

# Forgiveness

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 08 August 2021

Preacher: Anselm Beach

[ 0 : 00 ] Hello everyone. So my name is Anselm Beach and I have been coming to the table now for a year and a half. A little over a year and a half, which is crazy because a lot of that has been virtual.

And so it's great to see everybody here in person today. I'm part of the preaching cohort, so that's a group of people who, some of them who are here in the audience today, and I'm sure you watch this on the camera as well, who decided we want to try to flex this muscle of looking into the scriptures, bringing out the message in there, and sharing that with you all in a way that inspires and encourages and challenges, but ultimately that leads us more to bring into practice the teaching of Jesus that we find there.

So this is my first time, I was telling Pastor Anthony this morning, this is my first time really speaking to a group in this context in over two years.

I used to be a minister. I'm going to share a little bit about that journey a little bit later today as we hang out and get to know each other a little more. I want to start by saying a prayer, because it's a last feeling, especially given the work that I had to do to inhabit the message that we are sharing today.

And so I'm going to say a prayer, and then we are going to go with this as best as we can. Father God, thank you so much for this opportunity to be here this morning.

[ 1 : 40 ] First Lord, I just want to pray for the peace that surpasses all this day of the day. This is a really difficult time right now, and there are a lot of people who are hurting, a lot of people who are without the help, the love, the compassion, the empathy that they need.

And I know that breaks your heart as much as it breaks ours here. So I pray for that supernatural sense of peace that we don't know where it comes from, how it comes from, but it does know.

And I pray for that for all of us here today, all of us here in the world, as a 10-year-old. I feel that myself, Lord, as I enter into the space to talk about forgiveness, especially in the context of race and justice.

I know that I've spent a lot of time kind of immersed in black pain, not just the pain that I feel when I see it, but also the pain that I have witnessed through my preparations and stories I'm going to share today.

I pray again for that peace as well and that you help me to represent that in these stories in a way that really honors the people, not just the trauma, but the people who've experienced that. God, I'm also very aware that I am a black man in public space about to talk about race, for all to hear, less than a mile away from where just a few months ago, you know, white supremacy and racism reared its ugly head.

[ 3 : 15 ] And I know that that puts me in a position that is not always comfortable. I pray for your love, your passion, your protection here as I dig into this, and that you really help people to hear the messages in the park at the center of the gospel, that forgiveness is something that is available for everyone who is ready for it.

So thank you for hearing this prayer. And I pray that it's all in Jesus' name. Amen. Okay, so we're going to roll with this as best as we can.

So I first wanted to just give a quick land acknowledgement and acknowledge that the land that we are on right now is ancestral territory that belonged to the Anacostan people and the Piscataway people.

So we want to make sure that we acknowledge that and that we acknowledge that we're drawing a lot of our experience here today from the people on Piscataway land. Who all here, just by show of hands, know who Botham Jean is? Botham Jean.

Okay. I'm going to tell you a little bit about Botham. So Botham graduated from Hardin University in Searcy, Arkansas, which is about 35 minutes away from where I grew up in Jacksonville, Arkansas. And I was born a few years before Botham, so I was long gone by the time that he got there and we had a chance to meet.

[ 4 : 36 ] But that didn't keep me from feeling some sort of kinship with him. For one, Hardin University is affiliated with the Churches of Christ, which is the denomination that grew out of the Stone Campbell movement of the 1830s.

I was once part of a church that grew out of the Stone Campbell movement of the 1830s. So see, kinship. There we go. But far more than that, we both sang a cappella in college. He led worship service at chapel. I led worship at our campus ministry conferences. And thanks to the Stone Campbell movement of the 1830s, we probably sang a lot of the same hymns. So there we go.

There's also the Caribbean connection. His parents are from St. Lucia. Mine are from St. Vincent in Cuba by way of Jamaica. So my Caribbean folks out there, I feel y'all. Let's share that connection. My dad is actually here in the audience today. So I draw a lot of inspiration from here as well. So being of Caribbean descent also mentioned that we are both big black men.

[ 5 : 34 ] Let me tell you something. That BBM connection is strong. Okay? Especially when shared by folks who have to navigate predominantly white spaces, as both them and I had to do.

It's even stronger when it plays a role as it has time and time again in the fate that ultimately befell both them. You see both them was working as an accountant at Pricewaterhouse Cooper in Dallas, Texas, when he was shot and killed in his own apartment by an off duty police officer named Amber Geiger.

According to her testimony, accidentally wound up on the wrong floor entering an apartment that was clearly not hers, believing it to be hers. And when she saw a big black man alarmed at the intruder in his apartment, she saw what hundreds of years of racism and a racist history and racist society conditions were to see.

Not a human, but a threat to be neutralized. You know, if you note where things come out of the ensuing trial. One is that there was a trial in the first place.

The fact that she was fired and eventually invited for a murder is surprisingly rare among police officers who kill, especially if the victim is black. But even more surprising that Geiger was ultimately convicted of both them's murder and sentenced to 10 years in prison.

