

# MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

## LET THAT GO | LETTERS FROM MY FUTURE SELF

RYAN BRAMLETT | JANUARY 15, 2023

Traders Point how are we doing? Hey. Hey, good to be with you everyone watching at the campuses, everyone online, so glad that you are with us today as we continue in our series *Letters To My Future Self*.

I don't know about you, but I think this one was really personal. Like, it hit home last week, and I have a feeling it's going to do the same thing here. But, I think the big idea of this series, and go with it for a second, is what would it look like to receive a letter from your future self? Alright? Kind of sci-fi type of stuff.

What if you woke up tomorrow and in your book bag or sitting on your table was a letter with your handwriting written from you in the future? What warnings, what advice would you need right now in this season that would be helpful?

I was thinking about that. And here's a letter that I think my future self would write me.

"Hey, Buddy."

I have this picture in my head that my future self would call me buddy. He means well, but that's the only thing I don't like about him, really.

"Hey, Buddy,

It's me. Well, it's you from the future. You get it. I just wanted to tell you to start paying attention when your dad is fixing stuff around the house. I know you keep saying that you don't need to worry about stuff like that because one day you'll be so rich that you won't have to fix things yourself. You'll just pay people to come do it.

I'm here to tell you, and man I wish I wasn't the one, grab a seat, you aren't going to be rich. You'll be rich spiritually. I know you don't know what that means. It's something called Christian humor. You'll understand it one day, but you still won't think it is very funny.

The irony is you won't pay someone to fix it. Your dad is going to be the one who comes over to fix everything. Get really friendly with a screw driver, hammer, and at least a basic working knowledge of electrical and plumbing. You'll thank me later."

That's something that I wish I would have heard, and I would have paid attention to. But I think that there's a letter that I would receive that is maybe a little bit more personal, a little bit more serious. And I think a lot of us could relate. I think if my future self wrote a letter it would be a short one. And it would just say:

“Dear Ryan,

Let that go. Let it go.”

And knowing me like I think my future self would, I think that there would be another letter after that one.

“Hey Buddy,

Do I have your attention now? I know that you don’t like that I call you Buddy, let that go.

Don’t just say that you have forgiven them. Really forgive them. Forgive yourself. Forgive them. Release it.”

Now, I don’t know if it’s my personality. I don’t know if it’s my Midwestern upbringing, but it is very hard for me to admit that you hurt me. I’ll often play it off with phrases like: It’s good. Don’t worry about it. Hey, no worries.

“Look, I’ve got two eyes. You took one of them. Right? God gave me two of them. Get out of here, man. Don’t worry about it.”

And here’s what it is. I pretend to be okay to make you feel okay. And at the surface that might even sound noble, but I can tell you that it’s not because it’s drenched in fear. I’m afraid to share how I feel because I’m afraid you’ll leave. I’m afraid you will decide that reconciliation is not worth the price, and you’ll walk away. So I pretend. I stuff it down. I deny what I’m actually feeling.

And I don’t know about you, but that’s my struggle. I pretend like there is nothing to forgive in the first place.

Maybe for you your struggle is on the other side of not letting go. It’s not that you pretend but you hold grudges. And once people wrong you, once they cross that line they are dead to you. And you burn that bridge, and you move on.

## **WE LEARN TO FORGIVE**

What we want to focus on today, this exercise that we’re going to do is: How do we learn to forgive? Really forgive? Not just pretend like nothing is really going on. Not to just blow up and to hold grudges and keep people at a distance. But how do we really forgive?

And before we jump into what forgiveness is, I just want to take a moment and talk about what forgiveness is not, just to make sure that we are all on the same page.

## **FORGIVENESS IS NOT**

- Excusing

A lot of times I think we just have this idea of, "Okay, well they did this because of this." We try to justify what happened. That's not what forgiveness is. It's going to reality. This is what happened. It's not denying. It's not pretending. It's not turning a blind eye and saying, "I didn't see it," or "There is nothing here to deal with," until it comes out later.

