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Traders Point, how are we doing? It's good to be with you. My name is Ryan, and I'm one of the pastors around here. To everyone at the campuses and everyone watching online, welcome. We're so glad you are with us.

I just want to kick off a special announcement before we get rolling today. You just saw the clip on it, but it's for all of our students. All the students in the room, middle school and high school, all the parents of students, and for anyone in here who knows a student a little bit, this one is for you. September 14, One Big Night at our Northwest campus, I'm telling you that you don't want to miss it.

It's a night filled with food and fun, and a professional fireworks show. Take my word for it, I worked in student ministries for years, and there is nothing like this night. Check out the website for all the details. You do not want to miss it.

But as far as today goes, we are continuing in our series *6 Words that Can Change Your Life*. Maybe you hear that, and you get a little wary. Is this some kind of a quick-fix scheme? What's going on here? And it's not. It's actually the exact opposite of that. What we're doing in this series is taking a deep dive into our lives.

We all have some stuff going on underneath the surface. We have some relationships that need a little bit of maintenance. We have some habits that need to be altered. What we said, what this is coming down to, is a lot of this starts with us. A lot of that can change with the disposition of our hearts, and sometimes that can happen with a word. A word can start all of that.

If you were here last week when we kicked this thing off, all I can say is, "Wow." Do you get it? Do you see what I did there? I love inside jokes, I always wanted to be a part of one. But seriously, I love the way Aaron kicked this off last week by talking about wow and how wow is the word we use when we can't find the words to say. Wow is just really what falls out of our mouths.

Now, today is pretty much the exact opposite of that. The word we're going to be looking at today is not one that just falls out of our mouths. A lot of times it's a word that comes out kicking and screaming. It's one of the hardest words we will ever say. I'm going to need a little bit of help with this one. Here is the word today:

Sorry

It's hard to say when it's not even connected to anything. I didn't even do anything wrong, but to say it out loud, to say *sorry* is hard for everyone no matter who you are. I have three kids at home. Two of them are in the room right now. They are seven, five, and three. Most of my life is spent following these people around and convincing them they need to say sorry.

It's just like, "No, no, no, go say sorry. Go say sorry to your brother."

“Why? Why say sorry?”

“You just dropped kicked him in the face. You need to go say sorry.”

And you would think that is maybe just a thing for kids, as we get older saying sorry becomes easier. But I’m here to tell you, I’m getting up there in age and I’m starting to think it doesn’t. I think that is a myth. Sorry is no easier to say now than it ever was.

Even with the people who are closest to us in our lives, saying sorry is so hard. Isn’t it? Is anyone else with me?

You get into those situations where you know, “If I could just say sorry right now, it could change the trajectory of everything. We could get moving in the right direction, if I could say sorry.” And we get to that point and we say, “And another thing.” We justify, we get defensive. We say, “I just think it’s funny how I can promise you that whatever comes next is not going to be funny, not even a little bit of what comes next is funny.”

But we try. We get defensive. It barely comes out, and when it does it comes out kicking and screaming. Saying sorry is hard to say. That’s what we’re going to be looking at today. I think it’s kind of a unique approach, because a lot of times when we talk about sorry it’s usually lagging behind forgiveness.

When we see it, it comes from a sense of, “Hey, someone has done something to us, we need to figure out how we can forgive them, how we can accept, ‘I’m sorry.’”

But we’re going to flip it today. Because what if we’re the ones who need to say, “I’m sorry?” Ouch. What if we’re the ones who messed up? How do we say that? And how does power really come from saying, “I’m sorry?”

And to look at this, we’re going to look at the word of Jesus. He actually has a lot to say. When Jesus was walking this earth, he found himself face-to-face with a group of people who could not say these words. They could not say, “I’m sorry.” They always thought they were right. Those are the best kind of people to be around, right? You just love them so much.

But you get the picture, through this interaction between Jesus and this group of people called Pharisees, that Jesus is doing all he can to get them to say, “Sorry.” To show them why they need to say sorry, sorry to one another, and sorry to God.

And to look at one of these interactions, we’re going to be in a book of the Bible called Luke. It is in chapter 18 starting in verse 9. If you have a Bible, you can go ahead and flip there. But if you don’t, and you want one, if you want to leave here with a Bible you can. At every campus, in our lobby, stop by Connection Central. That’s a free gift from us to you. Don’t just take our word for it, what the Bible says, take it and read it and study it. See what God has to say to you.