[ 6 : 58 ] Now, I have my own thoughts about, you know, prison time, equating justice. That's another open time to talk about that later. But perhaps what was most noteworthy about the court proceedings occurred when both his family was the opportunity to give a victim impact statement after Geiger was sentenced.

And I think that's a good thing. Because both them's 18 year old brother, Grant, shared the following words to Amber. He said, I don't want to say twice or even a hundred times how much you take from us.

I think you know that. But I think, I mean, I hope that you go to God with all the guilt, all the bad things you may have done in the past. If you are truly sorry, I know I can speak for myself. I forgive you. And I know if you go to God and ask him, he will forgive you. I want the best for you. Because I know that's exactly what both of them would want you to do.

Grant then turns to the judge. And he says, and I'll never forget, he says, you know, I don't know if this is possible, but can I give her a hug? Please, please.

[ 8 : 09 ] Please. The judge allowed him. And he hugged her. He hugged the woman who killed his older brother as she wept in his arms.

Now, depending on who you are, it may or may not come as a shock to you that Grant's gesture was extremely polarizing. Right? Many people, mostly white, including pastors who were, you know, late on their writing their sermon that Sunday, propped up Grant as the symbol of the healing power of black forgiveness.

Other people, mostly black, felt that Grant's gesture was unearned, was unearned, and that it let a system of police brutality fueled by the criminalization of black men in particular off the hook. Off the hook. I'll be honest with you. I don't know how I feel about that myself. I'm still trying to figure that out. But I will tell you the one thing, I'll be very honest with you. I didn't want to preach this sermon today.

Because, you know, when I saw forgiveness amongst the topics of, you know, within our race and justice series, I was like, please, God, not that one. Reparations? I could talk all about that one. But forgiveness, I have very complex feelings when it comes to the context or the concept of forgiveness, especially in Christian spaces.

[ 9 : 26 ] Because I feel like forgiveness, like many other concepts like humility, sacrifice, patience, are often used to protect oppressive and toxic people instead of the people they oppress.

The people who Jesus is all about protecting. Exhortations to forgive that shielded abusers from being held accountable for their actions and cover them to continue their abusive behavior.

I mean, just look to, there's a recent scandal going on with the global, international megaturch right now that you can feel free to Google later. Just, not what I'm talking about. Feel free to Google it later to know that this is exactly what happens over and over again.

You know, meanwhile, that forgiveness that's demanded of the powerless among them is rarely extended to the disempowered within these communities, especially when they fall short of the very standards that the powerful set and then fail to meet themselves.

And this is especially true regarding the history of racism, white supremacy, and colonization in this country. I personally think that part of the misapplication of forgiveness here has to do with the fact that you lost the idea of what forgiveness really is, what it entails.

[ 10 : 42 ] For many people, forgiveness is, it's a destination, right? It's a point to arrive at. That like everything else in our society, we rush to as quickly as we can so we can move on to the very next thing.

We often use words like excuse or pardon or forget about to signify forgiveness of the wrongs done to us. And I think that in that we do ourselves and the people who wrong us a real disservice.

So what then is forgiveness? I can tell you now that after reading about 20 different journal articles, I kid you not, listening to a few podcasts, I can confidently stand before you saying that forgiveness is I have no idea.

I have no idea. There are so many different like thoughts about it. And for me there's like so many different definitions. I really do feel like it's one of those things and those are the very 20, 21 thing to say that it really just depends on who you are.

But one thing I can say is that when I saw that forgiveness was treated more like a journey than a destination, it seems to have major transformational power for both the wronged and the wrongdoing.

[ 11 : 50 ] And it can be a force of justice in the world that is so often unjust. I believe that there is much for us to learn about this kind of forgiveness from the teachings of Jesus and the actions of Jesus that are recorded in the New Testament.

Namely, that God's position towards us has always been one of forgiveness for those who seek it. You have always been forgiven.

You've always been forgiven. You know, Jesus spoke of God as a father waiting for his lost son to return. A son that he welcomed with open arms the moment that he came home.

If you go back and read that parable, when Jesus, or sorry, when the father, you can look to see when did the father develop these feelings towards his son, right? He always had them.

He always had them. It doesn't say when he developed those feelings. It says that he always had them. So when the son came to his senses and realized his wrongdoing, he was able to return and experience the forgiveness that had always been there.

[ 12 : 55 ] You have always been forgiven. When a woman broke an expensive jar of perfume to anoint Jesus' feet, and then Jesus put her on blast by saying her many sins have been forgiven.

I'm like, come on, Jesus. You don't have to put all my business up in the street like that. Come on.

Anyway, he said, her many sins are forgiven. Was Jesus actively forgiving her in that moment?

Or was he simply stating a truth that was always there, that was realized within that moment?

Something that I literally realized this morning as I was looking over the scripture that I never noticed about it before was that if you look back at this passage in Luke chapter 7, it says that, let's see here, it says that he tells her before, or he says to the hope, before he says to her, your sins are forgiven, but it was because of her sins had been forgiven that she did this act.

He then turns to her and says, your sins have been forgiven. And she goes on about her day. That forgiveness had always been there, and her recognition of that led to this bold and desperate act of love towards God.