You ever been in that situation where you think that you've worked through something in a relationship with someone and then one day you're like, "Hey, I thought you were going to be there. I thought you were going to be home at 5. What happened?"

And they are like, "I thought you were going to be there on the most important day of my life. But you weren't." And it's like, "I was just talking about dinner. What do we need to go back to?"

But we see that love keeps no record of wrongs. So it's not:

- Denying

It's not denying it only to bring it up later.

And forgiveness is also not:

- Immediate trust or reconciliation

I think we have this too. If I forgive that means that everything immediately goes back to the way it was. That trust is reinstated and that even reconciliation is always an option. There may be people you need to forgive that you can't possibly reconcile even if you want to. Forgiveness hopes for reconciliation, but it's not always guaranteed.

And the thing that I would want to say that I think is so important and why this message is critical for us, our lives, and the culture we live in is because I think forgiveness is missing.

If you look out into the news, if you look out into what people are talking about, there is this phrase going around. Maybe you've heard it: cancel culture. And I get where it came from. I understand it because things were happening for a long time, and no one was held accountable. Things we excused away. So finally people said, "Hey, if this is not okay, I'm with you. But the way that it is handled, I'm not okay with because it is easy to cancel. It is easy to tear someone down. It is easy to remove them and to throw them into the dark."

But I think there is a better way. I think Jesus says that there is a better way. Instead of a cancel culture, there is a forgiveness culture, one where we don't excuse, where we don't deny, where we come, and we confront evil and sin and everything that happens. But here's the difference. We offer people a way back, an opportunity to be restored, an opportunity for hope to live. That's the kind of culture that we want to have. That's the kind of church we want to be.

So how do we do that? How do we forgive like that, even the people who hurt us so badly? Is there a way that we can even let that go? And I believe there is. So here's the framework we're going to be using for what it looks like to forgive.

## **HOW TO FORGIVE**

REMEMBER ACCURATELY

RESPOND ACCORDINGLY

RELEASE ALWAYS

We want to remember accurately. We want to respond accordingly, and then release always.

### **REMEMBER ACCURATELY**

So remember accurately. Here's what I mean. Not just remembering the account, not just remembering what happened to you and why you are upset with that person. That's probably pretty easy for you to remember.

We're going to remember something that actually happened long before anything was ever done to us. And from what I've seen, this is the only thing that truly brings the power to forgive. Alright? So we're going to begin with a story. Jesus is telling a story here in Matthew, chapter 18, starting in verse 21. Take a look at this. It says:

*"Then Peter came to him and asked, 'Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?'"*

He's saying this to get extra credit. He believes that this is an unrealistic number. He believes it's probably like three. But he's going over the top and saying, "I don't know, Jesus. What do you think? I think seven. Right?" Thinking Jesus would be like, "No, no not that much." So he says this and here it is:

*"No, not seven times,"*

He's like, "Yep, you got me there."

*"...but seventy times seven!"*

What He is saying is, "There is not an amount. There is no line that you are going to get to where you can say, 'I'm done. I'm done forgiving.'"

How? How could we possibly do that? How could we possibly forgive people that many times? That doesn't seem realistic. But it only is in light of the story that Jesus is about to tell Peter. In verse 23, this is what Jesus says. He says:

*"Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one*

*of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt.”*

*‘But the man fell down before his master and begged him, “Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.” Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.”*

*‘But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. “Be patient with me, and I will pay it,” he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.”*

*‘When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, “You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?” Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.”*

*‘That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.” Matthew 18:21-35 (NLT)*

It's a heavy story. It's a heavy story. And it's one that you can't read disjointed. Right? You can't just read the second part without reading the first part. The reason the second part stands out so much is because it's in light of what just happened moments earlier.

