

Alright. Hey, everybody, I want to take a moment and welcome in all of our campuses, whether you're joining us from online, or Gainesville, or Venue, or Flower Mound, or Lewisville, or Denton, wherever we are in the world, let's welcome each other together today. And hey, it's Christmas. It's Christmas. It's all of the lights and the shopping and the peppermint latte, and all the office Christmas parties, and all the family gatherings, which -- I don't know if you've ever noticed this before -- can quickly become all the lights you don't want to hang up, all the shopping you can't do because of supply issues, all the peppermint lattes that spill in your car, or become like a Starbucks graveyard in the front seat, you know, down by the floorboards, all of the -- all the Christmas parties that your spouse really doesn't want to go to, and the family gatherings that let's just not talk about those because we know they're coming up, they're still on the horizon. But have you ever noticed that the Christmas season sometimes gets flipped up on its head? That sometimes things get turned around that we think it's going to be like one thing and then it's like another?

Some of the biggest things that we're looking forward to at Christmas then become the biggest tensions inside of us. The moments we were looking forward to just start to cause anxiousness on the inside. And one of the things I've noticed is some of the biggest relational tensions that we face seem to happen during this most wonderful time of the year. That doesn't seem right, right? It doesn't seem like some of the biggest relational tensions that we're ever going to face happen right now during this, the most joyful season, we're supposed to experience. Why? Why is that? Why is that the case? You see, we said that 2021 was going to be one of the most important years of your spiritual journey. And if we would have chosen a word for the year, the word probably would have been relationship because it was going to be that critical to experience relationships, healthy relationships as we went on this journey, as we journeyed the year together. And so that is why today, we're going to start a brand new series called Wrapped: Finishing the Year with Healthy Relationships.

You see, before we decide to wrap up our shopping, or wrap up our semester, or just wrap up a busy season, it's really important that we choose to wrap up this season with healthy relationships. And let's not be confused, relationships are really important to God. Healthy relationships are really important to Jesus. Jesus just says, "This is my command: Love each other deeply, as much as I have loved you. For the greatest love of all is a love that sacrifices all. And this great love is demonstrated when a person sacrifices his life for his friends." Jesus says, relationships are really important and they require us to actually demonstrate, like actually do something about it in our healthy relationships with one another. They're going to require us to sacrifice. That is healthy relationships are going to cost us something, just like it cost Jesus everything to bring us into a healthy relationship with the Father.

Relationships will cost us something. Relationships, the world has been quick to discard them, we are quick to embrace them. Relationships, the world just straight up wants to cancel them, man, we need to choose to reconcile them. Relationships, the world often uses them as a means to the end, in the kingdom they're the beginning and the end. They're the reason we

were created, they're the reason Jesus came, they are the game, they are the story. And so this Christmas, may we choose to love deeply, choose relationship, choose to be relationally healthy. At the end of his time on earth, Jesus says, I got to leave guys, but I got a great present for you. Each other. So now choose relationships, choose to be relationally healthy. So every week in the series, we're going to pull the thread of relationship, we're going to talk about how to relate to one another in healthy ways.

And it's really perfect timing because so much of the Christmas story exemplifies how to relate to one another. Did you ever think about this? The characters in the Christmas stories, they had to choose to relate to each other in healthy ways as they awaited the coming of the king. There's all kinds of examples on how they had to relate one to another. So I think this series is going to be both timely and practical. So as we kick it off, a brand new series, two of the most important things we can do to relate to one another are to forgive and to apologize. Oh, come on, not easy but so critical. Even now as you hear me say that, forgive and apologize, as you want to go screaming and running out the doors, don't do it. Take a moment and just begin to ask the Spirit, Spirit, who is that person?

Maybe it's obvious. Maybe you know it immediately. Maybe the Lord wants to reveal it to you and bring you to a level of health that you've never experienced before. Holy Spirit, will you speak to us? Will you show us who and how to live in healthy relationships with one another? Begin to show us, Spirit, how to relate to each other this Christmas season. See, God says it like this, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words and slander as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another just as God through Christ has forgiven you." Can I ask you, did you experience any of these things over the past few years? Did you experience any bitterness towards a spouse, raging anger towards maybe extended family, harsh words with your kids, slander against co-workers? Okay. If so, that's okay, it's just time to apologize.

