

A person is sitting on a wooden dock that extends into a calm lake. The water reflects the surrounding landscape, which includes lush green trees on the right and rugged, rocky mountains in the background under a clear sky. The overall scene is peaceful and contemplative.

FREEDOM THROUGH FORGIVENESS

A LIBERATING
PRAYER JOURNEY

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The purpose of this prayer walk is to help you come to a deeper understanding of God's love for you, of different aspects of forgiveness, of why and how you forgive, and of the freedom of forgiveness. Our desire for you is to use this time to hit the pause button on your busy life and spend time in the presence of our Heavenly Father. May you come before him with awe and reverence, reflecting on the written words, the Bible verses, and the questions prompting prayer. Dig deep into your heart, your feelings, about your present circumstances and any past experiences, especially any burdens that you are hanging onto. Be honest with God. Including any feelings of anger, despair, hopelessness, guilt, or pain. For healing, peace, and freedom can only be found at the foot of the cross by repenting, asking for God's forgiveness and receiving God's grace. There is no time limit for each section. Some may require more thought, more time in prayer. Some may have to be revisited in order for the Holy Spirit to complete his work and for the full meaning or the full impact of the messages to sink in. Other sections may not pertain to you, but we ask that you linger there and pray for those who you know are - or might be - struggling with that topic. Rest assured that all of your prayers, no matter how long or eloquent, no matter how simple or short, will be heard by God. He hears every one of them. In fact God knows what you are going to pray before you do!

Psalm 139:4 *"Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely."*

Nonetheless, God still wants to hear from us, his children. So, whether your prayers are silent and from your heart, or whether you speak them aloud, we pray that this prayer journey blesses you and all for whom you pray.

The Elders of St. John

First find a quiet place and ideally a quiet time when you won't be interrupted. Then clear your mind of all the things that you have to do. (They will still be there when you are done:). Before you start, pray that God will bless your time with him.

With Love and Prayers,
Pastor Rod and the Elders of St. John

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER'S LOVE

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE. KNOW THAT YOU ARE LOVED.

When we come before God to speak to him, it is with the understanding that He is our loving, Heavenly Father. God created you special and unique. God loves you because you are his child; lovingly created exactly the way he wanted to, just the way you are.

Psalm 139:14 *“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”*

Read that verse again. Let the full weight of that sink deep into your soul. You are one of God's “works”. That means you are wonderful - just as you are! You are a masterpiece which he lovingly designed and created with care exactly as he planned to do from before the world began. God knew you were coming into the world before your earthly parents did.

(PRAY) Take time to thank God for his love, for being your Heavenly Father, for giving you your parents, your siblings, and for creating you uniquely special in all the world. Thank him for your entire family and for all the people in your life who love you and care about you.

Sometimes we look in the mirror and we find something we don't like; whether it be a physical characteristic or what we have said or done. We compare ourselves to others and we don't seem to measure up. Our lives appear to fall woefully short when we glance at their facebook page and see their perfect: home, spouse, children, vacation, dinner, craft, life. We tend to see ourselves through the eyes of the world which judges our worth on outward appearances or on what we can do. God does not.

1 Samuel 16:7 *“...The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at outward appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart.”*

Newsflash, those “perfect people” are just like us, imperfect and in need of a savior.

(PRAY) Take some time to thank God that neither his love nor his kindness are conditional. Thank God that his love does not hinge on how good you are or on how “perfect” your thoughts, words, or actions are, but simply on the very nature of his relationship with you, his child. Ask God to turn away your thoughts and desires for

chasing after love, approval, and self-worth from worldly performance and measurements. Instead, may you seek your Heavenly Father's face and His love knowing you already have it.

GOD LOVES US FOR WHO WE ARE NOT FOR WHAT WE DO.

God speaks from **Jeremiah 31:3**, "...I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."

God's love for you, God's kindness, never fades, never fails and it never changes. Ever. There is nothing you can do to make him love you more and there is nothing you can do to make him love you any less. We read these passages found in **Romans 8:37-39**, "No, in all things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels, nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Just as a parent's love for their child remains when he or she is disobedient, so, too, does our Heavenly Father's love for us remain, even when we disobey his commands.

Daniel 9:9, "The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him."

(PRAY) Thank God that he does not turn his back on you when you are unkind, imperfect, or sinful. Thank God that his love for you will never go away. Thank God that he continues to love you even when you turn your back on him because of your baptism.

GOD LOVED US FIRST - EVEN WHEN WE WERE SINNERS.