If we just read the second part of the story and there are these two guys walking down the road and one guy owes the other guy a few thousand dollars then he demands his money to be repaid. We're like, “That's reasonable.” Choking him out in the middle of the side of the road, maybe that goes a little too far. But outside of that, a guy owes you money, handle your business. You don't necessarily have to offer him grace. You don't actually have to offer him mercy. Maybe if you do, that's okay.

But you see, we can't read this story disconnected from the first half. We cannot live disconnected from the first half. Because the truth is, our lives do not begin when someone hurts us. Our lives do not begin when we need to forgive someone. Our lives begin from this place of: I am forgiven.

Before anything has happened to me, I have been forgiven. I have been forgiven a great debt, one that I could never pay in my life. One that if I had a million lives, I couldn't have come up with it. But God blessed me. God chose to clear my record. God chose to deal with my sin and extend grace to me.

And I'm telling you, from this perspective, this is the beginning of when and how and the power to forgive comes from. It's not from, "I'm just going to try really hard this year to forgive those who hurt me. I'm going to try really hard not to hold grudges. It's when we see those who hurt us in light of what Jesus has already done for us.

So, when I come to this place, I know I have been forgiven. I know that my debt has been wiped clean. I know that I was dead, but Jesus bought me to life. I know I was an enemy of His, but He adopted me into His family. I know He could have left me alone, but He lavished His grace upon me. I am swimming in grace right now. So when it comes to this, I can offer you a cup. We have to bring ourselves to that space of remembering. And that will begin to shape how we love and the length that we will go to extend that forgiveness.

Jesus hinted at this. There was this day where he goes to this religious leader's house. And the religious leaders are acting kind of funny around Him. Not really showing Him any respect. And there is this woman there. And she's described as a sinful woman. But she comes in and she sits at Jesus' feet, and she starts crying and she uses her hair to wipe the tears from His feet. And she pours this expensive perfume out on Him.

And these guys are sitting there, "If you only knew who she was, you would not let her be that close to you." And look at Jesus' response. He says:

*"I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."* Luke 7:47-48 (NLT)

So, once again, when we remember and we start our days from this place of, "I am forgiven, I need forgiveness," it completely changes the rest of our exchanges throughout that day.

I love the way C.S. Lewis said this. He says that this is what it means to be a Christian:

*"To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."*

We can't disconnect one side of the story from the next. We remember that we are forgiven. That's the first thing. The second thing is we:

### **REPSOND ACCORDINGLY**

And I have a feeling that what I'm going to say next might surprise you. Maybe you thought that this was off limits, this was something that we don't talk about or touch and this is always wrong. But I believe it's a word, I believe it's an emotion, we need to take back if we are truly going to learn to let it go. And I think that it is found in the parable that we just read. So go back and look at this. It says:

*"Then the angry king sent the man to prison..."* Matthew 18:34 (NLT)

What kind of king was he? He was an angry king. An angry king. Now, I don't know about you, maybe that word is surprising. But what I want us to see and to hear today is that anger is not a problem. Sometimes anger is necessary. Anger is telling us something. Anger is not intrinsically bad. It is sometimes very hard to wield, but there is this idea of a righteous anger.

**A lot of times we don't let go because we don't allow ourselves to get angry.**

But a lot of times we don't let go because we don't control our anger. We don't control our anger because we don't have any experience with it. And just from my seat, here's my theory why we don't do anger very well—even in the church we don't talk about it because none of us ever saw it modeled well.

When someone got angry people got hurt. When someone got angry people got choked on the side of the road. When someone got angry someone got cussed out. When someone got angry a door got slammed. When someone got angry the relationship was over. I think we need to take that back—that idea of anger—maybe that's rage. Maybe that's something else.

But there is this Biblical anger that I think we need to tap into because it's telling us something. And before we can let it go we need to know what we are letting go of. I love the way that Tim Keller talks about Biblical anger. He says:

“Biblical anger: energy aroused in defense of something good and released against something evil.”