Let’s dive into Luke 18. *“Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else.”*

So, they had great confidence in their own righteousness. They had a lot of confidence in being right. This is what prompts Jesus to tell the story he is going to tell. These people, these are the Pharisees. This is who Jesus is talking to here. Look at what he says.

*“Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’”*

Here it is. You can see right away why Jesus might have had a little bit of a problem with these people. He steps up and his immediate prayer is: God, thank you that I am not like other people. And then he starts pointing out the other people. It’s almost like he is reading the room with his prayer, which means he is breaking Christian rule number one. You can’t pray with your eyes open. Right?

But that’s what he starts doing. He says: God, thank you that I’m not like these other people, like I’m not like one of those cheaters over there, that I’m not like one of these adulterers, that I’m not a sinner.

And then he saves the biggest one for last. He says: O God, look at this. Thank you that I’m not like that tax collector. He doesn’t say: Thank you God that I’m not like a tax collector, he says: God, thank you that I’m not like *that* tax collector.

And what he is doing in this moment, by saying: God, thank you that I’m not like these people, that I’m not like a sinner, he is saying: God, I have nothing to be sorry about. Sorry, not sorry. You really broke the mold when you made me. That’s a bold strategy, and we’ll see how it pays off.

Next, what Jesus does is compares and contracts. He used the prayer of this Pharisee, this person who would have been seen as the most upstanding person, the leader of this religious organization, someone who was loved, respected, and admired and then he switches.

And he sees things from the angle of someone who was seen as the exact opposite, someone who was hated, someone who was despised. It was the very person who the Pharisee called out at the end of his prayer when he said: God, thank you that I’m not like that tax collector. We get to see how the tax collector responds, how he prays.

Look at this. *“But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’”*

What a difference. The tax collector stood at a distance. He didn’t even bother to come close. He barely made it through the temple gate. He is right there at the exit. He says: This is as far as I can go. I can’t go any farther. I shouldn’t even be here.

And I know there are some people in the room today who felt that. You barely get through the doors on a Sunday before you stop and say, “I cannot go any further than this. I shouldn’t be here.” And there are some of you who didn’t even make it this morning, because some of those same thoughts were swirling around in your head. You said, “I can’t even go in today, I’m just going to watch it online.”

If that’s you, you are in good company because that is where the tax collector is. That’s where he is when he begins to say this prayer of, “O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.” What is he saying? He is saying: God, be merciful to me. God, would you forgive me?

What does he need forgiveness for? He says it right there: Because I'm a sinner. He asks for forgiveness for the very thing the Pharisee just thanked God that he wasn't—a sinner. And the tax collector says: No, no, no God, please forgive me because I am a sinner.

What does that mean? A lot of times, by the time we come in contact with words like sin or sinner, they are usually blasted or shouted on a megaphone, or maybe we see them on a blog. But one of the best ways the Bible uses to describe sin is in relation to archery. It's actually a term that was used for archers—missing the mark. Someone took a shot and they missed the mark.

Sin = Missing the mark

What mark are they missing? What they are talking about here is God's mark. [An archery target is on stage and the mark is the perfect center] God has a perfect standard for life, it's his way. He is perfect. His way of life is perfect. This is it, this is the mark. Everything outside of that is considered sin. And the Bible goes into great detail about what sin is. There are so many laws and commandments.

You may have seen like a top 10. Here are the top 10. Don't kill anyone. Yeah, I can do that. Don't cheat on your spouse. We are like, "Okay, okay." Then Jesus steps in and is like: You've heard it said, don't kill anyone, and everyone is like, "Yep." And he says: Try this one on. Don't even have thoughts of anger towards someone else.

Well that changes things. We just quickly moved outside of perfection.

And he says: You've heard it said, don't be an adulterer. Don't cheat on your spouse. But I'm telling you don't even have a thought of lust, because if you do, you are no longer perfect. And that becomes a really big, heavy thing. When we have seen what all sin is, it almost seems impossible at first.

So, what's a sinner?

A sinner is a person who missed the mark.

We're the ones holding the bow. [Ryan has a bow in his hands] You guys are a little tense. I promise you, there is not a chance in the world I'm firing this thing. I'm from the west side of Indianapolis. I've never held a bow in my hand, and its not going to happen today. We can calm down a little bit.

But, we are the sinners. We are the ones who took our shot and missed God's perfect mark. And who missed it? Look at what Romans says. *"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard."*

And when you start thinking about it that way, when this is God's glorious standard, if we could hit that with our lives, if we could live the perfect life, that is where we would end up. [In the perfect center of the target] But the Bible says no. We have all sinned. We have all fallen short of the glory of God.