You have always been forgiven. That's the conclusion I came to you from looking at the scriptures here today. And I'm not here to talk to you today about the mechanisms of how that we have that forgiveness or, you know, and I thought about all the different texts that might make us feel otherwise.

[ 14 : 25 ] I'm happy to talk about those later. But what I will talk about is how this affirmation that we have always been forgiven empowers us to do two things that I believe are necessary if we hope to revert the tide of racism, white supremacy, and colonization in the church, in our country, and in the world.

And the first of these things is that this state of forgiveness empowers us to forgive ourselves. All right. So this first point right here is for anybody else out here in the audience listening to us here online, on the internet, the interwebs.

This point is for those of you who may have been, sorry, may have harbored racist or white supremacist thoughts, or who have actively or through their inaction participated in racism and white supremacy, whether you are ready to admit that or not.

And that's not just white people, as I will say here, but it's also a lot of white people. I'm just going to say that. Put that out there. We talked about confession last week and, you know, lamenting and all that kind of stuff. So we're going to get a lot more of that here today as well.

Because I believe that one of the greatest hindrances to actually seeing the justice when it comes to racism that we are really longing for is the fact that there are a lot of people, again, a lot of white people, who are unwilling to acknowledge their role in racism and in whiteness and how it plays out and continues to play out in the harming of black, brown, and native people.

[ 16 : 04 ] Right. We are currently, currently there are 28 states that have either enacted or are trying to enact legislation to ban just the use, not even the teaching, but the use of critical race theory in the instruction of children.

Again, because of this fact that like this great sin that our country has never really repented of or we never really tried to prepare or ask for forgiveness for or even try to get that forgiveness.

Like this comes from this absolute denial of the fact that these historical events have existed. Right. Like we think about like after the reconstruction period, which is a time, a legitimate time of growth within the black community that had been enslaved for many, many, many generations.

A lot of growth took place. And what happened as soon as the powers changed and as soon as like the, you know, the, the, you know, the, uh, very more progressive government changed into a more conservative government at that time, at least.

[ 17 : 11 ] And it was, it was, it was different parties at that time. Right. There was a huge uprising, this huge backlash of, uh, of white people who simply just because they saw black success, consider that success a threat to the security that they found in whiteness.

And so we have a history of redlining that has led to, uh, uh, uh, entire community of, of black people not being able to have, uh, access to, uh, housing and the wealth that comes from that.

And so today, I mean, we've talked about this before. Many of you may have the benefits of wealth from either yourselves or from parents or whatnot that has resulted directly from government policies that excluded black, mostly black, but also black and brown people from getting access to that wealth.

Now we're fighting a battle against voter suppression that we haven't seen in 50 years, really. This battle to suppress the votes of the poor, of the weak, the black and the brown among us, simply because of people who believed their votes will take away the security again that we find within whiteness.

And all of this is because there are so many people who are unwilling to acknowledge not just the history, but their own complicity in systems of racism and white supremacy that have led to these things.

[ 18 : 47 ] You know, I completely understand this. I get it. Nobody wants to feel like a bad person. And there are a lot of horrific things that have happened due to racism and white supremacy in this country.

A lot of things that would break our hearts. And, you know, given the kind of the air of retributive justice within our country, makes a lot of people feel that if we acknowledge this, if we give black people a little bit of an inch, they're going to like rise up and do exactly to us what we've been for hundreds of years.

And we've seen time and time again, that's not what happens. That's not what happens. But when we live in a state of unforgiveness without recognizing the fact that the moment that we acknowledge that we have that forgiveness, we can receive that and feel that, there are a lot of people who need to live within this delusion that, again, their security is threatened by the gain, by the love, by the protection of those who most need it.

As I said, I get it. I understand. The most defensive person I've ever met is the guy that I meet in the mirror every time I look at it. And that's me. I'm an extremely defensive person. You know, I have this image and idea of myself in my mind that like is at one side, it's kind of like, you know, based on a lot of things that happened to me throughout my life.

I have like this kind of low self image of myself, but I also think extremely highly of myself at the same time. Right. And so anything that confirms the kind of low self image that I have of myself, I very much like I bristle.

[ 20 : 24 ] I try to fight against it as much as I can because I don't want to I don't want the feelings that I feel deeply inside of myself to be confirmed. Right. So I can be very defensive when it comes to that because I want to hold on to that image. Right.

But I think that like I've had to do a lot of work recently to look back at my own, you know, compliance with systems of power that have taken advantage of people who most needed protection, most needed love and support.

So I mentioned earlier that I was a minister for a for a church a while ago. And I think that, you know, I'm not shocking anybody. I think a lot of people here at the table, you know, are here because they come from religious circumstances where they were very oppressive, that were inequitable, that favored the power, the powerful.

They favored white men over pretty much everybody else. A lot of us are coming here to this place from there. And I was coming from that place where I experienced that, where I also was a perpetrator and perpetuator of that myself.

You know, I, given the power and the status, the recognition, the acclaim that for me affirmed the positive feelings that I have about myself, the good feeling that I had about that.