It's energy aroused in defense. So, when I get angry, what is it telling me? What am I trying to defend? The thing that I'm trying to defend—is it good, is it right, is it pure? And what's the thing that I am attacking. I'm not attacking a person, I'm attacking corruption, I'm attacking the problem in the situation. What is it telling me?

You know, I've have been confronted with this, being angry, at a very specific time of the day and it was becoming a pattern that really bothered me and upset me. And it's going to be hard to talk about because a few of my kids are in here.

But, there is this specific time of the day where I would get angry. And it was at bedtime. Not for me. I'm great at bedtime. I'm great. It's one of my favorite times of the day. And, as an introverted man, my bed is on my mind. By the end of the day, that's where I want to be.

And I found myself getting angry and getting short-tempered and getting upset when the kids, not that they didn't do anything wrong, but they were being kids. I should have been able to deal with it in a healthy way, but I would lose my temper, or I would get frustrated. Frustrated why? Because they want another drink—the 38<sup>th</sup> drink of water right now, in this moment. I don't understand how they don't pee the bed. Angry

because they want to read another book, when we've read six. Angry because they want me to stay a little bit longer.

What was I defending? Was it good? Was it righteous? No. I was defending convenience. I was defending my want to have something when in reality the best place I could have been was right in front of them. The best place I could have been was reading another book. The best place I could have been was cuddling just a little bit longer. But my anger stole those moments from me.

What does anger steal from you? Unaddressed, left on its own, anger can spin into a bunch of different things. But it doesn't have to. You know, Jesus got angry. Jesus got angry. Think about that. Jesus healed people angry. Jesus cleansed the Temple angry. But at the end of the day, He was always defending something that was good, attacking something that wasn't. And at the end of the day, He always wanted the best for us. Can the same be said about our anger?

What we're going to do next is we're going deal with this tension. If it's okay to be angry, there's a very small window in which we can be angry. And God gives us some guidelines of what it looks like to be angry and to protect us from ourselves. Like I said, the option isn't to never be angry or to pretend like we are not upset. Anger can be something good. But here's the tension. Ephesians 4:

*"Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin;"*

Isn't that like sneezing and keeping your eyes open at the same time? Is that even possible? Can you be angry and not sin? He says that you can. But he says:

*"...do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."*  
Ephesians 4:25-27 (ESV)

So he says, "Be angry." You are going to see things that make you angry. There are going to be things that build up this righteous, justice within you and it's okay to be angry. But remember what are you defending and what are you attacking.

And then he places another thing there, "Hey, don't let it turn to sin." And here's one of the biggest things that you can implement this week. When you get angry, deal with it very quickly. That's what he put in there. He says, "Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Don't let the day pass without doing something about it."

And I don't know about you, but... Usually when something that makes you mad, that you get angered, someone has offended you or hurt you, it's not like things get better as time goes on. It's not like the story in your head begins to smooth out. If anything, it gets worse. You start adding things like intention. You start adding in details that maybe were or maybe were not there.



And I think we need to squash this idea that time heals all wounds. Here's another equation for you:

### **TIME + WOUND = INFECTION**

You are offended. You are hurt. Someone broke trust. Someone lied to you. Someone stole something from you. Someone hurt you. You have an open wound. And if it's not addressed that infection will spread, just like anything. But this infection, this particular one, what we're worried about is a root of bitterness coming up.

That anger, maybe, was righteous in the beginning but now bitterness is taking over, "I no longer want the best for you. I want you to hurt like I hurt. I want revenge. I want payback. I want to see you fall on your face. I want to get even." That's the other side of anger that you have to worry about so that that doesn't sprout, so that that doesn't grow, we need to:

### **Attend to the wound ASAP.**

As soon as possible, we need to attend to the wound. It could be small. I could be really big. But don't just shove it down. Don't just pretend like it's not there and just try to move forward. It's telling you something. So, when it tells you something, here's the next move:

### **When do I need to go to them?**

When do I need to go to them? I'm angered. I've been hurt. When do I need to go to them? Because here's the other thing that we have to hold in friendship. We also need to have thick skin. We also need to know what we are walking through, and we just extend a general grace to people who hurt us.

