



Summer Family Reunion

Part 8 – The Path to Peace in Relationships

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A couple of summers ago, I was here, and I forgot to dress appropriately for church because we were coming here for this camp, so I had to run by Target. The only shirt they had that I could wear was a shirt with all these little martinis on it. So, Ted text me earlier this week and said, “Hey, we’re excited about you being here, make sure you wear that martini shirt. I do appreciate that this is one of the few churches that I feel like... You’ve got just the most wonderful, normal, extraordinary, accepting people that you would let the pastor wear a martini shirt. So, if you're just checking out this church... If it were me... I don’t live here, but if it were me, this is where I would go to church. And if you like the preaching, great. If you don’t like the preaching, come back because I’m not the normal guy anyway.

Today we are going to talk about two big ideas. I’m just going to give them to you up front then I have to tell you this little story of what I’ve experienced most recently. I want to talk about peace today and I want to talk about forgiveness today. We’re going to talk about how those two things work together. The place I have most recently had to learn about forgiveness is really what’s been happening in our own family as of last week. Last week was a big week for us. I’ll explain that in just a little bit.

This is a picture of our family – my wife, Jenny and... I am definitely in love with her and she’s in love with me most days. I’m not always easy to be married to. We have five kids. This school year, our oldest will go into ninth grade and our youngest will go into kindergarten. We’re really grateful for the life that God has given us. The one that’s missing in this picture is really where I’ve had to experience forgiveness – this guy right here (picture of dog).

This was our dog. His name is tater tot. It’s a family name. We love tater tot. I still love tater tot, but I have to tell you the story of how he came into our family and how he left our family. I wasn’t really a dog person. I didn’t think I was. I grew up with a basset hound who smelled terrible, therefore our house smelled terrible, therefore I couldn’t invite my friends over. That was pretty much the extent of my experience with dogs. How many of you are dog people? How many of you are cat people? This lady down there just said, NO!” In the first service, when I said how many of you are cat people, somebody over here started booing. Now I do love this woman’s conviction, but it made me think, who are the people in life that I’m like when someone says are you a that kind of person, I’m just like NO! I love that.

This is a quick story about our dog. I’ll try not to make this too long because it does have a lot of other parts to it. As of about two years ago, I resigned from my job. I was a pastor in Atlanta in a church that had multiple locations. About four years ago, they asked me to move locations. It really disturbed my

soul. I had all these questions. I was about to turn 40. I was going through a bunch of stuff in life. It really just threw me off; it messed me up. They asked me to move basically about the same distance from Springfield to Branson. It was a pretty big life change. Our kids were going to have to go to new schools, I was obviously going to work in a new place, my wife was going to have to get a new Target. It was a huge change for us.

I was nervous about telling our kids. My wife said, "I've got an idea. When you tell our kids, keep this in your back pocket (key words). She said, "Tell them we are moving and if they get sad, tell them but we're getting a dog." I was like, "That is a great idea. You are so brilliant." I gathered all the kids together, "Hey, I've got something I've got to tell you." Which that didn't alarm them, right? I said, "I've got some bad news and some good news. I'll start with the good news. The good news is we're getting a dog! And the bad news is we're moving." My wife comes over and pulls me aside and says, "I said back pocket. I didn't say lead with it."

A couple of months later, we ended up getting Tater tot, the dog. It didn't take us a long time to realize there was something off about this dog. It really didn't show up until about a year or year and a half into us owning him. He started getting more and more protective, which I took as love. I thought it was because he loves us. But where it really became a problem is when I got a phone call from a guy who was doing some yard work for us. His name is Ivan, a wonderful guy. Ivan and I have built a good relationship mostly because his dad, Norberto, doesn't speak any English and I don't speak a lot of Spanish, so I have a hard time communicating with Norberto.

So, Ivan calls me randomly... I knew they were laying some pine straw in our bushes or something. I'm trying to act like we're all rich and stuff, but I was having someone put pine straw on our pushes. He calls me and he says, "Mr. Clay, can I ask you a question? Has your dog been vaccinated?" This was during 2020, so my immediate thought was, "Jenny, has Tater tot had the jab? Are we doing this? Did I miss a memo? Did I miss where we're now giving dogs the Covid 19 Vaccine?" That was my first thought. And it took me a few minutes to realize, Oh, he's not asking about that vaccine, he's asking about rabies because he went on to say, "Your dog bit my dad and he drew blood."