[ 21 : 48 ] I wanted to protect that at all costs. You know, I grew up as somebody who was teased a lot. I grew up as somebody who had wonderful parents who are now both here today.

My mom is here. She just joined us today. You know, who told me from the beginning, you're going to change the world. And then I grew up with that and I came to come at this basis and like, here I am with this opportunity.

I was speaking before people. People are like, yeah, Ansel, you're awesome. You're a great singer. You're a great preacher. Yeah. I wanted to protect that at all costs. Unfortunately, that led to me sometimes silencing the people who most needed my protection in order to preserve that power, that status, and that acclaim that I needed so much.

There were times when I, as the black minister within a, you know, an ethnically diverse church with one of the very few black ministers on the staff, was asked to speak to black members of the congregation that I didn't even know, that weren't even in the ministry that I was a part of.

But I was asked to speak to them because they were doing things that were a little too, you know, uncomfortable for like the mostly white men who were leading at that time. And at that moment, I felt, I was like, I knew this is not good.

[ 23 : 04 ] I don't feel good about this. But, you know, you've all been there before. Many of us can understand this loop here. I was like, but maybe, you know, the heart is deceitful above all things.

Maybe I just need to be humble. Maybe they're seeing something that I'm not seeing. And also, I don't want to lose my job. So, I'm going to do this. And I participated, again, in the silencing of people who were expressing that the current circumstance that they were in was not helping them, was actually harming them, was not protecting the power from the weak, the very people of the gospel.

Jesus literally said, I'm here to preach to the poor. I'm here to set free the oppressed. I'm here to feed the hungry. Like, all of those people, I had become a part of the system as a black man, as somebody who, I didn't even realize it, was experiencing some of that very same, you know, what's the word for the quote?

The very same exploitation is a very strong word that's the first word that's coming to my mind right now. So, thank you, spirit. But, yeah, I mean, I was experiencing some of that myself. I also became a perpetrator of that. But I had to really grapple with that.

I've had to really grapple with that. Like, in the three or so years since I was in this position, I've had to really sit with a lot of very difficult feelings, feelings that kept me up at night, feelings that led me to really seek out the people who I harmed in those moments and to acknowledge to them, let them know, I acknowledge what I did.

[ 24 : 31 ] I didn't in the moment. I didn't listen to you in the moment. And I'm sorry. And it turned me into somebody who I think really stood up against these structures of power and oppression that can really exist within church spaces, especially for people who are marginalized.

I think that what really helped me to make that jump was realizing that this is a part of my story. This is a part of my whole story of how my life and my experience folds into the work that God has always been doing through the people who join in with that work.

And that's the liberation of those who are oppressed and who are weak and who are poor from the systems and the structures, the principalities and the rulers and the authorities, according to Ephesians 6, that oppress them.

It's a story that I will tell you here today. And this preaching right here, this message, is an act of me resisting against and ultimately trying to undo the harm I caused by learning how to apply the Scriptures in a way that doesn't oppress, that's not used to make my job easier or the right man above me job easier, but that really speaks words of encouragement and love and patience to the people who need it the most.

You know, it's at this moment in mind of the Scripture from James chapter 4. Verse 8, it says, Come near to God, and God will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

[ 26 : 03 ] Breathe, mourn, and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. It's a complete reversal. I think Psalm 32, actually, where it says, You turn my mourning into joy and laughter.

That's a complete reversal there. Bible notes, though. Anyway, humble yourselves before the Lord, and the Lord will lift you up. You know, that's the scariest part, that mourning, that grieving.

Those are uncomfortable feelings that we do not want to sit in. But I'm convinced, new glasses, I'm convinced that as part of the forgiveness, of acknowledging the forgiveness that we've always had, we have to be willing to acknowledge the hurt, the weight of the sins, whether we know it or not, and our own, you know, simplicity within these systems of oppression.

We have to acknowledge that. And those are very uncomfortable feelings. There's a promise here in the Scripture that if you do that, God will lift you up. I don't just mean to exalt you to go back to this, you know, whatever power system or, you know, level of power that is what you had before. But, like, I imagine, like, my head's down. I'm crying. And God's looking at my head and saying, you've been forgiven. Now live like that. Live as though you've been forgiven. You know, I'm reminded of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

[ 27 : 22 ] He shared his own story. He said, I am the least of the apostles. And do not even deserve to be called an apostle. Because I persecuted the church. But by the grace of God, I am what I am.

And God's grace to me was not without effect. No. I worked harder than all of them. He's getting a little boister there, you know, saying, but, you know, it's Paul. Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.

Okay, thanks, Paul. You saved it there. Awesome. Give credit to God. Amen. But, no, Paul speaks of how consistently empowering it was to acknowledge, who he used to be.

And how, when he recognized that that forgiveness was always there for him, how much God had forgiven him. It didn't sit there. He may have sat with the feelings of hurt and a pain and a shame. I mean, we have no idea what he was thinking about during the three days when he sat there blind. But it was probably the best that he had ever seen in his entire life, if you know what I mean. But, you know, we know that after that moment, he was motivated to do even more of their work.

