. It doesn't have to be that way.

**Vanessa:** And Baby is our main character, played by Jennifer Gray. She is a young Jewish woman who's like about to go to Mount Holyoke in the fall and has, like, the world in front of her and is is gonna to join the Peace Corps and has her whole life planned and they fall in love.

**Patrick Swayze/Johnny Castle:** I've never known anybody like you. You look at the world and you think you can make it better. Somebody is lost. You find em. Somebody’s bleeding and you –

**Jennifer Gray/Baby:** Yeah yeah I go get my daddy. That's really brave. Like you said.

**Patrick Swayze/Johnny Castle:** That took a lot of guts to go to him.

**Vanessa:** So she gets pulled into the world of all of the people who work at the camp, sort of all of the invisibles of the camp. [Casper “mmmm”] And she borrows money from her father to help a young woman get an illegal abortion. And her father sort of directly ”sks her when she asks for the money, he says, “is it for anything illegal?” And she says, “No, Daddy.” Right? So she lies right to him about what the money is for, because obviously in 1963, abortion was still illegal in the United States. The abortion goes badly. And so when the abortion goes badly, Baby very bravely runs to her father, who's a physician, to come help this woman. And he does. And he's wonderful to the woman, but she gets outed as having told this big lie and that is at the center of this fight that the two of them have had. [Mm hmm.] So at the end of the movie, there's this, like, tension between Baby and her father, and her father's, like, barely looking at her, and she can't stand it. And so Baby goes up to her dad to apologize because she lied to him. And right? Like. And she breaks the first rule of apologies because she says, “I'm sorry, but” and now I'll play it for you.

**Jennifer Gray/Baby:** [00:11:49] I'm sorry I lied to you. But you lied too. You told me everyone was alike and deserved a fair break. But you meant everyone who was like you. You told me you wanted me to change the world, to make it better. But you meant by becoming a lawyer, or an economist, and marrying someone from Harvard. I’m not proud of myself. But I'm in this family, too, and you can't keep giving me the silent treatment. There are a lot of things about me that aren’t what you thought. But if you love me, you have to love all the things about me. And I love you. I'm sorry I let you down. I'm so sorry, Daddy. But you let me down too.

**Vanessa** [00:12:51] This is not a classically good apology, right?

**Casper** [00:12:54] But it's moving. I feel her.

**Vanessa** [00:12:58] Oh my god - It's so moving. It makes me tear up every time. But if a PR person was coaching someone and how to do a good apology, they would shut this apology down. You don't do. “I'm sorry but.” [Mhm.] Right? Like you take all the responsibility, you don't put the responsibility on the other person's, it's your mistake and you need to own your mistake and Baby doesn't do that. Right? Like the line I'll really have us look at is “I'm sorry I let you down. I'm so sorry, Daddy, but you let me down, too.” And that's how she ends it. She ends, “But you let me down, too.” And what's amazing is that it works. In the next scene, he goes up to them and and says, “When I'm wrong, I say I'm wrong.” the father. So he, this, brings them back together and is an effective apology. And so I'm wondering.. this to me is just evidence of the fact that like. You can say “I'm sorry, but…” And sometimes maybe you should say “I'm sorry, but…”

**Casper** [00:14:00] Why do you think it works? Like because it does bring them together. They both acknowledge their own mistakes.

**Vanessa** [00:14:07] I think part of why it works well is because she's telling a whole truth.

**Casper** [00:14:13] Yes.

**Vanessa** [00:14:14] Because she calls him out, right? She's like, you told me that everyone was the same. [Yes.] But you meant like all doctors and lawyers and dentists deserve the same. You did not mean, house painters, and dancers. Like, you want me to treat everyone with respect except for servants. And he he knows that she's been exposed to that truth. And so I think that if she had just said, “I'm so sorry, I, I lied and I used the money in ways that you wouldn't have liked”, I think that he would have forgiven her, but their relationship would have become much more shallow. It's a complicated situation, and so it needs a complicated apology, including calling him out.

**Casper** [00:15:01] I think you're so right that the truth in this statement is what makes it work. I mean, it's affecting to listen to because you can hear the fullness of the emotion. Right? Like she's saying something that's really hard to say because she loves her father. But she's also pointing out, as you said, she's holding up a mirror to him she's pointing out his mistakes in here as well. And I think what I love, what you're pointing us to, is that he actually respects her more because of this apology. And if it had been that kind of textbook apology of only talk about yourself, I'm not sure he would have respected her as much, but and I think it's because she's telling the truth. And so I'm I'm just thinking about your experience of the apology with Sara. Like, what was a truth that she didn't say? Like what, what was missing in what she said that felt so empty at the time?