This was bad. I profusely apologized and felt horrible about it. My wife was greatly disturbed. She was like, "We can't live like this. We have five kids, we've got a lot going on. It's already a circus, basically a zoo. We can't live worried about people coming to our house that our dog is going to bite them." I was like, "That's legitimate, but let's maybe see where this thing goes." About a week later, he bit an Amazon worker. My wife was like "I told you we can't live like this." Now, I'm actually thinking should we be ordering less on Amazon? We should certainly keep that on the table as an option. We shouldn't just throw that out immediately, but let's think through that. But this person was obviously very upset and was taking pictures of it and was like, you'll be hearing from my attorney...

We knew we had to do something about this. She had heard from a friend of a friend who had known somebody who was a 28-year-old gal moving to Atlanta and she was looking to rescue a dog. This one particular day, my wife goes to meet her. As she's going to meet her, my job is falling apart. I knew that the end was near, and it was making me really sad. Also, the symbolism of we got this dog to make this move that didn't end up working out and actually kind of was the beginning of the end. And now we're having to process giving this dog away. I was just a complete mess. She leaves to go meet the girl and she has Tater Tot with her.

She pulls back into the driveway and Tater Tot is not with her anymore. And I'm like oh no. She walks up to the front door, and she was like, "Well, she seemed really nice, and she was willing, so I gave her Tater Tot. I lost it. Not like in anger, but like in sadness. I was so sad. I'm not kidding you. I laid in the bed for three straight hours sobbing. I have never cried like that. I can't remember the last time I cried like that. My kids have certainly never seen me cry like that. I overheard them out in the hallway asking their mom, my wife, "Is dad okay." I'll never forget my wife saying to them, "He is not okay." But then she told them, "But it's not just about the dog; he has a lot of other stuff going on right now. " I'm thinking that doesn't make it any better.

Last week, we were serving at this camp in the middle of nowhere Alabama. It was a camp for men and women and kids who have disabilities. There was a girl who was serving at the camp as well. She comes up to my wife and says hello to her. Later on that day, my wife was like, "Do you know that girl over there?" I was like, "Never seen her before in my life." She was like, "She came and talked to me like I know her. She looks kind of familiar, but I don't ever remember meeting her. And then the next day it dawns on her, "Oh, my goodness, that's Tater Tot's new owner." We're serving at this camp together and we were together all last week. I was so excited. Because we had had all these fights about what kind of adoption we were going to have. My wife insisted on a closed adoption. She was like, "I don't want to meet these people, I don't want to track with them, I don't want to have a relationship with Tater Tot."

I wanted an open adoption. It wasn't my fault that the dog didn't work with us, or the dog didn't jive with us. I want to still see the dog. But we had had a closed adoption for two years until Melissa showed up at this camp. I had all these questions for her. I wanted to know. "Was it us? Were we just too much? Is Tater Tot a normal dog?" She starts laughing, "No, he is anything from normal. When my mom introduces him to other people, other people are like 'Oh, is it a Golden Doodle?' and she goes, 'No, it's a wackadoodle.'" I was like that is so perfect because that's what we thought. I'm telling you there was so much redemption in it. But let me tell you where the greatest amount of redemption was.

I have this really close friend of mine who we've been friends for 20 years. But during this season, I don't know why he felt the need to really challenge me on a lot of different things. I was not really feeling it, I wasn't really receiving it, I wasn't in a healthy place. In fact, he's like a real dog expert and so he told me during that season, "Well, you know there aren't bad dogs; there are just bad dog owners." We still had a relationship, but I was honestly upset about it, it bothered me. I was already carrying a lot of guilt and shame and brokenness and just didn't need that on top of it.

And it made me realize the past week after now being able to talk with him and laugh with him and tell him that he was wrong, that there evidently are dogs that need some special attention that a family of seven cannot give that dog. It has created a lot of opportunity for restoration, but it's really made me think a lot about bad blood. We all have bad blood in relationships. We all have the potential of bad blood in relationships. We're not the only ones that have experienced this. Every person in here has somebody that you either have a problem with or that has a problem with you. There's a broken relationship with somebody you haven't spoken with. bad blood is difficult because it's painful.

Today, I want to talk about that idea. I want to talk about what we do with those broken relationships in our life. Bad blood is costly and it's complicated, right? It hurts, it takes life away from us. And it's complicated. If you were to share your story, you would go, "You have no idea all that I've been

through.” “You have no idea what he’s done to me.” “You have no idea what she took from me.” “You can’t even begin to understand it.” You might be absolutely right for feeling that way, but I promise you that feeling that way is not what’s healthiest for you nor is it for me because bad blood is costly, it’s also complicated. It costs you peace and it complicates every other relationship in your life.