[ 28 : 24 ] But, of spreading this message of liberation, of inclusion for all people that he, all the people that he preached to. I'm not saying that he didn't go back to some of those moments and read some of the other letters.

You can tell he wrestled a lot with the hurt that he caused, with the lives that he destroyed, with the people who literally lost their lives because of his religious zeal. But there's a promise here in the scripture that, like, if you, and a promise that I believe is played out in human experience.

And when you acknowledge that and you allow that to spur you on towards undoing that work, towards joining in God's work, it's a very empowering experience.

You know, for those of you out here who might be sitting with that, who may be wrestling with that for yourself, and I really, really do encourage you to do that. You know, I must be very frankly here to the white people out here in the audience, and also to anybody who, you know, has been complicit as I gave in my example here, you do have, you have played a role in the oppression and the impact that that's had on the marginalized people here.

You have, we've talked about it in the other weeks here, I'm not going to go deeply into that. But I really encourage you to look into that, to allow yourself to feel the discomfort of that and to recognize that you have to, and you can, forgive yourself.

[ 29 : 46 ] And that by doing that, you can be a force of justice and liberation here in the world. Read Psalm 51. Take a look at that. That's the song that David wrote after his, he realized, not just that he had, like, you know, killed some dude's wife because he got her pregnant.

The Bible's crazy. Game of Thrones ain't got nothing on David. I'm telling you that, right? First Samuel, second Samuel, read it. But, no, I mean, it wasn't just that. He used his power and his influence as a wealthy person of power to take advantage of those beneath him.

You know? And that was a horrible thing. He would have been me too'd so hard today. Though maybe not because some people have. But, you know, I'm not going to get political here, right? But, you know, when you read what he wrote after realizing that, after sitting in that discomfort, it's a journey that takes him from feeling super sorrowful to feeling like I'm a worm, I've been sinful since I was born, like, expressing it so vividly to ultimately finding hope and trust and ultimately being spurred on towards deeds of love and restoration.

So, yeah. I want to go back real quick before I move on to the second thing. This is just the first thing here. Thank you so much for your patience. Before I move on to the second thing here, I want to go back to the story of Amber Geiger, right?

[ 31 : 13 ] So, after she was sentenced, and she's getting part of the way to go to prison, she had an opportunity to speak with the judge, Judge Tammy Kemp. Judge Tammy Kemp is a black woman who sat on the side of her room with this and was the one who handed out the sentence in here.

So, the judge came up to Amber and said to her, as she has done to many, she mentioned this in her interview, she's done this to many, many defendants in African court proceedings.

She went up to her and she said to her, listen, you need to forgive yourself so that you can live a life of purpose. Amber said to her, do you really think that my life would be purposeful?

She said, yes, absolutely. But you've got to forgive yourself. You know, I don't know, I mean, I'm going to share a little bit more about this story after this, because this story is twists and turns. I definitely, you know, advise you or, you know, recommend that you look it up.

But all I know is that this judge had hope for this person here, and we can all have hope for ourselves that, you know, once we forgive ourselves, we can live lives of purpose.

[ 32 : 20 ] So, I talked about how the first thing that this affirmation of, you have always been forgiven, does that, empowers us to forgive ourselves. But it also empowers us to forgive others, right?

Now, this one, this point right here, is for those of us who have experienced racism and white supremacy, either directly or vicariously through those within our racial group, through what those who have experienced, right?

And that's for all of us here, that's for all of you there. Like, for those of you who have felt that, this one's for you. Now, I want to be very clear. For any of you guys who are worried about me coming up here and saying to you, hey, I'm black, you need to forgive, like, white people and racism and all kinds of stuff.

Hold on, I'm not going in that direction at all, right? Because I think that there are two levels to forgiveness when it comes to forgiving others, especially, especially for the sin of white supremacy and racism, right?

Because there's first a level of a need for primary forgiveness. The act has actually been committed against the individual and the people connected to that individual, right?

[ 33 : 25 ] So, you know, the family of George Floyd, for example, they have a level of forgiveness that is very different from the black people who saw themselves in the man lying on the ground when they saw him there, right?

So, someone like me who saw that and felt the hurt, the pain, and the anger at the injustice of that moment, like, there's a different level of forgiveness that I have experiencing that secondarily to the primary person, to his daughter, to his girlfriend, to his family members and friends and people that he knew in the community who saw that.

It's a different process. It's a different journey. And that's why I don't believe that there's this, you know, this one formula for how people forgive. It's something that people need to be given the space to do.

However, when it comes to racism and white supremacy, so much more is asked for and demanded of black people than any other group, I believe, than any other group.

I say black people and native people, than any other group, I believe, within this country. Because black people are the few people among the only people where people actually expect them to give these, you know, statements of forgiveness for the individuals who have harmed them and the people who they love.

[ 34 : 48 ] Nobody is asked to carry that love more than especially the black people who feel that, you know. I want to read a quote to you from Roxane Gay.

She wrote this op-ed in the New York Times shortly after the murder of the nine people within the Charleston, South Carolina church.