And I think a lot of times we try to justify it like, "Maybe I'm not perfect, but maybe I'm just right about there. I'm on the fringe of being perfect. I'm as good as it gets. I'm good enough." No, it says that all have sinned. All have fallen short of the glory of God.

It's like it didn't even make its way to the target, but it bounced its way all the way there. That's what the Bible says about what it is to sin and what it is to be a sinner. That's what the tax collector understood. That's what brought him to that spot of saying, "O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner."

The translation, what is he saying is: I'm sorry for missing the mark. Forgive me. And accept my apology, not on the grounds of how close I got to hitting your perfect standard, but on the grounds of the fact that you are a good God, and I am a sinner. The only shot I've got at this thing is how good you are, not about how good I am. That is the prayer of the tax collector.

Look at what Jesus does. Look at how Jesus explains this story. No one would have seen it coming. *"I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

No one would have seen this coming. What was happening? The tax collector and not the Pharisee was justified. But the Pharisee, he spent his whole life practicing. He had a bow and arrow at home. He took shot after shot, got as close to perfect as anyone has ever seen.

But Jesus says: No, no, no, he didn't leave justified, it was actually the tax collector.

What does it mean to be justified? It just means to be in right standing with God. It says in that moment, on that day, that tax collector left in good standing with God. But he is a tax collector. He literally cheated people out of money for a living. He was what anyone would say is a bad man. He had a rough past. He didn't belong. He was standing on the edge for a reason.

Yet, he was the one who walked away justified. He walked away with a right standing with God. Hear that. For those of you who barely made it through the doors today, hold onto this story and the way Jesus approaches the tax collector.

Because what Jesus is saying is that I can mess up, I can fall short, but if I come to him and say a prayer, a broken prayer like, "O God, be merciful to me, because I am a sinner," he is telling me that he accepts my apology.

"He accepts our sorry in a moment. We can leave that place forgiven. We can leave in right standing with God?" That's what he's telling me. That's exactly what we are saying. That's exactly what Jesus says.

And this is where we are getting to the beauty of the gospel. Everything the world says, anything you see out there, from religion to everything like, "You want to be good? Try harder. Get that bow straight. Fire, fire, fire again. Keep going, keep trying. Get as close to perfect as you can." Jesus is the complete opposite.

Jesus says: Stop. Bring me your hands. Bring me your bow. You can shoot that shot. You can try to live the perfect life, and you can get as close as you think you can. Or, and this is the gospel, you can hand me that bow. And you can watch me do it. You can look and see I was the only

one who lived the perfect life. And Jesus, in that moment, is willing to take that shot for us. Here is the good news:

Jesus does not miss.

He lived it. We've seen what he did, and we've seen what he offers us. Jesus did not miss. Because of that, we get to say we are with him. It doesn't matter that we messed up, it doesn't matter that we fell short. He forgives us. There is a word that Jesus weaves throughout this story, and he kind of closes it out with it.

It's the word that's in there that is the game-changer. It changed everything between the Pharisee and the tax collector. It's what will change the relationship between us and Jesus and between one another. If we can hold onto this word, it's what this is about. Take a look at that line one more time.

*"For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

That's exactly what we just saw played out. The Pharisee, he stepped in and he tried to justify himself. He did it, he did it by comparing himself to other people. He did it by pushing other people down. He did it by pointing out their imperfections to make himself look better. But that didn't change the fact that he couldn't actually justify himself. That didn't change the fact that he truly didn't hit the mark.

Jesus said: No, no, no. For you to hit the mark you will actually have to surpass the righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. So, even the Pharisees couldn't live that perfect life.

So, what was the difference? It was humility. You see, the tax collector humbled himself and was justified before God.

It wasn't about anything he had done or said outside of the fact that he came to God with an apology in hand and said: I'm sorry God, forgive me. And Jesus stepped in and said: You are forgiven. Let me take this shot for you. That was the game-changer.

And that spirit of humility, everything from the way he prayed to where he stood in the temple, those are the things that will change our relationship not only with Jesus, but with one another. If we could leave it there, I think a lot of us could probably swallow it. If there is a perfect God out there, it makes sense that we would fall short of his standards. It makes sense we couldn't live up to that, that we miss God's mark for sure. But that's not the only mark we miss.