**Vanessa** [00:15:52] I mean, that's interesting, right? Because I'm not sure I have my like worst case scenario truth, which is that like part of what she likes about me is that I'm always there for her, and she's, like, not that interested in being there for me. [Hmm.] I do think it would have brought us closer if she had said, “You know what? I've never really thought of you as an equal member in this friendship.” Like. [Hmm. ] Even if she had said. “But you love being the caretaker, like you love doing this.” Right? Like that could have gotten us to, like, a more authentic place.

**Casper** [00:16:23] Whew. Yes.

**Vanessa** [00:16:24] And, like, just like with Baby and her dad, like, life created that situation, right? I met Sara right when something horrible had happened to her, and it was at the beginning of a school year. So, it wasn't like I met her because that horrible thing happened. But I would have been a really bad person if I hadn't made the first few months of our friendship about her. And like Baby and her dad had to lie to each other because we live in a classist system where abortion is illegal and like he couldn't give her money as a doctor for something that was illegal. So like, they act imperfectly, but in an imperfect world, just like Sara and I acted imperfectly in an imperfect world.

**Casper** [00:17:01] There's something you're pointing us to, Vanessa, in that this is not just telling the truth, but it's telling a truth that can hurt. And that in these moments of apologies, there is actually a window in which we can say hard things that maybe it's so much easier to leave unsaid all the rest of the time. And there is a risk in that, because it could go either way in terms of how it's received. And so I'm curious if you're thinking about how you would give and would want to receive apologies. To what extent are you comfortable hearing really hard things when someone is apologizing to you?

**Vanessa** [00:17:37] I know. Like probably not very. [Yeah.] I'm not sure there's anything Sara could have done in that moment. I think I was hurt by, like, two years or three years of behavior, and I was embarrassed that I had put so much of myself into this friendship. And, like, it clearly wasn't reciprocated. And so I wonder, like, if I shouldn't have said, I'm mad you didn't call for my birthday. I probably should have said like, “Hey, I've been thinking lately and. This friendship feels really uneven, and it's like making me feel bad about myself, how uneven I've let it get. And like, I'm not quite sure how to get out of that right? Like, we're in a bad cycle” because instead what's happened is like, we still like and love each other very much, but like, we're just not as close since that happened. It feels like we, like, saw something maybe true. And like, she apologized, and I just kept yelling at her. And she was like, “I don't know what you want me to say.” And I was like, “Me neither.” And so if I'm going to make it all about what she could have done differently is like, I wish she had said “I'm sorry, but” [hmm] like, “I'm sorry. But this has always been our dynamic since day one. Why are you changing the rules on me now?” Which makes me wonder if “I'm sorry buts” are helpful.

**Casper** [00:18:59] Well. Or if she had got on a plane or planned a trip and came to visit you and like, demonstrated a different way of being a friend.

**Vanessa** [00:19:07] Yeah. It's not like she has figured out “Vanessa doesn't care a lot about birthdays, so, like, that's not a way to show her I love her, but, like, she does really care about Passover, so I'll send her a box of matzo one year.” Yeah, I think it's been ten years since this fight. And like, she was, she was really sorry, and, like, she was really embarrassed and disappointed in herself and felt bad. But also, she was sorry, but she wasn't, right? Like that was the relationship that she had agreed to with me. I had implicitly signed on that dotted line that it was like, okay, that I did things and she received things. And so, yeah, I basically was just calling her out.

**Casper** [00:19:49] Yeah. I feel like we're seeing two very different experiences of apologies in you and Sara and then in the father/daughter situation from Dirty Dancing, like.

**Vanessa** [00:19:59] In Baby and Daddy. It’s hard to say.

**Casper** [00:20:00] In Baby and Daddy. I wanted to avoid that language, but let's say it out loud. Let's tell the truth.

**Vanessa** [00:20:05] It’s the language in the movie. So. GROSS But it's baby and daddy.

**Casper** [00:20:09] It's baby and daddy. Like you and Sara, there was a rapprochement to use a little French here like, but it's papering over the cracks, right? You are still friends, but the closeness has withered a little. Like, you're fine, but it's kind of a thin friendship how I hear you describe it. So it's like you've looked at the apology together. You're like both of you know it wasn't great, but you've kind of like just put some planks over it or like there's wallpaper over the crumbling wall and like, everything is fine, right? And then the dirty dancing Baby and Daddy conversation is one where they've looked at the crater that that came between them. And they've both stayed looking at it like they haven't looked away. They haven't papered it over. They've looked at it. They've seen themselves in it's deep and ugly and bright and ugh but they're in it together. And actually out of that comes greater trust and greater connection. And that's a very different experience of apology.