You know, this is, again, one of those moments where I was reading about the details and it absolutely broke my heart. This man sat with them for an hour, listened to their Bible study, participated, and then literally just stood up and said, I'm going to give you guys something to pray about or something to pray about before you then went through and shot and killed nine people. And I know it's hard, like, we appear to be encouraged and inspired and lifted up, but we have to sit with uncomfortable feelings sometimes. So we have to sit with the same pain that, you know, that I felt with. Knowing that, you know, many of you might not feel that same exact pain, but it's important to bear that here.

It was very, very hard to go back into that. What's amazing about the story is that two days after the event, some families were being interviewed, families of some of the victims there.

[ 36 : 06 ] And they shared about how they forgave the 21-year-old white supremacist, whose name I'm not going to mention here. They forgave him for what they did two days later.

And again, it was one of those polarizing things. It's a lot of white reporters and correspondents. It's like, oh my gosh, look at the power of the forgiveness here, the healing power. This can really overcome racism here and black people and all that kind of stuff.

And there are a lot of people who are still feeling and reeling from the terror from the core of that pain. We're like, this is, you know, hey, I respect you for whatever process you have to go through, but we got to talk about the fact that people expect this from, they expect this from black people. And it is problematic. She said in this quote, Roxanne Gay, she said in this quote, what white people are really asking for when they demand forgiveness from a traumatized community is absolution.

We're trying to get what we talked about in the first point, right? That forgiveness without real forgiveness. They want absolution from the racism that infects us all, even though forgiveness cannot reconcile America's racist sins.

[ 37 : 10 ] They want absolution from their silence in the face of all manner of racism, great and small. They want to believe it is possible to heal from such profound and malingering trauma because to face the openness of the wounds racism has created in our society is too much.

I, for one, am done forgiving. I want to read another quote from Stacey Papp, who wrote an op-ed shortly after this as well in the Washington Post. She says black pain is only heard after forgiveness is afforded to these white perpetrators.

Black rage is challenged as inappropriate and unhelpful, while the media and others celebrate the traumatized family members' ability to respond to this latest heinous crime with compassion and love.

When black forgiveness is the means for white atonement, it enables white denial about the harms that racist violence creates. When black redemption of white America is prioritized over justice and accountability, there is no chance of truth and reconciliation.

It trivializes real black suffering, grief, and the heavy lifting required for any possibility of societal progress. I just wrote a lot there.

[ 38 : 30 ] I'm going to encourage you to go look these up and read these words for yourself. But these two quotes, I think, share exactly what's at the heart of this point. Yes, we have all been forgiven.

And the goal, the hope, is that we can come to a place for our own well-being, and maybe for nothing more, for our own well-being, of being able to forgive.

I think to ask that forgiveness to be absolution, to be excusing, to be able to say, you know, essentially what I believe that I have felt many times, I've seen Lisa, oh, it's okay for what you did to my family.

I forgive you, right? Like, I'm not saying that that's what those families are saying. I'm saying that is how a lot of white people view when black people offer those feelings, those sentiments of forgiveness.

I jokingly said that, like, you know, white pastors say, oh, man, I've got to write this down for my sermon. I got it. Like, you love Jesus. And, you know, the suffering and the trauma of this black family here, perfect, awesome, great.

[ 39 : 31 ] But that does a really true disservice to the pain of the people who are going through it. And it does not allow them to be fully human, to really sit with the emotions, to express the rage, the hurt, and the pain of that experience.

You know, again, this is a sermon, a Christian sermon, so I do want to take it to this scripture here because I want to dissect a passage that is oftentimes used and utilized, again, at the top, utilized to convince the oppressed people to forgive and to continue to excuse the acts of those who are oppressing them.

Because I think that within it, I think that a real look at this in the context of what it was written might actually expose the power of forgiveness and when it's appropriate to offer it and when it's actually appropriate to not offer that forgiveness.

It's in chapter 18. In the interest of time, I'm just going to summarize this story here, right? You know, Peter says to Jesus, Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me?

Up to seven times. And of course, Jesus says, no, 77 times. Or in some translation, seven times, seven times. You know, sorry, 70 times, seven times, right? Jesus goes on to tell a story about a servant who owed this man, this king, far more money than he would ever be able to pay.

[ 40 : 54 ] The king was like, all right, it's time to come collect my debt here. And the servant was like, please be patient. I'll mercy on you. I'll pay you. The king was so moved by the servant's plea for debt forgiveness that he canceled the debt.

You know, the servant then goes on and finds somebody who owed him a very small amount of money, a fellow servant of his. We'll come back later. A fellow servant of his. He says, hey, you owe me this money.

Pay me back. The guy literally says the same exact words. He says, please be patient. Forgive me. I'll pay you back. And the servant's like, no. And throws him into jail to be beaten for not paying off this debt, right?

Some other servants see this, and they tell the king, yeah, yo, king, that guy you forgave, he just mistreated this other servant. And of course, the king goes back and says, hey, you wicked, unmerciful servant, I forgave you, and I'm going to throw you in jail because you and your family in jail because you didn't pay me back, right?

Of course, the message here is that, like, this is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart. You don't want to dissect this because this parable is doing a lot.

