Ration the Rationalizing

I just got a traffic ticket an hour ago for crossing over a double yellow line to get into the left turn lane at a light, instead of waiting for the cars to go and then entering the lane through the opening. I don’t usually do that and actually just recently told my newly-driving daughter not to do the same thing. Why did I do it? I don’t really know. It was an impulsive action, done right after thinking, “I should wait.” The motorcycle cop at the corner pulled me over and for a minute, I even thought, “Why is he pulling me over?” As soon as I realized that he saw what I’d done, I started rationalizing: I explained that I normally am a good driver; I only entered the lane a little before the legal entry point; I even claimed the lines were confusing and other lame excuses. I hoped he wouldn’t give me a ticket, meaning I hoped he wouldn’t hold me accountable for my actions. I was even irritated with him for doing it.

As I drove away, I thought about how I do this in relationships, too. I make a choice, thoughtfully, impulsively, or both, and then when someone gets upset with me, I offer lame excuses and rationalizations, and then I get irritated with them for not understanding and letting me off the hook. Has that ever happened to you? Have you been impatient, selfish, angry, rude, insensitive, selfish, gossipy, reactive, demanding, controlling, forgetful, irresponsible, or attacking and then gotten angry with the person who points it out to you?

We need to be accountable for our actions. If you got angry, spoke harshly, overreacted, or were impatient, pushy, controlling, rude, gossipy, selfish, insensitive, forgetful, irresponsible, it doesn’t matter that you were tired, upset, overwhelmed, provoked, stressed, or anything else. Those are all excuses and rationalizations. Whatever you did, you need to be accountable by admitting it, apologizing for it, and making whatever amends are necessary.

Keep your apologies short and clean—without excuses and rationalizations. Simply say: “I was wrong.” Explanations undo the apology by attempting to make you look better, but they are really nothing more than a rationalization in disguise.
I am regretting making that decision to cross over that double yellow line. I will regret it even more when the ticket comes in the mail for hundreds of dollars and my insurance goes up as a result of the ticket. But I often regret what I do in my relationships, too. And it is too late to change either one. The fine is there to teach me a lesson—obey the traffic laws or it will hurt your pocketbook. People are there to be honest about what they see in us and to let us know when we have done something that harms them. We need to be humble enough to listen and accountable enough to apologize and make amends.

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God,

Help me to stop rationalizing, explaining, and excusing, when I do things that are wrong in my life and relationships. Help me admit my wrong and be willing to make it right.

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Relationship Challenge

❖ Pay attention to how you respond when you are confronted with what you have done wrong.

❖ Stop rationalizing, excusing, and explaining your mistakes.

❖ Admit when you are wrong.

❖ Keep your apologies and amends simple.

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Scripture Meditation

1 Peter 2:20

“But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.”
Psalm 32:5

“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”

Proverbs 15:4

“A fool spurns his father’s discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.”

A wise person is open to hearing the truth. A humble person apologizes for wrongdoing. A responsible person makes amends for harm done. A mature person doesn’t expect to get credit for suffering for doing wrong; instead, a mature person recognizes that suffering for wrongdoing should be borne willingly, because it is deserved.

If you have any questions you would like to ask Karla, please feel free to email her. Portions of your email and Karla's response to you may be used anonymously in future materials. By emailing her, you are giving your implied permission.

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