So, even if you're here today and you can't really process what it feels like to miss the mark with God because you don't believe in God, you know the feeling of missing the mark with someone you love. You know the feeling that comes when you decided, "I'm going to hit this mark. I'm going to love people really well," and then you do or say something and fall short. We know that feeling and what it is like. That is a tough thing to step into, that we're the ones who dropped it, we're the ones who messed up.

And it's not even just that, it starts so close to home. It starts with us. Even when we say, "This is my mark for me. This is the standard I'm going to set for myself. My body is a temple. From

this day out, I'm going to show me a good time. I'm going to appreciate me. It's Sunday night, and this week is going to be different. This week I'm going to work out four times a week, no more fast food. I'm doing it. I'm hitting the mark. I'm going to do what needs to be done."

And the week flies by, and you wake up Friday and you haven't worked out once. This is completely hypothetical, right? And you get to your truck, you open the door and you see it there. The evidence. You not only ate fast food, you see it, the Popeyes chicken sandwich wrapper right there on the edge, just moving you all the way from perfection.

Not only did you eat fast food, you went against your queen. You went against Chick-fil-A. And you're sitting there like, "What happened? I had a plan, I had standards." And everything seems to fall down in front of us. What is that? Why is it so hard that we can't even hold ourselves to this? We can't even hit the mark we set for ourselves or for others.

When we tell ourselves, "This is how I'm going to treat other people. I'm going to be loving, kind, and patient," and we drop the ball. We say, "This is how I'm going to approach people," and it seems like our efforts fall short once again. What is that? Why do we fall short, and why is it so hard to say sorry when we do?

I'm going to tell you. It's pretty profound and deep. It took me a long time to write it, so take notes.

We are sinners

Very eloquent, I know. I'll probably publish a paper on it later this year. But we are sinners. We all miss the mark, that's what makes this so hard: me, you, our neighbors, and our co-workers. And even those tiny little people we call children and our kids—they miss the mark. They are sinners, the whole lot of them.

So, what makes that so hard is not only that we mess up, but it's what happens when we do. When we mess up, when our arrow does not hit the mark when we are going after other people (and ourselves) and treating them with respect and doing everything we can, and then we come to them with an apology, what we are doing is bringing them that arrow. We are saying, "I missed the mark back there. I didn't treat you the way I should have. I shouldn't have said that. I'm sorry."

And this is what makes it so hard. You're handing that to a sinner. You're handing that to someone who could use that against you. And a lot of us have had that experience. We went first. We said, "That's my bad. I messed that up. I'm sorry." And then what happened when we did? It felt like they took that arrow and they kind of stabbed us with it.

We said, "I'm sorry," but they used the arrow to keep us down. It seemed like we lost a whole lot more than we gained when we said, "I'm sorry." So the older we get, the better we get at pretending and justifying to ourselves that we really don't have a reason to say we are sorry, because when we're sorry people leave. When we show weakness, that's when everything starts to fall apart.

So, "No, no, no, I'm going to puff my chest up, I'm going to stay strong, and I'm going to show I don't have anything to be sorry about." As we do that, we for sure become bullet proof. No arrows can penetrate us, but nothing can come out either. The cost of not saying, "I'm sorry," is

a loss of being known, being loved, and being accepted. Can I just say that the cost is way too high? That will not lead us to the place that can change our lives in any way that is impactful, or better.

Can I propose that just because of how it went down, that doesn't mean that saying sorry is wrong? There is nothing wrong with being vulnerable. There is nothing wrong with coming to someone and saying, "I'm not perfect. I messed up."

Saying sorry might actually be the domino, and when we begin to hand that over it kind of softens us up to a place of real vulnerability and real relationships, where we can know other people and they can know us. But that is hard.

What I want to do with our remaining time is look at that. To say, "What are some things we can do?" Because if sorry is a word that can change our lives, how can we bring it back into the forefront? How can we use it in a healthy way? I'm going to throw out a few questions of how we can do that.

But before we get there, I just want to say one thing. If you are here today and you are in an abusive relationship, whether that is physical or emotional, you are being abused—saying sorry is not the end-all, be-all. There are more steps that need to come with that. If that's you, we'll have people at the front of our stage at every campus after every service, so make sure you talk to someone before you leave.

What we're talking about here today is—when we come with our sorry in our hands, and we say, "I'm sorry," we are talking about how that can infuse health, how that can change a relationship from day one. That's what we're going to be looking at today.