[ 42 : 04 ] First, Jesus says that we're supposed to always forgive those who sinned against you. Anytime that, you know, someone wrongs us, we are to forgive them 77 times, right? The 78th time, you know, I'm going to put that up.

But then he goes on to tell a story that seems to suggest that if we don't do that, God will remove the forgiveness he has for us, which kind of goes against the message that we should always be forgiven.

Like, what in the world is going on here, right? You know, I think all of this is clear when you look at the context in which this parable is being told. Because this chapter begins with a conversation about who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

You know, Jesus takes a child, literally the most vulnerable demographic at that time, takes a child and says, this is the greatest among you. If you treat the most lowliest, the most oppressed, the weakest among you, as though they are the greatest, then you yourself will also be the greatest. Why don't you stop and imagine what the world would be like if we treated people, the most vulnerable among us, as though they were the greatest in all of our country, community, church, gym, whatever.

[ 43 : 15 ] Like, imagine the society that would bring back, right? The change there. It's amazing. But in that context, Jesus then goes on to say that if you don't treat these people with love and the dignity that they deserve, and if you go on to act in ways that harm them or that cause them to stumble, he gives very, very vivid imagery about what it would be better for you to do than to be caught doing that.

See, this whole passage is about protecting, about how in the community that Jesus is aiming to build here, that whole passage is about how we need to protect the vulnerable, all right? How we need to give special praise, pride of place, the same exact way that God has always done through the Scriptures. If you look at it, God has always sided with the weak, the vulnerable, the oppressed, you know, the downtrodden within the society.

God has always done that, right? And so Jesus is saying here that, like, that's what needs to be, that's what needs to continue here. Everything that happens within this community needs to be for the protection of the least among us, because if we protect the least among us, then all of us will be protected, right?

So we go back into this parable where Jesus is talking about this guy who owed a ton of money and was forgiven. Despite the fact that he was forgiven of all of his debt, who did this man go to eat, you know, meet out his anger against?

[ 44 : 41 ] A fellow oppressed person. A fellow servant or slave within his community who was also a victim of predatory lending from a king that would lend, that would willingly lend these people money that he knows they couldn't pay back.

He went to another marginalized and vulnerable person here. When Jesus tells us, he says, uh-uh, that kind of behavior does not belong here. Because there is a way where we can, quote-unquote, forgive people that disadvantages, that harms, and continues to marginalize those who are marginalized among us.

And when it comes to that, you have a license to withhold your forgiveness if it doesn't coincide with the work of liberation and inclusion that God is trying to do among us here.

And you know how I know that? Because if you look at Luke, in Luke's telling of this story, Luke actually says, you know, if your brother, in Luke 17, verse 3, if your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them.

And if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying, I repent, you must forgive them. If they repent.

[ 45 : 54 ] We're going to talk about what that means next week, but just to be brief. If they acknowledge and bear the weight of the pain that they have caused. If they join in the effort to reverse the works of oppression that they have been incumpled in and advance the cause of liberation, you should, you can forgive them.

We have to understand that, again, as I said before, forgiveness is the journey, not the destination. We have to allow people, especially marginalized people, especially people who are coming from hundreds of years of experience.

And I'll tell you again, like, I really do want to speak to, give more time to this idea of secondary forgiveness, right? Like, I need to forgive, or I, the forgiveness that I am called to have towards Derek Sheldon, for example, I will mention his name for this here, the guy who killed George Floyd, is a different kind of forgiveness than what George Floyd's family needs to have.

But there is something, there is some wrong, and there is some wrong that's done against black and marginalized people when people within their community are harmed. Because of the fact that we all experience racism on a regular basis.

Racism that could easily escalate to what we see on screen. And so because we see that, and we know that could have been us, there is hurt and there is harm that is done there, too. It might be hard to understand that if you're not in a marginalized community, because, again, because of white supremacy and because of, like, the American ideal, there's so much individualization, and, you know, like that, it's, like, all about the individual, right?

[ 47 : 30 ] It's very different for communities that are not even given the space to be individuals. And so, again, there is that process. I do not see here anything, and anything here in the scriptures that talk about the time that is necessary to go through that.

What I do know is that if you look at the Psalms, they're full of unforgiving people talking about how much they want the people who harmed them to pay. And these are holy scriptures, the things that we read about.

Maybe we sometimes sing about them. I mean, like, what was that song? You Come Back with the Head of My Enemy? I think we changed the words of that here, right? But no, that's the original song. There are words in the Psalms that talk about breaking their jaw.

That, you know, Psalm 137. Look it up. But anyway, there is space for that, because that's human. It's human to feel these things. It's human to feel the anger.

And it should move us to feel angry when we see the egregious way that white supremacy, whiteness, not white people, whiteness. If I have time, I'll talk about that.

[ 48 : 35 ] You can ask me about what I need by that later. But, you know, that the harm and the pain that that has caused is real, and we should be enraged by that. And you should give black people the space and the time to feel those things.

In the hopes that through that process, they can come to the place of forgiving, not just for the sake of the person who has done the wrong, but for their own heart.

I told you at the top, I've been deep in a lot of feelings of sadness, of anger, of pain. I'll be very honest.