How many of you, whether in this room or outside today, would say, “I have somebody in my life that we have some bad blood and it’s affected my life, and it’s not even my situation. Maybe it’s something that a sibling has with your parents. Or maybe it’s something that a brother has with one of your sisters. Or maybe it’s something that some other business associates or business partners have, and their bad blood has affected your life. I’m telling you it costs peace, but it’s also extremely complicated.

The good news for us is that the path to peace is paved with empathy. This is not easy, and if we had more time, we would spend more time talking about what that means. I’ll give you a simple illustration for empathy. This is the way I feel about empathy. Right now, in England, in Liverpool, there is this big golf tournament happening. Is anybody tracking with it? Some of you are like, *Why would I be here if I was tracking with it.* And then some of you can’t wait to get home to watch it. And then some of you can’t wait to turn it on so you can take a wonderful nap while it’s on in the background. And then some of you couldn’t care less.

This is the way I like to think about empathy. When pro golfers putt... You know there’s the hole here and the ball here. They get behind it and they look at it and see... What are they looking at? What’s the contour of the ground? Which way is the grain growing? What is this putt going to do. The pro golfers do what the amateur golfers shouldn’t necessarily do. Not only do they take a look at it from the back side, but they walk all the way around... Some of you are like *this is usually when I take my best nap.* It’s slow and it’s long and you have to be patient. But they go all the way to this side and then they look at it from the front side to try to see if there is anything that they missed. Is there something they might be able to see from this side. That is what empathy is.

Empathy is taking this long walk around to see it from the other side. It doesn’t mean it’s right, it doesn’t mean it’s true, but you walk around and see it from the other person’s side, put it on, wear it, try it out, don’t judge it. You put it on and take it on as truth. It doesn’t mean it’s true, but wear it as truth and see what it does. Often times, you see something different, you feel something different. You’re so, “Oh, now I realize, now I understand. If I would have known that then, it would have made sense.” That’s the power of empathy. **If empathy is what paves the path of peace, forgiveness is the vehicle to move you down the path.** Forgiveness is the vehicle that gets us, that moves us toward peace.

And I know it’s not easy. I am aware of that. In fact, over the last couple of years, I’ve had to experience forgiveness more from other people and to other people than I ever have in my life. And before that, I had preached on forgiveness a bunch. In fact, let me ask you, What’s easier, forgiving someone or preaching on forgiveness? I promise you it is so much easier to preach on forgiveness than it is to actually forgive.

So, before we even get into Romans 12, which is where we’re going to be. We’re going to look at a couple of verses in Romans 12. I want to give you just a couple of things that forgiveness is not. Before

you already write me off, before you already think *oh there's no way I'm doing this. You don't get me. You're up there with your JV Preacher problems. I'm living in the real world with my varsity problems.*

Before you even go there, let's lay some groundwork. Here is what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not condoning. Forgiveness is not saying what the other person did was okay. Forgiveness is not saying what the other person did was right. Forgiveness is also not forgetting, right? You've heard that – Forgive and forget. For some of you, your pain is so deep, you'll never forget what was done to you. As silly as that story is, my friend telling me there are no bad dogs, just bad dog owners, I will never forget that he said that at a really painful, really difficult point in time for me. Forgiveness is not about forgetting, it's not about condoning.

And it's not about waiting for an apology. Forgiveness does not have to be predicated upon by an apology. For some of you, there is an opportunity for forgiveness, and you will never get an apology from the other person. The other person will never know all that they did. They will never wake up to the idea that they really hurt you. They will never own up to the idea that they really hurt you. Some of you have an opportunity to forgive someone who is not even alive. So, waiting on an apology... If that's the case, we are going to be waiting a long time. No, forgiveness is possible without condoning. Forgiveness is possible when we'll never forget. And it's certainly possible without an apology.