One of the best ways we can do that is by starting with our relationship with God, with how God has framed up the relationship between me and you. He has infused it in there. He has made it part of the ingredient list. God makes it overly clear that: Hey, when you fall short (and you will fall short) don't run, don't hide, don't try to justify yourself. Come to me. Bring me the missed arrow. You apologize to me, and I will not hold it against you.

He adds that into our conversation. The question is, have we? This may sound a little weird, but have you given people permission? Have you given people permission to say, "I'm sorry?" A marker of this is this question, one that you can look at today and in your group this week, when was the last time someone said sorry to you? This could be a good marker.

If you're thinking back and you can't think of a time when someone came to you and said, "Hey, I'm sorry for that," or "I'm sorry for this," it may be a good time to circle back and kind of go into those relationships and say, "What is it? Is there anything between us that makes you feel like you can't be honest and vulnerable with me? Is there anything that makes you think I wouldn't accept your sorry?"

And then to take it a step further, dive a little bit deeper. When someone did say sorry last, how did you respond? Because I'm telling you the truth, church, we are sinners, and maybe you can relate to this. When someone says sorry, when someone brings you the arrow, there is a moment when pride sneaks in or sin creeps up.



In that moment we feel the power exchange. This person is vulnerable, this person is weak. Our gut response, a lot of times, is, "You're not sorry yet. I'm going to hold you in this position a little bit longer."

And I know that's dark, but it might just be real. I know I've felt it before. What we're talking about here, for sorry to be infused into our relationships, for sorry to be part of our vocabulary, when someone brings it to us we can't hold it against them. We can't keep them down. We have to be in a spot where we can say, "Thank you for bringing that to me," and be able to apologize and have forgiveness for this person, even if it's not in the moment. We're not going to hold it against them.

That's one: When was the last time someone said sorry to you?

And the second one kind of goes with it. If you really want to know how to infuse I'm sorry into every day language, it's by going first. So, the second question is this.

When was the last time you said sorry to someone else?

When was the last time when you messed up, when you did, or said, what should not have been done or said, did you come with an apology in hand? Did you say, "Hey, that was me. I did that. I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

Or, did you feel something well up within you to justify it, to defend it? A lot of times, when we mess up, sorry is one of the last things that comes out. We find other words to fill its place. A couple of words that take its spot are: at least. Maybe you can think back to a time where you messed up, but you couldn't bring yourself to that moment of vulnerability so you said, "At least."

"I didn't call last night." Or, "I missed dinner again, but at least I have a job. At least I bring money home. Why don't you thank me for that instead of pointing out everything I did wrong?" We justify ourselves by comparing ourselves. "At least I'm not like Jim. He doesn't even have a job. And you want to come at me with this?"

I can tell you where the arrows begin to come out, is when you mess up and I mess up, and we, instead of apologizing, we say, "Who are you to come at me? At least I didn't do what you did." And then that arrow that the other person thought had been reconciled, the other person thought had been dealt with, comes out. And we do everything we can, even exploiting the people we love the most, in hopes of saving ourselves from saying, "I'm sorry."

But I'm telling you, what Jesus says here is that we don't have to do that. If we can humble ourselves, we can truly say, "I'm sorry," and mean it. Just think about how refreshing that would be this week in your relationships with the people you love most, and with you saying it as someone came up to you, instead of justifying it, instead of turning the tables, instead of explaining it away, what if someone just came up to you and said, "Hey, I'm sorry. I'm sorry I didn't show up. I'm sorry I didn't value your time. I'm sorry." Unjustified, "I'm sorry."

With our kids, "I lost my temper back there. I shouldn't have handled it the way I did. I am sorry." Unjustified, not explaining it away but coming arrow-in-hand and saying, "Hey, I am sorry." Think about how refreshing that would be. Think about how different that would be from a lot of times when we approach conflict with one another, if we could just say, "Hey, I'm sorry."

And if we did that, if we just did these two things—unjustified sorry—if we would think back to the last time we said we were sorry and dove deep into that, and we started saying sorry more and if we looked at our lives and said, “Hey, do people feel like they have permission to say they are sorry to me? Is there something I need to do to open up some vulnerability in the relationship?” I’m telling you, if we did those two things that could change our lives. That could change our relationships. If those two things were implemented tomorrow, that could change it.

Well church, I just want to give you something that can change your life because those are two great things that could, but there is one thing that would for sure, we know who can, and that is Jesus. And it’s when we see who Jesus is, we see this is all centered-on and powered by our relationship to Jesus. And when we can see how humbly we come to Jesus, that’s what completely changes everything.