Not everything needs to be addressed. Not everything needs to be talked out. Right? For example, you leave here today and say you're driving home, and someone cuts you off. Don't follow them home. He is going to start freaking out. You get all the way to his house, and you're like, "Hey, I know what you're thinking. I just wanted you to know that I forgive you. No, no, no. You cut me off back there. I just wanted you to know that you're going to need forgiveness from the court. Okay?"

Not everything needs to be addressed. Not everything needs to be worked out. Some stuff needs to be absorbed and just released. But if you do need to address it, here are some good ideas—just a framework of, "When do I need to have a conversation?"

### **When the sin is serious enough to strain the relationship with you or with others;**

And,

### **When there is a pattern of sinful behavior.**

Right? Like, “I can see that, and I can feel it ripping apart our relationship. I can see how it is ripping apart your relationship with others. So the loving thing that I’m going to do is I’m going to have a conversation.” And when you go:

### **GO TO THEM PRIVATELY**

Don’t include other people who have not been involved in the whole situation. And I will say this. Go to them privately when you can. I know that there are circumstances right now that the wise thing for you would not be for you to go to them privately, not meet with them alone. But I’m talking about, generally, if something happens, go to them privately. And then here’s the other one:

### **GO FIRST**

I’ve got a feeling that there are some people in our rooms today that, as we’ve been going you’ve been like, “I’ve forgiven them. But I’m not going first. I didn’t do anything wrong. I’ll be ready when they come. I’ll be ready when they come back to me.”

But the Bible is very clear, whether it’s something we did or something that was done to us, that’s enough for us to make the first move, not to wait. Because when we wait, whether that’s with us or with them or with both, there is a chance for the Devil to get his foot in. There is a chance for bitterness to grow. And when that happens that creates separation not between just you two but between them and others and ultimately between them and God.

So, when I feel a stirring in my spirit, I go first.

Then he’s going to continue here in Ephesians of how can we know that we really let go? What are some signs that we’re not just, you know, giving lip service saying, “I forgive you.”? What could we see to know that we’ve really let it go? Take a look at this. He says:

*“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

*“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” Ephesians 4:29-32 (ESV)*

So:

### **How do I know I haven’t let go?**

How do I know that I’m just pretending? I can see it up here. If I said that I forgive you but I’m still angry. If I say that I forgive you but I’m still slandering you. Like, “No, no, no. I forgive you.” But when someone talks to me about you I’m like, “Hey, I wouldn’t. I know

some things... I'm not going to say everything, but just know I would keep your distance from that one."

And then he takes it a step further. True forgiveness is not just that I don't hate you, it's not that I'm not enraged, and I'm don't want to hurt you, you can get to this place of being kind and tenderhearted.

So, maybe you've said, "No, I forgive them, but I will never be in the same space as them. I forgive them but I avoid them at all costs." I would push in on that. I think there is something there that you need to let go of.

So:

**Remember Accurately**

**Respond Accordingly**

and then,

**Release Always**

Release always. And this is a powerful one. Because I think as we're working through this, the fascinating thing to me is that, if you caught it, at the end of that last verse that we read in Ephesians where he says, did he tell you, do you see the tie? Why do you forgive them? Why are you kind to them? Why are you tenderhearted to them? Because you forgive them just as Christ our King has forgiven us.

Doesn't that sound like the same sentiment from the parable that we read in the beginning? Why should he have forgiven the guy? Because he was already forgiven. Why can we extend forgiveness and be kind to one another, even those who hurt us and inexcusable ways? Because we've been forgiven.

So I will say, if you get to that space and you're saying, "I still haven't let this go," I will tell you the only place to go is Brian McKnight. *Back at One, Baby. Back at One.* Yes. Remember.