**Vanessa** [00:21:09] I just had such an aha moment. Baby, so brilliantly has figured out what the problem was. [hmm] This is not obvious, right? It's not obvious that baby lying to her father about what this money was for was predicated on a lie that he told. It was predicated, like you told me, to help everyone and you didn't mean these people. So she's actually spent a lot of time diagnosing what was broken here. And she's not saying, “I'm sorry I lied, but you gave me the money.” She's like, really figured out what is wrong here. And part of it is time. Like she's taken a few days, weeks, like the timing is unclear, but she has astutely diagnosed what has happened. And Sara and I never had that follow up conversation. We never had. “Look, I'm mad about the birthday, but I'm not. And, like, I actually owe you an apology. Like, I've set you up to fail in this friendship, and I didn't realize it.”

**Casper** [00:22:16] But you set me up to fail, too. And that's, that's the second part of that comment, I think.

**Vanessa** [00:22:22] Yep, but in like intimate friendships, I just wonder if we should always be looking for the but.

**Casper** [00:22:30] One thing that I don't think you mean this, Vanessa, but I want to just double check, which is so often when, when people say “I'm sorry, but” what they're gonna say next and what I have said is like, “Oh, that wasn't my intention.” Or like, “I want to give context, I want to explain.” It's a way in which sometimes we avoid taking responsibility actually for the harm that we've done. And I don't hear you saying that, but that's often how that “but” word creeps into the apology. So I just want to ask that.

**Vanessa** [00:22:58] Yeah. I'm thinking, you know, the first couple of months of my relationship with Peter, I was sick, and I was trying to hide it from him. And so I would cancel on him and it felt like the right thing to do was to not make it his problem. So I would say “I'm so sorry” and I would just stop. And he eventually was like, “Look, this is a problem. Like this is really angering me, that you cancel on me.” And that was a moment where I should have done a “but” like, I'm so sorry. But there are times that like my illness flares up and I literally can't. And instead what I was doing was protecting myself by not sharing the “but”. However, like if I'm running late and it's just because I plan my day poorly, I need to show up and be like, “I'm sorry.” And like, that's it, right? Like, it's disrespectful to show up late and like.

**Casper** [00:23:50] And I did that.

**Vanessa** [00:23:51] And I did that. I should have created a day with more space for, like, traffic. I planned poorly, and, like, you don't need to know that there was a car accident, cause there are always car accidents, and I should have planned for it. I guess maybe what I'm thinking is that apologies should always make us uncomfortable. And if you feel comfortable, you've done it wrong.

**Casper** [00:24:11] Yeah. There's something exposing about a real apology, whether it includes a but or not. Right? Because it can be rejected. And I think that's the part of it that can feel so scary and why it doesn't feel nice to do. But I think you're exactly right.

**Vanessa** [00:24:25] Right. Like part of maybe why Sara was just like, I'm sorry. Was so she didn't have to engage in, like, anything else, right? Like, if you say a clear “I'm sorry” and I'm not blaming her, but like, you get to say, “look, I did the right thing. I said, I'm sorry. What more do you want?” [Mm hmm.] And I think I think part of what I wanted from Sara and part of what I always maybe want from an apology is, this is what I did wrong, and this is how I'll make sure it doesn't happen again. Right? [Right.] It's like the mistake is a pothole in the smooth road of your relationship in the apology is like refilling the pothole, and it's never going to look like it was part of the original road, but it's going to make the ride smoother. And if if the person is just like, “yup, I see the pothole”, I'm like, Well, that's not helpful. I mean, I'm glad you see it, because that means I'm not making things up. But like, no, I need you to say “I see the pothole. I made the pothole. I will now fill the pothole.”

**Casper** [00:25:24] That's right. Yeah. We need to tell the truth about the impact. We need to to acknowledge our role in creating that harm. And then we need to demonstrate that we're going to do better and illustrate how that's going to happen. And to promise something we can actually do. Because I think we can also set ourselves up for harming someone again if we're promising something that we can't make true.

