



## Group Leader Guide

### “Father, Forgive Them...” – Famous Last Words

#### February 29 - March 1, 2020

#### Group Creed

We come together as a Group with the goal of Spiritual Formation; encouraging one another to become the same kind of person that Jesus is, so that we can live out every part of our lives inside of His Kingdom.

#### // Message Summary

Teaching Pastor, **Ben Foote**, kicks off a new series this week called **Famous Last Words**. We will be looking in-depth at each of the phrases Jesus says while on the cross. We will be looking at what these words meant in the moment, as well as how they encapsulate different moments throughout His life. This week, we look at the first phrase He said on the cross: “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” (**Luke 23:34 NIV**) This idea of offering forgiveness to people who are lost and still in the midst of their sin is evident throughout Jesus’ life. Specifically, it is revealed in the story of the woman caught in adultery and how Jesus responded to her with grace and truth (**John 8:2-11**). Jesus always leads with grace and follows with truth, which can be viewed as a road map to help us become “un-lost.”

#### // Biblical Background

**John 8:5**: The law commanding the stoning of adulterous women is found in **Leviticus 20:10** and repeated in **Deuteronomy 22:22**. As Ben noted, this law condemns the adulterous man as well. We are not given a reason as to why the woman was singled out, if indeed she was “caught in the act.” The simplest answer is that they didn’t actually care about the transgression; their goal was to trap Jesus (verse 6), so grabbing both people just wasn’t that important.

**John 8:6**: It is not stated what Jesus stooped

down to write on the ground, so any answers to that are purely speculation. However, it is interesting to note that judges during this time had to write their sentences before reading them aloud. So, He may have been following this tradition and writing the equivalent of an acquittal.

**Luke 23:34**: Jesus’ prayer of forgiveness for his persecutors does not have much Biblical precedent. The Old Testament is filled with people calling on God to enact vengeance and brutal justice on their enemies at the moment of their death or persecution (e.g., **2 Chr. 24:22, Psalm 69:28, Jer. 17:18**). It was, indeed, perfectly acceptable to do this. Jesus, however, transcends what was acceptable and sets a new standard of what it looks like to love our enemies, as he had taught his followers to do earlier in his ministry (**Matthew 5:43-44, Luke 6:27-28**). This new standard of love and forgiveness is exemplified by the first Christian martyr, Stephen, in **Acts 7:60** (also written by Luke), as he cries out to God at the moment of his death, asking God to forgive the men who were executing him.

#### // Manuscript Analysis: John 7:53-8:11

This excerpt of 12 verses, which includes the entire story of the woman caught in adultery, is not found in the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel of John. In fact, it isn’t found in any before the 5th century AD., hundreds of years after the Gospel of John was written.

Internal evidence, such as vocabulary used throughout the rest of the Gospel, and its apparent interruption of the narrative, suggests that this story doesn't fit here, either. However, the story is included in essentially every version of the Bible out today. What are we to make of this? Does this call into question the validity of the Bible as a whole?

The bottom line is that this story, whether original to the Gospel of John or not, does not introduce any doctrine, theology, or characterization of Jesus that isn't fully supported by the rest of the Bible. We cannot ignore the evidence that this story was most likely not in the original version of the Gospel. It can, however, be viewed as a true and accurate representation of the Jesus we find characterized throughout the Gospels and on the cross, saying the words "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

(For a more in-depth look at this issue, please start here: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/neither-do-i-condemn-you--3>)

## // In Preparation

Welcome back! And to all the new leaders, welcome! Hopefully, this guide will help you learn a bit more about the background of whatever Bible teaching is going on during the weekend message. This will be a resource for you to gain some context around the text, be able to answer possible questions from your group members, and hopefully learn something new and interesting!

While the weekend message focuses mainly on application to our lives today, this guide aims to help put the Biblical text in the context of what was going on culturally at the time of its writing and give you, the leader, a more complete understanding of the Biblical meaning. It is by no means meant to be a comprehensive study, but merely a resource to help you feel prepared and confident heading into your groups. Also, feel free to send this out to the members of your groups as well.

This will post to the website every Friday by 5pm before the weekend the relevant message will be given.

Take some time before your first group to pray for each of your members, even if you don't know them yet. Pray that they will begin to feel safe to open up and share their lives with you and the other people in the group. Pray that God will use you in whatever way He desires to bring the people in your group closer to Him.

## // References

Keener, Craig S Ph.d. *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. InterVarsity Press, 2014.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *To the Cross: Proclaiming the Gospel from the Upper Room to Calvary*. IVP Books, an Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017.

"Neither Do I Condemn You." Desiring God, 28 Feb. 2020, [www.desiringgod.org/messages/neither-do-i-condemn-you--3](https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/neither-do-i-condemn-you--3).



## Group Discussion

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#### // Bible References

Luke 23:34, John 8:2-11

#### // Message Screenshots

- “Okay. Let’s roll.” -last words of Todd Beamer, September 11, 2001
- “I have offended God and mankind, because my work did not reach the quality it should have.” -last words of Leonardo da Vinci
- “Let’s see how many of these Jolly Ranchers I can fit in my mouth!” -possible future last words of Ben Foote
- “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34 NIV)
- Jesus starts with grace.
- “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8 NIV)

#### // Community Questions

1. Who has a good story of being lost in an unfamiliar area?

#### // Core Questions

1. Where in your life do you feel lost?
2. When and where do you think the initial wrong turn was made?
3. Did you make the wrong turn yourself, or did someone else make it for you?
4. Do you tend to live your life as if God loves you unconditionally or as if He is disappointed and ashamed of you?
5. What are some of the negative messages you believe about yourself that you tend to think are coming from God?
6. How does that belief show up in your life? (For example: You beat yourself up over your sin and shame, never feeling good enough, or you try to do enough good things to make up for your mistakes, or you live your life ignoring or running from God.)
7. Read 1 John 3:1 and 4:9-10. What do these verses have to say about God’s love and grace for us?
8. If God is good, loves you unconditionally, wants good for you, and indeed *died* for you before you ever made a step towards Him, what might He want you to know or believe that you have not been knowing or believing?

## // Challenge

As humans, we have a hard time understanding unconditional love and grace. Very little in our world has no strings attached. Usually, we put this on God as well. We don't allow ourselves to be seen as God sees us. We consciously and subconsciously try to "balance the books" with God by either trying to do enough to earn his grace, beating ourselves up so we feel as awful as we think He thinks we are, or we just run and hide, avoiding it altogether. By doing this, we start to take on some unhealthy ways of feeling God's love and acceptance, ways He never intended for us to live in.

The truth is God loves us and wants good for us. This is exemplified by the words of Romans 5:8: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Grace is a gift given by a loving Father. He expects nothing in return. He loves you unconditionally and wants you to *enjoy* the freedom He has obtained for you through the death of Jesus. He didn't intend to remove the chains of sin from you just to load you up with more chains of shame and performance.

So, what is something that you do in your life naturally, that makes you feel alive, that you enjoy, that you feel is a gift from God, that you can use as a new way to feel loved by and connected to Him? This could be something as simple as seeing a beautiful sunset or enjoying nature, spending time with friends or family, eating good food or hearing good music, etc. Something that doesn't feel obligatory. Spend some time this week thinking of what this could be. Once you have it, write it down and let the future experience of it be a reminder of God's love for you and your connection to Him from now on! And come back next week prepared to share with the group what you came up with.