There is something that is a disconnect there that is not allowing me to release this fully. I've released parts of it. I've done my best to will it and to say that I forgive, but there is still something there. You've got to release it. You've got to let it go.

And, like I said, it doesn't mean immediate trust. It doesn't even mean reconciliation. Forgiveness can happen right now, today, in this moment. It doesn't even need the other person. It's in your heart.

But I also know in rooms from where everyone is watching there are people going, "You don't get it. You don't understand where I'm coming from. You don't know what was done to me. You don't know the pain that I went through."

And I can stand here confidently and say, “I do not know.” And I’m sorry for what you went through. God is not okay with what happened to you. It’s not okay. And I’m sorry. And what I’m going to say next, I do not say flippantly, I do not say without compassion, but I say it in confidence just the same. What happened to you, that evil, does not begin to compare to the love that Jesus has for you.

What I can say is that holding onto that it’s almost like this false sense of power that you get to hold onto. But it’s hurting you. Forgiveness is not saying that what was done was okay. It’s saying that you are not going to be the one who is punished any longer for it.

I’ve heard it said that holding on to unforgiveness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. When we release it, we’re saying that we are no longer going to be the ones punished. We’re trusting God with what is going to happen. And I’m going to release that so that it protects me and so that there is no bitterness to come. And I’m going to make more and more room for Jesus.

And I just want to give you a few examples of what it looks like and the power that is behind the forgiveness of God.

You know, there was this guy, Joseph, in the Old Testament who had a heck of a life. Right? Born into a very blended family, same dad different moms. Some of us know the situation. And some of us know this situation where we’re pretty sure our parents had favorites some of the time. At least seasons like, “You definitely love her more, him more.”

There was no surprise here. Everyone knew their parents loved Joe more than the rest of them. Right? His brothers didn’t really care for this. So, they devised a plan and by plan I mean they decided to sell him into slavery. Okay. So this is a guy sold into slavery. And as he goes he becomes a slave for this guy who is well off.

And he’s doing his thing now. He’s doing the best that he can in the circumstances that he has and he’s getting a little bit more going for him, “Okay, things are starting to look up.” Only until he’s falsely accused of a crime he didn’t commit, and he’s thrown into jail—sold into slavery and sits in jail year after year after year.

Until, finally, God uses him. He interprets Pharaoh’s dream. He’s released from prison. He’s given this very high, prominent job to oversee all of Egypt. He’s doing very well for himself.

And then here came his brothers. They don’t even know it’s him. It’s been 20 years. And they never would have thought that the guy they sold into slavery would be running all of Egypt. But Joseph knows them. Joseph couldn’t forget their faces.

And they are coming in because there is a famine that had hit the land. And without the food that Egypt has all of them and all of their families are going to die. And Joseph is in this place, "What am I going to do? Am I going to forgive or am I going to get even?"

And in this moment Joseph has this beautiful line. He says:

*"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good..."* Genesis 50:20 (NIV)

Not that what happened to him was good.

But no matter the situation, we believe that God can rescue you from it and that there is hope on the other side of it.

And the next one I want to share with you is a little more recent, not 2,000 years ago. This was in 1999. There was a group of Christian missionaries, medical missionaries in India serving in a leper colony over there. It was a husband, wife, and their two kids one 10 and one six. And the husband and the boys are out when a mob comes, an anti-Christian mob comes and they kill the husband, and they kill both of the kids.

The next day the news makes its way to the wife. And this is her response. Take in consideration that it's the next day. It says:

*"Mrs. Staines shook with grief and, for a time, moved very slowly as if struggling to part her way through the air. She seemed to be impaled in the middle of a thought, which finally, with a quavering voice, she shared. 'Whoever did this, we will forgive them, she said...' That's the good news... that there is forgiveness for every sin through the vessel of Jesus Christ."*—Tim Keller

It's possible. Even the thing, the darkest thing, the thing that you don't want to mention, the thing that you have stuffed down so deep, the thing that you pretend didn't happen to you because you don't believe that there is anything good that can come from bringing it up, there is power in the name of Jesus.