It's time to go first and say, I'm sorry. Did you have anybody who just kind of treated you just straight up mean in the last few years? Like they just weren't kind to you and they didn't respect you. And maybe they cared more about politics or platform than they cared about like a relationship with you, and you have like this this thing in your heart. Okay, that's real. That's real. That hurts. It's not fair. It wasn't right, but it's time to forgive. It's time to forgive just as God through Christ Jesus has forgiven you. See, I think we often forget what kind of level of forgiveness Joseph would have had to have walked in during the Christmas story. I want you to think about this for a second. So Joseph and Mary are betrothed to be married. That is like -- it's like engagement plus. Like they're planning their lives together, all the families know about it. They got the whole thing kind of working out. They're trying to figure out what it's going to look like.

I bet you, Joseph was like dreaming about what his life with Mary was going to be and how they're going to build their life together. And then Mary comes to him one day and has a

conversation, "Hey Joe." "Yeah, babe." "I have something I need to talk to you about." "Yeah, what is it?" "You're going to want to pull up a map for this one," and then proceeds to explain to him this amazing revelation, right? She's going to be the mother of the savior of the world. That's before Joseph knew what the angel was going to say to him. And check it out, look how he relates back with Mary. It says, "Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly." So catch this, so Joseph then lived with a heart of forgiveness. He wanted to not, you know, expose her to the public disgrace.

He wanted to not live and bitter towards her. He didn't have rage and anger. He just thought he was going to be able to honor her even with that bad news. And of course we know where it goes from there, the angel talks to him, says, it's okay man, it's real. This is real, so stay with Mary. But what you see out of Joseph in that story is a posture of forgiveness. You see a desire to live even then in healthy relationships. And I got to thinking about both the word forgive and the word apologize and what makes those two words so closely related, right? They're interconnected, they're locked in. And it's not just that they're difficult to do. They are difficult to do, but I think what makes those two words so closely connected is the word withhold. As you hear me say forgiveness, as you hear me say apologies, you might think to yourself like, well, I don't really have anybody right now that I need to forgive. I'm good. Like I don't need anybody I have to apologize to. Okay, let me ask you. Is there anybody that you're withholding from right now?

Is there anybody that you're separating from right now? Like withholding emotionally. That is you're not really opening up like you normally do. Maybe withholding affection. Like spouses, there's just -- there's less touches, less hugs, less affection shown, maybe withholding time. This one's not as obvious but it's like we're just like spending less time together right now. Maybe withholding energy, my thoughts and my energy are going everywhere else except for towards those we love. Because what I want you to catch is that withholding is a telltale sign that you may need to forgive or you may need to apologize. Withholding, starting to separate back from someone, it's this subtle way that you actually may have an area of unforgiveness or you may need to walk in an apology with someone you love. You see, both of those things albeit slowly, cause us to drift away from those that we loved.

And here's what I want you to catch on how God's posture towards us looks. It's Romans 8. Romans 8, "For God has proved his love by giving us his greatest treasure, the gift of his son." Don't be confused this Christmas, Jesus is the greatest gift to the world. And since God freely offered him up as a sacrifice for us all, he certainly won't withhold from us anything else he has to give. The Father didn't withhold from us. Before we apologized, He forgave. Before we humbled ourselves, he humbled himself even unto death on the cross. And so, is there anybody in your life you may be withholding from right now? Isn't this the Christmas story that God not only didn't withhold from us, he didn't withhold himself from us. And the word

became flesh and dwelt among us and we've seen him, the glory of that one. This Christmas, he came right down and didn't withhold anything from us.

Let's be clear, forgiveness doesn't mean that you completely forget and I'm not even totally sure that's even possible. It means you still may remember, you just choose not to withhold. You might still remember what happened, you just choose not to withhold from that person. So is there anybody you're withholding from maybe creating space from right now? Come on, no time for that. Lean in. It's Christmas time. It's time for healthy relationships. It's time to lean into forgiveness and apologizing. Jesus tells a story in Matthew Chapter 18. He tells a story about a man that owed his master 20 years' worth of wages. And one day the master comes to the man, he says, well, it's time to pay back that debt. So here's what has to happen, I have to take over all of your possessions and actually need to take your family into servitude in order for that 20 years of payment to be paid. And the man looks at the master and he's like, oh, oh no. No, please, please, please. Please sir, have pity on me.