God loves us even when we are disobedient, even when we ignore his commands. God does not withhold his mercy or his forgiveness until you are good enough to be loved. Nor does he wait for us to repent before He gives His all for our redemption. We know this from **Romans 5:8**, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

(PRAY) Thank God that he sent you a redeemer to take away your sins. Thank God that Christ did not wait until you were good enough before Jesus died for you. Thank God that he loved you enough to sacrifice his one and only son on your behalf.

NEED TO FORGIVE YOURSELF - GOD DOES.

There may be a sin that caused you to think that what you have done is so horrible as to be unforgivable; that there is no way that God can love you or forgive you. You may hang onto your guilt and your shame, thinking that God's forgiveness comes too easily, that you don't deserve it. Tell God if you are feeling that way, tell him why you are carrying around and hanging onto your sin. For God tells us in **Matthew 11:28**, "*Come to me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*"

(PRAY) Take some time to search your heart about anything from your past - both recent and long ago - anything that is troubling your soul. Is there something that you have tried to bury deep within you, that you have tried to keep hidden from others or from God? Let God know of any past or present actions, regrets, addictions, or burdens that you have been carrying around. Bring them now into the light of his presence and tell God what has been weighing on your soul.

The truth is there is no need for you to carry around any of your burdens, any of your past sins. Even if you feel unworthy to come before God, he is waiting to receive them. Jesus has already paid the penalty for all your sins. Christ has already done what you cannot ever do.

Romans 8:1 "*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*"

(PRAY) Talk with your Heavenly Father and as you place your sins before him, try to understand his great love for you. Repent of your sins and ask for his forgiveness. As soon as you do this, know that your sins are instantly forgiven no matter what you have done. He has removed them and wiped the slate clean and given you a fresh start.

Know and believe in your heart that God can and does remove all of your sins. ALL of them. Every last one. No exceptions.

How do you feel now knowing that no matter what you've done, no matter how many times you have failed, God is still crazy in love with you and has already redeemed you? Spend some time contemplating the richness and fullness and depth of God's love.

GOD FORGIVES ALL OF YOUR SINS.

It is a wonderful, liberating feeling when you come to know and believe that God has forgiven ALL of your sins, past present, and future. Your forgiveness, your freedom from sin, is not about what **you** can do, but is all about what Christ has already done **for** you.

Hebrews 10:10 *“And by that will (God’s), we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”*

(PRAY) Ask God to remove any traces of guilt, shame, or regret from your heart that Satan will try to use and keep you from reaching out and connecting with God. Tell Satan that he has no power over you, that as a beloved child of God, you are fully redeemed and totally forgiven.

Take some time to tell God how you feel about His unending grace, which transforms you from a sinner into a saint; a person set apart as a holy child of God.

Psalm 25:7 *“Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O Lord.”*

Jesus has already paid the price for your sins. As a believer, you don’t need to do anything. Jesus did it ALL and he did it all for you. However, your freedom from the consequence of your sin did not come cheap - it came at great sacrifice. It came at a great cost.

(PRAY) Reflect on the humiliation, the unjust punishment, and all the innocent, bitter suffering that Jesus went through on the cross before he died on your behalf on Good Friday.

When you won’t forgive yourself, when you exclude yourself from God’s forgiveness, you are essentially telling God that Christ’s sacrifice was for naught. If you refuse to forgive yourself, you are rejecting God’s gift and telling him that Jesus’ death somehow wasn’t able to pay for your sins. Forgive yourself, for God has already forgiven you. And if God can forgive you, then you can - and must - forgive yourself.

(PRAY) Ask God to release you from trying to punish yourself, for Christ has already suffered for you on your behalf. Ask him to help you stop looking down in shame, but to raise your face to him; to hold your head up knowing God considered you worthy to send Jesus to die in your place. Ask him to help you to love yourself in order for you to be able to “love your neighbor as yourself”

Besides forgiving oneself, one of the most difficult aspects of being a Christian is forgiving others. However, it is exactly what you are called to do if you profess to follow Christ. We know that God forgives us, but why should we forgive those that hurt us?

WHY WE FORGIVE

There are several reasons why you need to forgive others.

YOU HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN MUCH.

First, you need to remember that you have been forgiven much by God. Your forgiveness by God is something you did not earn nor can you ever achieve by your own merit. God redeemed you and removed your sins. It is all his doing. It is a part of the plan which He had for you from the very beginning.

2 Timothy 1:9 *“He has saved us and called us to a holy life - not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.”*

(PRAY) Thank God for his forgiveness and grace, for caring so much for you that God created a way out from your sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thank God for including you in his plan of salvation and not having to personally pay the price for your sins.