You see, we’ve talked a lot today about the gospel, the good news, the fact that we fell short of God’s perfect mark. But Jesus steps in and says: Let me take this shot for you. And that is a beautiful picture.

But that is one half of the gospel. You see, half of the gospel is that we are sinners, and we fell short of the glory of God. And God was willing to offer a perfect sacrifice for me and you. The second part is what happens with all of the missed arrows. You see, each one of these missed arrows had to be accounted for. For each one of these missed arrows, there was a penalty. There is a penalty for falling short, there is a penalty for not hitting this perfect mark. And the penalty for it is heavy. Take a look at it in Romans 6:23, “*For the wages of sin is death...*”

Death.

It says that missed arrow, the wages, what has to be paid now for missing the mark is death, separation from God for all of eternity. That is the cost. Those are the wages. But look at this church, “*...but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

We will never be able to say sorry like we should until we see what our missed arrows did to Jesus. You see, the gospel is not only that Jesus stepped in and took the shot for us. The gospel is this:

Jesus not only took the shot for us, he took the shot that was meant for us.

That penalty, those missed arrows, the penalty was death. And Jesus said: No, I love them far too much for that. Let me step in and take their place.

And when we begin to see—when we see Jesus on a cross, when we see Jesus dying for everyone on this planet, when we see the arrow, we see it was my arrow that fell short, it was my arrow that fell short, it was my arrow that brought Jesus to the cross, it was my arrow that held him there, you can no longer see Jesus on the cross the same.

You can’t help but look at the cross and see Jesus and say, “I’m sorry. I’m sorry that that is where I brought you. I’m sorry this has happened. O God, be merciful to me, because I am a sinner. Look what I have done.”

And our missed arrows, they took Jesus to the cross and they killed him. He died on that cross, but he did not remain dead. He was not done, not by a long shot. And Jesus rose. We are justified, not by how close we got to the target, we are justified through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That Jesus would come in and deal with sin, pay its wages once and for all, even when it meant giving his own life to do it. That is the gospel.

When we can come to this spot truly humbled by the fact that we are loved enough that God would die for us, that we are worth dying for, that brings us to a different mind frame, where we can say, "O God, you love me so much that you would die for me."

That brings a whole new level of freedom. It's no longer about being perfect. You have so much to live for, you have so much freedom. You're not worried about what's going to happen to these missed arrows. You aren't worried about one of them flying into your side, because Jesus has already taken care of them. Jesus has already taken them on the cross.

Now you can live in freedom. Sorry isn't hard to say. Forgiveness isn't hard to ask for because I know Jesus said: Father forgive them, forgive all of them. And I know he meant it, because he was willing to die to say it.

So, now we come. We come before God and truly humble ourselves. The most humbling thing we will ever have is that we were bad enough that the Son of God had to die for us to be made right. But now we are. Now we are justified, and now our lives truly can change.

And if you're here today... I hope you've kept up with this the whole time. This is Jesus' story, this is the gospel he wants his church to know, he wants his sons and daughters to know. He paid the cost. He took the shot. He has done everything. It doesn't matter where you are, what you've done, in this moment, just like the tax collector, we can say a broken and beautiful prayer, "O God be merciful to me, for I am a sinner." And we can leave this place justified before God.

What we want to do right now is just open it up, open it up for a time of reflection, open it up for a time to stand before God, to see him on the cross, to see that it was our arrows that brought him there. But to see that he offers us forgiveness. He offers us new life. He justified us through his resurrection. I'm going to pray that prayer over all of us. It's a prayer you can respond to, and a prayer that you can walk out of here justified because of Jesus.

So, pray with me.

God, thank you so much for today. God, thank you for what you did with our missed arrows—we missed. We fell short of your perfect standard. But God, you are gracious. God, you looked at us and you heard our prayers. We are sinners, but you are gracious. Will you forgive us? We are sorry.

God, over and over again, year after year, generation after generation, you accept our apologies. You forgive us. Because of that, lives are changed. Because of that, we get the free gift. God, we thank you. God, we pray that we would be encouraged to pray that prayer today.

I pray for all of those who are going to pray that for the first time. I pray all of that could be removed, no more trying to be perfect, but that they could humbly come before you and one another.

We can say, "Sorry," and we can mean it.

Jesus, we love you. It's in your perfect name we pray. Amen.