It says, the master looked at him with mercy and he decided not to sell his possessions and his family and instead decided to forgive him the whole 20 years' worth of wages, wiped out the whole debt. That man then walked away and upon walking away, he sees someone who owes him like a day's worth of wages. And that guy says, oh please, I'm sorry. I want to pay it back, I'll pay back as soon as I can. Will you just have pity on me? And it says that that man, the one that had just been forgiven, starts choking that guy out and says, where's my money? Give me my money. And the servants of the master see that and they get all -- they get all freaked out and they're like, hey, this is horrible. You won't believe what just happened. But here's what I think that story shows us. It reminds us that most of our forgiveness needs to happen in the micro, not necessarily the macro. Let me explain what I mean. Forgiveness in the macro is like when you're watching a movie and you see these characters that have been like separated from years and years from each other and like it's a dad and a son, like I love you son, I love you dad. I'm so sorry. Will you forgive me? And everybody's crying and the whole theater's crying. Big dudes in the back are crying.

Like we think about those moments in movies. And that's like macro forgiveness. But I think most of the forgiveness and most of the apologizing we need to do actually happens in the micro, in the smaller, in the mundane. It's I feel overlooked this week. I don't like the way they responded at dinner. They never compliment me for the hard work I've been doing. I was left off the Christmas invite list. It's right then, it's right in those moments, those day-to-day frustrations, those day-to-day offenses, it's right then that we can practice micro forgiveness. And here's how we do it. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, with kindness, with humility, with gentleness, patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance, any size grievance against someone, forgive as the lord forgave you."

Here's what Paul says. He says, make yourselves unoffendable and here's how you do it, you clothe yourselves with compassion, and kindness, and humility, and gentleness, and patience. Like students, do you have somebody that just keeps saying the dumb thing to you in the hallway every single day and been frustrating you? Okay. Respond with gentleness. Do you have somebody who makes you look bad in front of your peers at work and like all these times takes the credit from you? Okay. Respond with like a humility and be okay with that. Spouses, does your spouse always make you late and you hate being late all the time when you go somewhere out the door? Okay. Respond with patience. Respond with patience, bear with one another, have a heart that says I'm going to practice micro forgiveness in the small things, in the little things, so it doesn't become the micro forgiveness -- so it doesn't become the macro forgiveness. I think what happens to us is most of the time somebody owes us like a day's worth of wages and we treat it like it's 20 years.

Most of the time, it's the small things that have kind of built up inside of us and then there's this wedge that's so big that we can't even imagine how to get it out of the relationship. And so what was micro becomes macro because we didn't clothe ourselves with these kind of things, because we didn't wrap ourselves in compassion, and humility, and patience. We didn't make ourselves unoffendable by using what the Scriptures say is the way to become an unoffendable person, to live in a healthy relationship. So micro, so it doesn't become macro practice apologizing and forgiving in the small so it doesn't become big inside your heart. Okay. So let's get really practical. We're talking forgiveness and apologizing, right? Forgiving and apologizing. So how do we do that? What's practically ways that we can do that? Here's the first one. To apologize, don't wait, initiate. That rhymes.

"Therefore if you're offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them then come and offer your gift." Isn't this so the verse of Christmas? It's saying, don't wait, initiate. Don't be more excited about your shopping list than you are to be reconciled back to somebody you're having difficulty with in a relationship. One of the craziest parts of Christmas, this is crazy, we will offer gifts, we will literally give gifts in the same room with people that we've had years of relational tension with and we think that that's like the exchange that makes sense. But what makes more sense is to not wait, to initiate in forgiveness and in apologizing. Don't give a gift this Christmas faster than you want to give the gift of relational health to those that you love.

First go and be reconciled. And come on, if you're waiting for them to go first, you're going to be waiting a long time. You can be right or you can be in relationship. You can't do both. So don't wait, initiate. That's the first one. Here's the second one. Say I'm sorry for. I'm sorry for. I'm sorry for what I said. I'm sorry for how I treated you just then. I'm sorry that I've been frustrated and short. I'm sorry for and whatever the thing is, say that thing. It's amazing what that specific apology can do to open up their heart. And hear me, it's almost never a hundred percent their fault and zero percent your faults. It's almost always some percentage of both

parties, right? Even if it's 99 to one, you can say I'm sorry for that one percent. You can say, I'm sorry for that one thing that you did that set them off or hurt them or just didn't connect in their hearts.