**Vanessa** [00:25:46] Right.

**Casper** [00:25:47] That feels like one of the beautiful things in Dirty Dancing that you've pointed to. You know, we see Baby make this apology. And I think that she is going to behave differently to her father because of this. Like there's going to be more honesty in the relationship.

**Vanessa** [00:26:01] Right. She says, “I'm sorry I lied to you” and then immediately stops lying to him. Yeah. She's like, “I'm sorry I lied to you. You lied too. I'll never lie to you again. Here are nine truths. You raised me with all sorts of unacknowledged privilege And it messed with my head.”

**Casper** [00:26:19] I made a list. Let's sit down.

**Vanessa** [00:26:20] Yeah, yeah. Let's go!

**Casper** [00:26:46] So, Vanessa, what is the second text that you're bringing to us to to think about this question with?

**Vanessa** [00:26:51] So the second text I brought is very different. It is Dr. Martin Luther King's letter from the Birmingham Jail, which he began writing on April 16th, 1963. And let me just say, this was like a letter that I remembered reading many years ago and being like it was really good. And I re-read it and I was like, This is so frickin good. [It's astonishing.] Oh, good. Yeah. It is a treatise on civil disobedience and, like, the moral necessity for civil disobedience. [Mm hmm.] And so the history behind this is that Martin Luther King had been invited into Birmingham. Him and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and a group of eight white Alabama clergymen wrote a letter against King and his methods. And they were saying, we think your cause is just but we think that the way that you are trying to do it is too disorderly. You're trying to move too fast. And they had all these critiques of his methods. And so Martin Luther King got arrested and he gets put in jail and he gets just put in terrible conditions, just like the worst possible conditions that they could create for him. And an ally smuggled in a newspaper that was a few days old. And it had that letter from that Alabama clergyman and King read it, and he just had such a strong response. He started responding in the margins of the newspaper because he wasn't allowed any paper. And then his lawyers a few days later came in and they got permission to leave him a legal notepad. And he just kept writing. And so what he's really doing in this letter is explaining the nuance and the difference between man's law and God's law. [Hmm.] And, you know, he picks apart their argument. Like, one of the things that they say is like, “why are you here? You're not from here.” And he's like, “Why am I here? I was invited.” Right. And like, he just point by point takes down their argument and point by point is talking about how justice delayed goes against God and that, you know, if the law of man and the law of God are fighting against each other, then it is actually our job to break man's law in order to, like, live up to God's law. It's just so beautiful. Anyway, so he has this great apology at the end of the letter. “If I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth and indicates an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything that understates the truth and indicates my having a patients that allows me to settle for anything less than brotherhood. I beg God to forgive me.” [Hmm.] And I brought this in because it is another kind of frowned upon apology, which is the “if I've messed up, I apologize.” Apology. “If I've hurt you, I'm sorry.” Which is an infuriating apology. Right? [Casper laughter] And yet, here it is, like, completely fair and humble. It is, “Look, I've written this whole letter telling you that it is urgent that I break laws because my brothers and sisters are dying and I can't look at my daughter anymore and tell her she can't drink from the same water fountain as a white lady.” Right. Like, “I can't do it anymore. And so I'm going to do civil disobedience.” And he's saying, like, if I have overstated that and I'm being unreasonably impatient, like, think about it and forgive me, because that is not what I meant to do. I did not mean to overstate the truth, but I am risking your soul if I don't ask you enough. [Hmm.] I recently wrote an apology like this, claiming a truth bigger than me. I'm outspoken, anti-Trump, and anti the behavior that the rioters who stormed the Capitol on January 6th. And I heard from many people who were offended by the way that I spoke about it. That said, like “they weren't rioters, they were protesters.” You know, “President Biden is just as bad as President Trump”, etc.. And I wrote, “I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings, but I am not sorry for anything that I said. And like there is a truth that I will not bend on. And I care so much about my community. And if I offended you, I'm not sorry.” Right. Like it is my obligation to speak truth as I know it. [Mm hmm.] And so, you know something that one of our mentors, Stephanie Paulsell, said to me very early in my ministry training was, if someone asks you what's true and you know what's true, you have to say what's true. [Mm hmm.]

**Casper** [00:31:33] I mean, that's such a powerful value to hold, is truth. And knowing you as I do, I also know that one of one of the most uncomfortable experiences for you is if someone else knows the truth and isn't telling you. Right? [Yeah] Like the way in which the truth is a gift. Both when you receive it. Even if it's uncomfortable. Even if it's painful. It's better to know the truth and then build from there. It's a high standard, but I think a really important one.