Jesus was the only one who didn't need forgiveness. Jesus was the one who lived this perfect life for us. And Jesus is the perfect example of what it looks like to forgive people, even when they don't deserve it, especially when they don't deserve it.

Remember what Jesus said?

*"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."* Luke 23:34 (NLT)

And this wasn't when He was trying to teach them how to play Euchre. This is when He was dying on a cross with His last breaths. Choking on His own blood. He said: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

And in this great sacrifice, through that, because He chose to pay the penalty, because he erased our debt, now we have access to the Father. Now we are a part of this story

where we begin from a place of being forgiven and have been called and commanded to live accordingly.

We don't forgive because we're pretending. We don't forgive because it's the right thing to do. We forgive because it models the power of Jesus and because, "You are forgiven," are some of the most healing words. And there are people right now in your life who need to hear them.

I'm going to close with this one. I'll read it. It says:

*"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins." Matthew 6:14-15 (NLT)*

Now, I don't have time to unpack this. There are theological layers to this. People believe all kinds of things. But what I will say is that at its lowest level, it means that your relationship with God and your relationship with others are wrapped up together. We are one body. And it's all connected.

We can't say that we want forgiveness, we can't expect to receive forgiveness, if we're not extending that same forgiveness outward. It's not going to make its way through. It's going to make our relationships with others suffer and ultimately our relationship with God.

So what I want us to do right now is create a moment to reflect. This is a safe place. And I know as we've been working through today, as we've been talking about forgiveness, there are people on your mind right now that you are like, "I need to forgive them." And in the same thought, "I will never forgive them."

What we want to do right now is just create a space just to go through a guided time to reflect. Who is it who needs to hear: I forgive you? Who is it that you just need to say it to and get it off of your chest, to release that poison that bitterness from you? To truly get to the root of it so that you can make more room for love?

So we're going to have this moment of guided prayer and then we're going to close with this moment of communion. *Back at One* reminded us as to why and how we have the power and the ability and the calling to forgive those who have hurt us.

So just take a moment right now. Gather yourself. Close your eyes. Bow your head. And I'm just going to lead us through this moment. Go ahead and grab your elements for our communion as well.

What do you need to let go of? Who do you need to forgive? They may never hear these words, but you need to hear these words: I forgive you. It could be a spouse, an ex-spouse, it could be a parent, a child, a sibling, a family member, a friend, a business partner, a co-worker, a stranger.

Maybe you've been able to forgive everyone, but you can't forgive yourself. I just want to give you this moment right now to release it, to lay it down, to say I'm not carrying this out of here.

*Back at One.* The power. Our why.

*"As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, 'Take this and eat it, for this is my body.'"*

Take the bread that represents the body of Jesus that was broken as a sacrifice for us.

*"And he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. He gave it to them and said, 'Each of you drink from it, for this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many.'" Matthew 26:26-28 (NLT)*

Take the cup of juice that represents the blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins.

Father, we come to You and, God, I know so much probably got stirred up today. And at the same time I believe so much healing began today.

Father, I pray that this is just the beginning. I pray that we go from here and we continue to let that go. We continue to forgive those who hurt us. That we forgive those as You forgive us. God, give us the courage.

God, I pray that this becomes a safe place where people know that they can come in and they can be honest and they can share what was done to them and the pain that they've been through, the pain that they put themselves through sometimes.

And, God, that they would be met by Your people, and they would be met with hugs, and they would be met with an embrace, and they would be met with this: You are forgiven.

And, God, I pray that the better that we get at looking at You, the better we get at understanding the beginning of our story and all that You've forgiven us from, that, God, that would begin to shape the how and the length of which we are able to forgive.

Father, be with us. We love You. It's in Your Son's perfect name that we pray. Amen.