And hear me on this one too, you can always apologize for how what you did made them feel. So like you can always be humble enough to be like, man, I'm sorry. I did not mean to make you feel like that. I'm just so sorry. That is a great way to practice compassion. It's amazing what that can do to start to mend the tears in people's hearts, to start to mend the relationship. So don't wait, initiate, say I'm sorry for. Here's the next one, learn from it. We got to choose to learn from it. Check out this verse in Proverbs, "Whoever digs a pit will fall into it. If someone rolls a stone, it will roll back on them." This is like the verse for relational absurdity during the holidays. Do you find yourself in the same conversations over and over again? Are you at the dinner table dealing with the same frustrations year after year? Okay. Then don't dig that pit. Don't roll that stone.

Don't bring up that political conversation or what happened in the past or why you were -- don't bring that up. Instead, when we're reconciled through forgiveness and apologizing, it's amazing what that can do to help us learn from it, to help us move forward together. I'm telling you, sometimes we expect the holidays to be like this -- to be like this like hallmark movie. They turn into like a UFC cage fight, like real fast, and we don't learn from it and we're wondering why we get caught in those same conversations over and over again. I felt really strongly coming into this message to just speak this, Jesus says to his disciples, "When you enter a house first say, 'Peace be unto this house.' And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him." Can I just tell you? You are that person of peace. You are that person of peace. You are the one that can start to bring peace to chaotic atmospheres, to learn from what's happened in your family in the past or what's happened at the work in the past or what's happened, you know, with your kids in the past, and begin to live in that posture of forgiveness, that posture of apologizing.

So here it is, to apologize, don't wait, initiate, say I'm sorry for and then choose to learn from it. Okay, here we go. This is for forgiveness. To forgive, release the offense. You have to let it go. "A person's wisdom yields patience; it's to one's glory to overlook an offense." Can I just tell you? You can release those offenses because Jesus did. You can let go of it because that's what Jesus chose to do. Some of us collect offenses like baseball cards. Stop it. That's a bad thing to collect. And I just said, forgive and forget is not always possible. You know what a great strategy is? Forgive and release. Forgive and release. Forgive and release is a far better strategy than be offended and hold on to it.

So truly, choose to release the offense. It is to your glory and it's to God's glory. It's to one's glory and it's to God's glory when we choose to just say, you know what, I just -- I want to release that, not one time every time, not one time forgive and forget, every time forgive and release. In fact, sometimes we'll say the phrase forgive and forget just so we don't have to talk

about it anymore. And what that really shows us is that there's an entire area inside of our hearts and minds where we still need to forgive and release and give it up once again to Jesus. Alright, release the offense is the first one. The second one is just this, choose to bless the offender. Man, this one's hard. To bless, to speak well of, to pray for, to wish that good things would come into their life, to choose to bless the offender. Can you pray that good things would happen? Can you pray that they would experience joy and blessing and peace?

Can you speak good things about them? It's an integral part of God's kingdom because what you have to catch is that Jesus didn't just reconcile with Peter, he blessed him with a big old net of fish. Peter denies Jesus to a servant girl. He comes back, he releases that offense and he begins to bless him and he gives him his greatest economic win of all of Peter's fishing career. And that's what he does for us also. He's always blessing us with every gift in the heavenly realms. And so this one, this Christmas, this time, this season, who is one person in one way that you can begin to bless those that in the past may have hurt you or may have frustrated you or may have whatever had happened? Can you start to speak a blessing? Can you pray a blessing over them? That is the way forward. And by the way, it will renew some things in your relationship maybe but you know what it'll really do? Renew something inside your own heart. It'll actually free your own heart from that frustration, from that unforgiveness.

So release the offense, bless the offender and finally restore the relationship if possible. I want to start by saying it's not always possible, maybe the person is not around, maybe it's not safe. But whenever possible, the heart of Jesus is to restore the relationship. I think this one has to do with trust. And I think what happens is it's difficult for us to want to trust people again. Here's a question. What if it was that you weren't so much trusting people as you were trusting the goodness of God through people? What if it was that you weren't so much trusting that person again but you were trusting the goodness of God in that person? Not that they are good but that God is good, and that you can trust Him to help restore and reconcile that relationship because God wants to use people to heal you where other people have hurt you.