**Vanessa** [00:32:00] That's what I love about this King apology that you just made me realize. If I were the clergyman, [Mm hmm.] in this, like, imagining, right? Like, I don't know if everyone does this. I always am. Like, who would I be in the past version of this? And I'm like, I would have been a loyalist, and the revolutionaries would have kicked me out and sent me back to Britain. Like, I often think I would have been on the wrong side of history. [Yeah.] And I think I would have been one of these eight clergymen, like saying, like, Dr. King, we love what you're up to, but you don't know Birmingham and you don't know my congregants. And like you are causing a ruckus here. Please get out. Right. Like, I think I would have been on the wrong side of this, and I think that this this would have moved me. This. Let's remember that I answer to God. I don't answer to you. [Mm hmm.] I just can imagine being compelled by it in its humility and its confidence.

**Casper** [00:32:55] I love that. That combination of humility and confidence that feels really important, even just thinking about what goes into an apology as we're looking closely at this text and the context in which it's written, I think just to point to that again is so important because it's in this moment of of stress and duress, like he's writing in a prison cell. So there is a depth of truth to it that I think just flows out of the writing. Do you really think this is an apology? Because he's saying this is what's going on. Like, look at it. And yeah, you know, may God forgive me if I'm overstating the case, but I know that I am not overstating my case.

**Vanessa** [00:33:36] Yeah. No, I don't think it is, right. Nor do I think any. “I'm sorry if” apologies are apologies. [Hmm.] And I didn't know that when I brought this right. [Hmm.] Like with Dirty Dancing, I was like, maybe. “But apologies” are really apologies. Maybe. “I'm sorry, but” it really is apology. An apology. And then. And I was like, okay. And now Martin Luther King is doing the other, quote unquote, bad apology. “If I hurt your feelings right, then I'm really sorry.” And I'm like, maybe that's actually a real apology. It's not. If somebody is saying, “if I blah, blah, blah,” then it's not a real apology. What he is saying here is, I don't answer to you. I answer to God. And so I'm not sorry. Right. And I think that that's what we're always saying to some extent when we're doing “if” apologies, like “if I hurt you, I'm sorry, but you don't decide what is good and what is bad that I say.” And I think that we say those apologies when someone is asking an apology of us that we don't feel like we owe. [Yes], that's when that “if then, sorry.” Right. Like if I've said anything that overstates, then I beg you to forgive me. But we both know I haven’t.

**Casper** [00:34:51] And I think there's something in this King letter which is even more than that, because it's not just about your reality or my reality. Like there's a bigger truth that he's pointing to, which implicates both you and I, and that feels like particularly powerful just to think about in terms of apologies. And I'm seeing a connection here with the Dirty Dancing thing, which is like in that case, you know, Baby, as she talks to her dad is implicating them both in this truth that lies beneath their relationship. And that was not talked about. And that's the classism and [their privilege.] Yeah. That privilege and the limitations of their circle of concern. And baby wants it to be bigger. She wants it to be much more encompassing, including, you know, the staff at the summer camp. And so, yeah, both of these texts, in a way, are pointing to that deeper truth. And if an apology can't get there, then it's falling short, whatever language people are using to describe it.

**Vanessa** [00:35:46] Yeah.

**Casper** [00:35:48] So we're already starting to compare these two texts. Let's create a florilegium. So we'll take a little snippet of text from both texts and create something new. What are the two sentences you want to put together? And then I'll read them aloud for you.

**Vanessa** [00:36:02] Yeah, I think it's like the heart of it is in the dirty dancing. One is, “I'm sorry I let you down, but you let me down, too.” [Mm hmm.] And then for Martin Luther King, I'm going to do, like, an ellipsis on it. “If I said anything in this letter that overstates the truth, I beg you to forgive me.”

**Casper** [00:36:19] Okay. All right. Let's put them together. “I'm sorry I let you down, but you let me down, too. If I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth, I beg you to forgive me.”

**Vanessa** [00:36:32] I mean, what it makes me think of is that, like, we even have to be humble when we think we've seen the capital T truth. [Mm hmm.] Not only should Sara and I at some point have this conversation where we really look at it, but we also need to genuinely be doing. “And if I'm wrong, I'm sorry.” Right. Like. [Mm hmm.] Like, I always think of, like, Joan of Arc. She was very sure of herself. And we talk about her so righteously as someone who is sure of herself and, like, willing to die for what she was sure of. And even so, even in like all of that sureness, I wonder if part of her was thinking to herself and if I’ve over done this. I beg you to forgive me. [Mm hmm.] Right. Or, like, for Baby to say I'm sorry I let you down, but you let me down, too. And if I'm totally misunderstanding the message that you raised me on, then I beg you to forgive me. But I don't think you, I'm wrong.

