

### Long Mistakes Forgiven at Last

I was going on my first ever winter retreat with my youth group. Our youth leader invited a camp director from the area to teach us new ways to be closer to Christ. Decades before that trip, our leader had inspired the camp director to follow God in the first place. After that every year, the director would come and teach the youth group as a way to repay our leader. He really connected with us in a way that we, or at least I, had never felt before. I could practically feel how close to Christ he was. He wanted to share that wonderful feeling with all of us.

The lessons that he taught on the day inspired me. Those lessons were about how we could feel closer to God, about how we need to learn to let go of our sins and give them to God, and about how we can center our day around Christ. During his lesson I thought long and hard and reviewed all the things that I had done in my life. Both good and bad. I felt extremely regretful for my bad actions. I thought that the people that I might have been rude to in the past would always resent me. Or even if they didn't, then at least they wouldn't forgive me. I even thought that God might not forgive my actions, which I can see now was a silly thought in the first place.

That night before we went to bed I confessed to my friends some of the things that I had regretted for years. They consoled me and said that they forgave me. They said that all kids do bad things at some point or another. They said that it was normal, and that what I had done wasn't that serious. When I went to sleep that night I felt Christ with me. In the morning I could tell that not just my friends had forgiven me but God had as well. I felt lighter and happier, as though a weight had been lifted off my shoulders.

When I went on that fateful trip I never thought that I would feel this way. I thought that what I had done would never be forgiven. The thought of having that sort of new connection with Christ never even crossed my mind. The only things I thought that I would be doing on the trip would be hanging out with some friends, and playing around, but I left the trip with much more. I left feeling more whole than I ever had in my life. I left knowing that God loved me so much, and I knew that I was forgiven for my past sins. I knew that God was with me, and that he would never leave my side.

The other Grade 7 winner did not give permission to post.