God’s forgiveness to you is unconditional and freely given. It is not dependent on whether you deserve it.

Psalm 103:10-12, *“he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”*

Think about that. Your Heavenly Father has removed all of your sins that you have ever offended him in what you have done, said, or thought. How does that compare to the pain and hurt from someone else’s transgression against you?

(PRAY) Lord help me to remember just how good you are to me when you extend your grace to me time and time again, even though I don’t deserve it. Help that awareness trigger a response of compassion and forgiveness to anyone who hurts me or sins against

me. Help me to likewise not treat someone as their sins deserve but remember what you have done for me.

LOVE DEFINES US AS CHRISTIANS SETS US APART FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD.

Demonstrating forgiveness to others shows the world, particularly the circles you live in, what God is like. It is at the very heart of the kingdom of God. It demonstrates God's love. And love is the identifying mark of being a Christian.

1 John 4:7 *“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.”*

For someone who doesn't know Christ, are they able to see Christ reflected in your actions and words when someone sins against you? Do you react quickly and in anger, or do you take some time before responding with thoughtful and kind words? Reflect on your interactions with your spouse, your kids, your co-workers, your church friends or any other people you tend to spend a lot of time with on a daily basis

(PRAY) Ask God to.....Lord, help you to remember that not only does he see you when you forgive or when you don't forgive someone else, but so do others. Ask God to help you to love others each day by extending his grace, mercy and forgiveness to them so that the world may see God through your actions. Pray for patience, understanding, and compassion so that others words and actions directed at you may not cause you to react in anger.

FORGIVING OTHERS IS A PART OF YOUR ON-GOING RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

As a Christian, there is no justification for hanging onto anger towards a fellow human being. There is no room for hatred in your heart. Not if you profess to follow Christ. If you hold a grudge, if you refuse to forgive, your relationship with God is damaged. The health of your relationship with God rises or falls depending on whether or not you choose to forgive others.

Matthew 6:14-15 *“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your father will not forgive your sins.”*

The message from Jesus in Matthew 6:15 is a very weighty and serious statement. We

tend to ignore it or gloss over it, but It should stop you in your tracks or at the very least give you pause. Your forgiveness **from** God fuels **your** ability to forgive others.

Take a long, honest look inside your heart and really consider this question, “Which verse best describes you; verse 14 or verse 15?” Have you been hanging onto feelings of bitterness, anger, or hatred against another person? What do you value more; your ongoing relationship with God, or hanging onto those feelings?” It is a one or the other type of response. You can’t have both.

Listen to some of the words you pray To God, our Heavenly Father, each time you recite the Lord’s prayer... “forgive us **our** trespasses **as we forgive those** who trespass against us...” If you have not forgiven someone, when you speak those words, the first question He asks you, “Yes, but you have not forgiven that other person. How can you ask me to forgive you?”

Matthew 5:23-24 *“Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or your sister has something against you, leave your gift there and go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”*

(PRAY) Ask God to remove any feelings of anger, bitterness, or hatred that Satan can use to keep you from wanting to forgive someone. Pray that God will replace those feelings with love and compassion so that you can restore or maintain a right relationship with God.

FORGIVENESS STOPS SATAN IN HIS TRACKS.

You also forgive people to defeat the enemy. When you harbor anger and resentment you are unable to see another human being as a fellow child of God. You start to think of them as an enemy, as a foe whose actions have caused them to deserve your anger, to deserve to be despised or even hated. That is exactly what Satan wants you to do. When you extend forgiveness to someone, you remove Satan’s power over you and you stop Satan in his tracks.

Ephesians 4:26-27 *“In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”*

If you go to bed brooding over how someone has wronged you, you will awaken each day more consumed by your negative feelings, further and further separating yourself from God.

(PRAY) Ask God to help you to recognize and admit if you still have unresolved anger at the end of the day. Pray that He helps you to not hold onto those feelings of anger, but to give those feelings over to him. Pray that He enables you to discuss those feelings with whoever is involved, in a timely manner when you are less inclined to react negatively. Pray that you become a better listener, to help you confess and seek forgiveness when needed. Ask God to keep your heart from becoming bitter and hardened and from becoming a fertile ground for Satan to create division and heartache in your relationships.

(Make it a habit at the end of the day to talk with God and review where you had fallen short...)

ASPECTS OF FORGIVENESS IN A FALLEN WORLD

JUST LIKE YOUR OFFENDER WE ALL NEED FORGIVENESS. WE ALL ARE CHILDREN OF GOD.