**Casper** [00:37:31] This is really interesting, but I want to push you on one thing, which is, is that space for “maybe I'm wrong” towards the other person or is it to something bigger than yourself? It could be a value, because I think that's what you're saying. But I just want to test that.

**Vanessa** [00:37:47] Yeah, I think that that last “and if I'm wrong, forgive me.” Is for ourselves or or to God or whatever that is in you like. I certainly don't want Joan of Arc to be yelling. “And if I was wrong, my bad.” Right. Like, I want her to stand there and be like I was. Right. But I almost think it would be comforting for her in those last moments to be like, and if I was wrong, God forgive me. And for King to say, like, I'm doing my best. And if I'm doing it, not perfectly, like, God forgive me. And for me, it's like I'm trying to tell the truth about this relationship, but, like, I do not own the truth. [Mm hmm.] I am merely someone who believes that she sees it every once in a while. If I'm wrong, I hope the world will forgive me for it. [Mm hmm.]

**Casper** [00:38:36] One of the things I've heard you say in this conversation, Vanessa, aside from the obvious desire not to create harm, you know, the need to rectify behavior. You've really zeroed in on this piece of an apology, which is about the fullness of the truth or this kind of papering over strategy and the importance of having both confidence and humility. If we take you back to the situation that you started with at the top of the episode with Sara. Is there something that you would want to do differently now or any kind of apology that you might have to give in the future that you that you want to bring in?

**Vanessa** [00:39:14] Yeah. I mean, like, I just definitely would have wanted to like talk about myself rather than accuse her, right. [Mhm.] Like what really happened is she hurt my feelings or my feelings were hurt. I don't even know if I want to say she hurt my feelings, like my feelings were hurt. Like that seems like a very simple place to start on this. Like, [hmm.] Path towards truth, is just to, like, say, hi, Sara. It's good to hear from you. Before we talk about whatever is going on with you, it's important that you know that I am feeling really hurt by our relationship right now. [Yeah.] And like, rather than demanding an apology and, like, backtracking to truth, like, starting with truth and like, whatever the simplest, most honest thing is, which is like, it might not be fair. It might be totally fair. But the fact is, is that our friendship makes me sad right now.

**Casper** [00:40:08] Yeah.

**Vanessa** [00:40:09] I start from a place of like “I've been wronged. I must be apologized to” and, like, I need to start from a place of, like, “I've been hurt. And I want you to know.”

**Casper** [00:40:20] And from that truth. Please God, in nine times out of ten, the apology that follows is actually going to feel truthful because it's been invited from that place of truth.

**Vanessa** [00:40:31] Right. And either truthfully, like, “I'm sorry, but” or truthfully, like, “that's a you problem”, right? Here's a mirror I'm holding up and like, hey, clergy lady, you're out of step with reality. The time is now.

**Casper** [00:40:46] Absolutely.

**Vanessa** [00:40:48] Casper, thank you so much for helping me think through that. Like really thorny topic that I had no idea what I thought about.

**Casper** [00:40:54] I'm so glad you invited me into this conversation. And honestly, this one feels like there are other angles into apologies that I would love to explore with you another time.

**Vanessa** [00:41:03] Many episodes. Series. I, of course, also want to thank Baby Daddy and Martin Luther King.

**Casper** [00:41:11] What a combo.

**Vanessa** [00:41:14] I know obviously.

**Casper** [00:41:17] You've been listening to the real question. We can only make this show thanks to your incredible support. So if you have the means to help us out, please do check out our patron. At Patron.com/realquestionpod. There's some fun extra goodies in there. If you love the show, please leave us a review on iTunes and you can also follow us on Instagram and Facebook. Real question pod and Twitter at the real Q Pod, where we'll be inviting you to share voice mail. So it's a great way to be part of the community.

**Vanessa** [00:41:44] We are and a Not Sorry production and our executive producer is Ariana Nedelman. Our music is by Nick Bohl and we are distributed by Acast. Thanks this week to Julia Argy Nicki Zoltan, Megan Kelly, Molly Baxter, Stephanie Paulsell all of our patrons, and especially to Ruth for sending in her voice mail. Thanks, everyone, and we'll talk to you next week.