There have been times where I've had to correct myself and say I hate white people. I don't hate white people. I don't hate any people because we all share, like, the image of God. I have to say I hate whiteness because that is very different.

Whiteness is something that was created as a means of excluding and marginalizing the people who need protection the most. That's something I can hate. That's something I don't have to forgive.

[ 49 : 39 ] The people who cause that, who are themselves harmed by that, I need to embody the spirit that Jesus had when he was on the cross. And Jesus said, Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing.

You know, who was Jesus forgiving in that moment? It's a trick question because he wasn't forgiving anyone. He was asking God to forgive them in that moment because they were not repentant.

They thought that they were doing the right thing in that moment. That in their anger, in their religious zeal, they thought they were doing something that was going to help them to find security in whatever sense of power that they had in that moment.

And they were unrepentant about that. Jesus didn't say, I forgive them. I believe that Jesus was acknowledging again, hey, God, you've forgiven them. They don't realize that they are part of a system that impacts their choices and that limits them to act in these particular ways.

I hope that they will come to their senses and that they can then experience the forgiveness that they have there. I'll give you one more quote here. And then, I think I'll close out very soon.

[ 50 : 46 ] Thank you so much for sitting here. This quote is from Nadine Petteburn and Robert Cary. They wrote a chapter called Forgiveness in the Face of Hate and a book called Multiculturalism and the Convergence of Faith and Practical Wisdom in Modern Design.

It says, It says, It's just as vital to the healing as forgiveness.

It says, It says, It says, It says, It says, It says, It says, As forgiveness. I am not doing so much, It says, I'm not getting to my black, brown, marginalized, indigenous people out there that if you need to hear from anybody, you can hear it from me and I'll take it up with God later.

You do not have to rush to forgive the hurt that's going to cost you either primarily or secondarily. I believe that you should aim for that for your own sake, for our own sake, for our health, so that we can continue to find the motivation to fight this battle, to fight this fight of liberation, that it will only continue to be met by resistance, suffering, and pain.

We need that for ourselves, but I want to say to you here today that you do not need to feel the rush and the pressure to do that. For white people in the audience, for those of you who are in positions of power, I really want to say, please do not ask of the marginalized people to forgive.

[ 52 : 35 ] That's not your place. Give them the same exact time to process and feel the hurt and the pain that they feel, because that is necessary and that's needed for them, just like it is needed for every single person.

But, you know, I want to close out this story about Amber Geiger, right? So, again, this woman was weeping. You saw this video. She was weeping, crying, you know, running face because of, you know, the crime that she committed and the punishment that she received.

But just a few months ago, almost a little less than a year ago, Amber Geiger's name came back up because she and her lawyers submitted an appeal asking for her to be acquitted for the crime that she committed, basically saying on the grounds that because she was mistaken about the apartment that she walked into, she should not have been charged with murder, which means the whole thing shouldn't be counted this way, that she should be let free or at the very least have a reduced sentence, right?

Is that something that sounds like they repented and taking full responsibility and accountability for their actions? I'm not going to judge that. I don't know, right? But for me, I think it calls into question, what was the purpose of those two?

What was the purpose of acknowledging, like, the hurt and the harm caused? To then go back and say, oh, I didn't mean to cause it. I should be let free. I should be let off. I shouldn't have to go through this pain and this trouble.

[ 54 : 07 ] Again, I'm just going to leave that there hanging. Should that, you know, trivialize or take away from the power of Grant John's forgiveness of her? I'm not necessarily going to say that.

It was very clear from what he shared that that forgiveness was not for her, but it was for him. He needed that for him to process the feelings that he had felt. He had spent a year at that point dealing and wrestling with feelings of anger, rage, and hatred towards this woman.

And that was part of his process. That was his journey. He has the absolute right to say, because it's a journey, not this nation. He has the absolute right to say, you know, I don't feel like forgiving today, right?

That's his prerogative. And I hope that for his sake or for our sake or for all of our sakes today that we recognize that in the light of the humanness that we have, we do have the freedom and the potential to go through the process that is needed to forgive.

In conclusion, thank you so much for sitting with me here today to talk about this. I want to close with a quote from James Cone, who's a black liberation theologian who wrote in the book, *God of the Oppressed*, says, There is no reconciliation without liberation.

[ 55 : 24 ] Liberation is what God does to affect reconciliation. And without the former, the latter is impossible. To be liberated is to be delivered from the state of unfreedom to freedom.

It is to have the chains struck off the body and mind so that the creature of God can be who he or she is. Forgiveness of self frees us from the guilt that will either debilitate us or deputize us against the work that God is trying to do here within this world.

Forgiveness of others can be a source of emotional fortitude to continue in the liberative work that God is doing. And withholding forgiveness can also be an act of doing the same exact thing.

But ultimately, I hope that the goal becomes that we can forgive. So that, again, for our own sake, for our own hope and our own well-being, so that these chains that have kept so many people from being able to live in the fullness of their divinity, of the divine image that they share with God, these chains that keep people from being completely free to be who they are, can be released so that we can actually breathe.

That's great. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.