Let me flip it around. *“Unforgiveness is like drinking rat poison and waiting for the rat to die.”* Have you heard this quote? This is by an author named Ann Lamont. Forgiveness is ingesting rat poison but then staring at the rat wondering when it's going to die. Meanwhile, you're the one who has taken the poison. Unforgiveness is locking up a prisoner without realizing that the prisoner is you. Unforgiveness keeps someone locked up. It keeps you and I locked up. Unforgiveness is letting somebody live rent free in your head. That person that you have bad blood with, that person that you've got the problem with, the person that hurt you... Have you ever had an imaginary conversation about them? Have you ever had a hundred of them, right? Of course, you have. Therapists will call this rumination – when you just can't stop thinking about it. I know what I would love to say and one day I hope that I get to say it. and over and over again, you're just thinking about it all the time, and it's occupying space in your head and it's robbing you of peace because it costs us peace. And it's hard to be present with other people, it complicates every other relationship.

So, with that in mind, I want to look at Romans 12. It's not an answer, okay? It's not take two of these verses and then it will be solved. Some of you, your pain is so deep today might just be the beginning. Some of the pain that you're experiencing might be so real and so intense that today might just be God opening up our souls to the possibility of what might be. Because forgiveness ultimately is a process. It's hard to talk about forgiveness without quoting Taylor Swift who said *“Band-Aids don't fix bullet holes.”* This isn't covering it up, this isn't glossing it over. This is really helping us get to the root issue of what this is all about and it gives us something that we can actually do while we're in the middle of it.

Romans 12: 18 kind of gives us an overarching idea of what's possible in relationships. I love this first verse. ***18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.***

Why does the apostle Paul start by saying “If it is possible”? Because it might not be possible, right? I appreciate that he's opening us up to the idea that you might not be able to live at peace with everyone.

You know that. Some of you are going, *I don't know that I'll ever live at peace with that person.* Some of you know for sure. *I know I'll never do business with them again. I know they'll never live in my home again. I know I'll never donate money to them again.*

But what he's going to introduce us to is this idea that you might not be able to have peace in the relationship because that's not determined by you. How many does it take to tango? It takes two people to tango. It's a decision you've got to make and it's a decision the other person has to make as well to be able to have peace in the relationship. But, even when there's no peace in the relationship, it's possible for there to be peace about the relationship. You can have peace about it. You may never have peace in it, but you can always have peace about it if...I love this little phrase. As far as it depends on you. Would you be willing to do as much as depends on you? Would you be willing to go as far as you need to go, as far as you can go?

He says, ***"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*** The people that you love, the people that you want to love, the people that you have a hard time loving. Live at peace with everyone. And when we don't have peace, particularly when we've been hurt, our instinct is to do what he says in ***Romans 12: 19, 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends...*** I know you're going to want to take revenge. She hurt you. He took something from you. He makes you feel a certain kind of way, and you want to get revenge.

Now it's difficult to talk about revenge because revenge in this day I think more like the Hatfield's and McCoy's where revenge is like, "I'm going to capture your cattle." Or revenge is like a country song. "I'm going to take a baseball bat to your windshield." Thanks, Carry Underwood or Miranda Lambert – pick your favorite country singer. "I'm going to flatten your tires." "I'm going to go scrape the side of your car." "I'm going to wait for you outside with a shotgun." That's revenge in the real world.

Now y'all look like a very sophisticated, very lovely group of people that are not trying to get locked up in life. You're trying to keep your freedoms about you. And so revenge looks a little bit different for us. I think in 2023, revenge for most people is secretly celebrating someone else's demise. It's that internal celebration of someone else's misfortune. "Oh, did you hear? She just went through her third divorce. Oh no, I hate that." Don't act like you have never been on Facebook to go see what all your EX's are doing now. And don't act like I'm the only one that got excited to find out that there was something in their life that had gone wrong. We've all done that. And I think that's the modern-day revenge as we secretly celebrate someone else's misfortune. Obviously, that is wrong. Obviously, that is not what God wants for us. Obviously, the Apostle Paul is going, "Do not do that."

Do not take revenge my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath... I thought there would be cheering, celebrating. I'm not saying there should be, I just know some of us would go, "Okay, now we're talking." "God's wrath. What's he going to do. Strike them down, cause their favorite team to lose? What else could happen to them." Some of you may have prayed for that. You've prayed for the wrath of God to come down on that person. And it's understandable because of the way you feel. If we heard your story we'd be like, "I cannot believe it. that's sounds absolutely awful. But remember the words of the famous doctor during the day talk show host, Dr. Phil. What would he always ask people? "How's that working for you?" It might be right for you to feel that way, but it's not healthy for us to feel that way. Why? Why is it not healthy for us to desire God's wrath for someone? Because when we fail to forgive someone, when someone has taken something from us and we're keeping them locked up

in our minds, we're basically saying, "I am the judge. I sit on the judge's seat. I get to determine who did right and who did wrong, and I get to determine what the punishment is going to be." And he's telling us, "That is not your job." This is good news. It's hard for us but it's good news.