Hear me, God is desperately trying to use somebody in your life right now that you're struggling in an area of forgiveness with. He actually wants to use that person to help heal and bind a place in your hearts where other people have hurt you and so opening yourself up to any relationship to say, man, I'm just going to trust people again even though people have hurt me. And I know that's hard, but it's because I trust you God, I'm going to choose to reconcile the relationship whenever possible. Hear me, we are ministers of reconciliation, that God was reconciling the world back to himself, not counting men's sins against them. And that is us, ministers of reconciliation. And isn't this so the way of the kingdom? Isn't this the way that God did this for us to forgive, to release the offense? I will remember their sins no more. I'll forgive their wickedness.

I'll release as far as the east is from the west, I choose to not count men's sins against them. That's the posture of the Father for us, to bless the offender, God's given us every blessing in

the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus to reconcile the relationship. That is what he came to do. It's actually the story of Christmas that Jesus was reconciling the world unto himself, not counting our sins against us. Isn't this so how our Father in heaven chose to forgive us? He released us, he blessed us, he restores through Christ the relationship with us. And I think he's inviting us to do the very same thing this Christmas. I got to thinking about forgiveness and apologizing and how that's difficult and what that means. And then I got to thinking about the actual name wrapped for the series, like wrapping ourselves in forgiveness, wrapping ourselves with a heart of apologizing, a heart that's willing to apologize.

And I think that the word wrapped is far more prophetic than we may realize. It's actually far more profound for everything that we're talking about than we realize. And here's why. This will be assigned to you and you'll find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Christmas is when the hope of the world came wrapped in the form of a baby. And he poured water into the wash basin and he began to wash the disciples' feet to dry them with a towel he had wrapped around himself. The hope of the world came wrapped as a baby in a manger who grew up to become a man who would choose to serve those around him. Then they took Jesus's body and wrapped it in linen cloths.

The hope of the world came down as a baby wrapped in a manger, who grew up as a man, who chose to serve those around him who was obedient even unto death upon a cross, died, was wrapped and was buried for the forgiveness of our sins to make a way for us to relate back to our Father. One more. "And I saw someone like the Son of Man dressed in a robe reaching to his feet with a golden sash wrapped around his chest." The hope of the world came wrapped as a baby in a manger, who grew up to become a man, who served others around him, who then was obedient to go to the cross, was dead, was wrapped and was buried for the forgiveness of sins, to make a way for us to relate back to the Father. But he didn't stay there. On the third day, he rose again, he was resurrected, given a name above every name, given a royal robe and a sash wrapped around him, a title, Jesus, the name above every name.

That at the name of Jesus, every knee would bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father in heaven, on earth, unto the earth, in our relationships, that God made a way for us to relate back to one another through what Jesus has done, wrapped. What a profound name this Christmas season, wrapped, a baby wrapped in a manger. Jesus wrapping and serving those around him. Wrapped up in his death and burial and wrapped as the king of the universe. And so this Christmas, what if we chose before we finish all of our Christmas shopping, before we finish up our semester, before we finish up our busy schedule, what if we chose to finish the year with healthy relationships?

So let me just ask you, who is one person that you need to forgive and release? Who is one person that you need to apologize to? Come on, even close your eyes right now. Bow your head with me. Close your eyes. Let's just begin to ask the Lord, Lord, who is that person? Who do I need to go first, not to wait but to initiate a healthy relationship with? By your power,



in your strength, by your spirit, Jesus, will you help me walk out in healthy relationships this season, to forgive, to apologize, to do it from a place of identity, of confidence in you?

I'm not doing it in my own strength. I'm just going to believe by faith that you have entire wholeness and life and healing that you want to do in my relationships Jesus, that you want me to experience breakthrough. You want all of us to experience breakthrough this holiday season. And that we could live from a place of healthy relationships. We don't have to live like the world. We're called to be so far beyond that ministers of reconciliation, people of peace who understand who Jesus is and what he's done and why that changes everything for our relationships. If you're hearing me right now say that and you think, I can't do that, you just don't know the time, the length, the hurt. Okay, maybe you can't but Jesus can and he will and he wants to.

So even now, Jesus, give us a courage and a confidence to begin to walk in healthy relationships with one another. Give us the courage and the confidence to forgive and to apologize, to live as you've lived towards us, with this heartbeat of forgiveness, this love and this affection that allows us to apologize one to another. May we truly live in and from a place of health this season and every season. May we be the people who choose to forgive and apologize. We love you Jesus, in your name, amen.