You have a Father in heaven who loves you so much that when someone hurts you, he says, "It is mine to fix, it is mine to pay them back, it's mine to punish them because you're my child, my son, my daughter." So, you could deduce that God sorts out the punishment. He sorts it out when we leave it to him. But if you don't leave it to him, if you're always cheering for their demise, if you're taking revenge into your own hands, you're boxing him out. In a sense, unforgiveness shuts God out, but forgiveness... This is on such a heart level – Forgiveness invites and allows God in. forgiveness says, "God, I'm hurting, but I trust that you are my defender, that you are my protector, that you are my provider, that you are the one that comes to my rescue. I'm trusting that with you. I'm not going to take that into my own hands because I'm not the judge, you're the judge."

A lot of people have a hard time with God sitting on the seat of the judge. I've found it easier the longer I've lived because there are so many things in life that I see, and I think *that is not right. That is wrong. Shouldn't someone do something about that?* Aren't you glad that God says, "That's my job. I'm the one who sorts out right from wrong. I'm the one who sorts out what the verdict is going to be. He says, **Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but allow room for God's wrath, for it is written...** This is Old Testament God right here. He says, **"It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.** Two big ideas here. One – It's mine to avenge. God is the one who says there are consequences to sin. When someone makes a decision that hurts someone else, there are consequences to that decision.

You know that phrase, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." That's a wonderful marketing line because we all know it and it makes us think about Vegas, but it's bogus. It's the dumbest life advice. Because what happens in Vegas doesn't stay in Vegas, not if you go to Reno, not if you go to L.A., not if you go to Branson. No, it follows you wherever you go because your decisions have consequences. Whatever you sow therefore you then shall reap. It's how God works. It's the way God has ordained life to work. And so when someone makes a decision that hurts someone else, there is hell to pay, but it is not your hell to give them. No, God is the one who says that decision has a consequence.

Now it is also interesting how we pray for God to have mercy for us and wrath for others. But that's a different topic for a different day.

The second part is he says not only is it God's job to dish out the consequences for the decisions, but it is also his to repay, so says the Lord. Repay what? I guess he's saying repay what was taken. It's God's job to repay what has been taken. That other person can't repay you. The eggs are scrambled, it's already been done, they've already taken life from you. Even if you try to make them pay, they cannot repay, God says, "But I can." You might not ever get it back the way you had it then, but I can replenish your soul, I can refuel your hope, I can restore your life." Only God can do that. And he says, "That's my job." So, when you forgive, it's ultimately an act of trust, saying God, I believe you are who you are. I believe you do what you say you're going to do.

When we continue to maintain this posture of unforgiveness, ultimately unforgiveness is a failure to believe what God says. Ultimately unforgiveness is failing to believe that God really will do what he says he'll do. Unforgiveness is failing to believe that God really can restore what he says he will restore.

Instead, he gives us a different activity, a different imperative. **20 On the contrary...** And this couldn't be more contrary. He says, **"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.** Don't try to pay it back. What's that phrase we learned in kindergarten? You kill them with kindness. I don't know that we want to kill anyone, nor should we wish someone to be killed, but there is something to that idea. Because how does God lead us to a place of repentance? Does anybody remember this? God leads people to repent through his kindness. It's his kindness that leads us to repentance, God says. That there is something about... We think it's revenge that leads people to repent. We think it's anger. We think it's vindication that leads people to repent. God says, no, his economy is upside down. His kingdom has different values, and it is his kindness that leads them to repent.

And I wonder if Paul's not going, *If it works for God, why wouldn't it work for you... that it's your kindness that will lead them to repentance.* Look what he says, , **"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."** Now this is complicated because this makes no sense to us in our day and age, but in this day and age when this was written, 2,000 years ago, there was a custom in this society where if you wronged someone, if you offended someone, if you did something you shouldn't have done to someone to hurt someone, you would carry a basket of burning coals on your head. It's the ashes you would walk around with to represent that you were contrite, that you were repentant. So, he's saying when you give somebody good, when you give them something that's kind, when you do for them instead of holding them to something, you're actually getting the process started, you're heaping the coals onto their head. You have a better chance of getting them to repent by doing good rather than trying to take revenge.

This is so foreign to us because it makes no sense. We think yeah but if I don't make them pay, who is? And God says, "That's my job. You just go and do good. You just go and be kind." Now I'm not saying you keep loaning him money. I'm not saying you let her live with you. I'm not saying you go into business with them. There is the book called *Boundaries* by Dr. Townsend and Dr. Cloud that has some fantastic advice about what we do in toxic and abusive relationships. Sometimes we have to learn to love from afar. Sometimes we have to learn that we can love through our lack of assistance. Sometimes we can actually love by not continuing to facilitate their behavior. Those are the more difficult situations. You need to invite a counselor into that. You need to invite a pastor into that. You need to invite some friends and family in on that because that gets really complicated. But for the most of us, when it comes to the things someone said, the things someone did, the 80% of the situations where we've been wronged and we've been hurt and we've been trying to figure out what to do, he says, "Don't take revenge. You forgive, you let it go, you cancel the debt."

Verse 21 says, **21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** The evil is the unforgiveness. Do not let their evil overcome you and cause you to be filled with the very thing that's going to break you, the very thing that's going to disrupt your soul. You know what those unresolved emotions that we have do when we just stuff them inside of us, when we just stuff unforgiveness inside of us, do you know what it ultimately does? It just goes away, right? No. *I read an author that said, "The unresolved emotions in us go into the basement of our souls and they lift weights and just grow."* Ultimately, they rob us of life, and they keep us from experiencing peace. So, don't be overcome by evil, but instead, overcome evil with good. Overcome evil by extending forgiveness. Overcome evil by extending kindness, extending a generous spirit, cheering for them, wishing good on them. He says it heaps coals on their heads; gets the process started quicker. You have a better chance at getting to

peace when you forgive. Ultimately, peace begins when our demand for payment ends. Peace begins when you decide you don't owe me anymore. I'm not sending you the letters anymore demanding payment. I'm not sending you the mental letters any more demanding your payment. Peace begins when the demand for payment ends. Peace begins when we say you don't owe me. I'm letting you off the hook, I'm canceling your debt.

Let me ask you today. Who is it? Who do you need to forgive? I know this is a heavy question. I know it's a hard question. Who do you need to forgive. Who's running around in your mind? Who's taking life from you? Who do you feel like you've locked up when, truthfully, you're the one that's the prisoner? Who is it?

Would you be willing to forgive the debt? Would you be willing to cancel the debt and say I trust that God can repay. If they deserve a consequence, God's going to be the one to decide that. If there is something that's been taken from me, they can't pay it back anyway. Only God can restore, so I'm going to forgive the debt.

Would you be willing to take the first step? I told you at the beginning that this was a process. I don't know where you are in the process, I don't know what the first step might be. The first step might be to write somebody. The first step might be to start praying for that person. The first step might be to pray that person experiences the wrath of God. I don't even think that's a terrible prayer. That might be as far as you can go today. I hope that God gets you to the point where you can pray, "God, I hope that you spare that person from your wrath, just like I hope you spare me. Just like through Jesus, you have spared me of your wrath. I think that's where God wants to get all of us. But what's your first step today? What can you do to take a first step to forgive the debt. If you're looking for peace, if you would be willing to say today *this has robbed peace from my life*, I just want to invite you to meet Jesus who said you and I didn't have peace. You didn't have peace, but Jesus gave up his life. He didn't passively let it go, he actively pursued it. And in the same way, you will never passively find what you do not actively pursue. You will never passively find what you do not actively pursue.

One of my favorite things that the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans says, While we were yet sinners. I like personalizing it. When I was just a sinner, Jesus died for me. When you were still a sinner, he died for you. He made the move, he forgave the debt, he canceled the demand for payment so that you could have peace with him. So, now he just invites us in and says go and do the same. Would you be willing to pursue peace at all costs? Whatever you think it might cost you, would you be willing to pursue it and trust that he's the one that pays you back, he's the one that restores, he's the one that can replenish.

Heavenly Father, thank you, thank you, thank you that you canceled our debt. We hadn't turned around, we hadn't apologized, we hadn't said we're sorry, and you died for us I pray we'll never get over that. So, in the same way, you just invite us... You did it in the Lord's Prayer. You said, "Would you be willing to pray like this?" Tell your Father in Heaven that we are going to forgive others as we have been forgiven. I ask you that that would mark us today, that you would give us the courage to go and do the same. I look forward to the day when all of us can tell a story about the way that you have provided peace for us as we've chosen to forgive.

We pray all of this in Jesus' name... Amen.