Satan is constantly at work trying to create discord and division among us and ultimately a separation between you and God. Satan twists the truth when he whispers to you, “What that person did to you is unforgivable, they don’t deserve to be forgiven.” The first part is the lie. The second part is true, ‘they don’t deserve to be forgiven’.....,but neither do you. It would be different if you were blameless, if you were without sin, if you lived your life in perfect obedience to God....., but you are far from perfect.

Ecclesiastes 7:20 *“Indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.”*

(PRAY) Ask God to help you see others as fellow sinners in need of a savior; as a fellow child of God designed and lovingly created by him just as you were. Rather than condemning them for their sins, ask God to help you look on them with compassion so that you might understand their situation, their brokenness and empathize with what they might have been through.

There is only one who was and is perfect, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thankfully he is as merciful as he is loving. He forgives us every time we come to him in repentance and ask for His forgiveness.

1 John 1:9 *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

(PRAY) Take some time now to confess to our Heavenly Father admitting where you have fallen short with your thoughts, your words, or your actions whether it was a specific incident or whether it is repeated in your relationship - especially to those you love and care about. (If it is helpful, write down the things you want to be forgiven for, so in addition to God you can ask for forgiveness from the other person[s].)

We like to think that we are better than someone who sins against us, but we are not. We like to believe that their sin against us is worse than any of the ones we commit against them or another. But in God’s eyes they are not. All of us sin against God when we sin against one another.

Romans 3:23 *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified*

freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Jesus’ death and resurrection on the cross.)

(PRAY) Confess any weaknesses that frequently cause you to stumble and ask God for strength in those weaknesses, whatever they are. (Whether you struggle with anger, impatience, criticism/harsh words, negativity, avoidance, selfishness, jealousy, covetousness, addictions, etc. ask God to help you change your pattern of sinning. Ask God to help you become more like Jesus in _____? (what ways?) It is possible that you may need to pray the same prayers over and over again, especially if you have struggled with those patterns for a long time. (Write them down or set a reminder on your phone so that you are praying about those things without ceasing.)

FORGIVENESS ISN'T ALWAYS A PERSONAL THING. SOMETIMES IT'S ABOUT A GROUP.

It is just as easy to look down on an individual as it is to look down on a whole group of people. You might think you are better than they are for how they live their lives, their actions, or their worldview. You can over generalize and hold accountable an entire organization, a whole political party, a whole ethnic group, or a whole nation, for what just a handful of individuals have done.

You may feel angry and justified in condemning the whole group. For what they have done is so much worse than anything that you have ever done, or could ever do.

Luke 6:37 “...Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

God has written the ability in our hearts to know, discern and judge between good and evil - whether you or someone else commits the sin. We are supposed to know that. We are supposed to do that. What God doesn't want you or anyone else to do is to set yourself up as the prosecutor, judge, and jury. It is not up to us to determine whether someone should be condemned. It is not up to us to determine what their punishment should be, no matter what sins they may have committed.

(PRAY) Ask God to help you speak the truth in love with empathy and compassion and without condemnation into the lives of those who have sinned against you; to be able to let them know how you feel about their words or actions without attacking or condemning them.

GOD ASKS YOU TO FORGIVE, NOT FORGET

God says from **Isaiah 43:25**, *“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”*

We know God forgives us our sins and removes them from us as if they never happened. But it is hard to forget sins when we are faced with the constant reminders of the devastating consequences sin sometimes leaves behind in its wake, both in our lives and in the lives of those we love.

God asks us to forgive others regardless of the sin committed against us. You may ask, “It’s going to be hard enough for me to forgive. How am I supposed to forget what they did to me?” God doesn’t ask you to forget about their sin. Nowhere in the Bible does God ever ask you to forget about sin. God asks you to forgive the sinner, not the sin itself. (“... as we forgive **those** who trespass against us...”) Forgiveness is about forgiving the one who sinned - the one who hurt you, not excusing what they did to you.

We know God does not condemn you for your sins and neither should you condemn others.

Romans 8:1 *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

Yet forgiveness does not immediately, or sometimes ever, restore everything to the way things used to be. Even for followers of Jesus Christ sin changes relationships. Sin changes lives.

Sometimes the hurts run very deep and the wounds are more difficult to heal; especially when they are done by someone you love or someone you trusted.

(PRAY) Take a moment to consider the emotional pain, betrayal, and hurt that adultery, addiction to porn drugs or alcohol; abortion, stealing, lying, etc can have on those who sinned and on those who were affected by the sinner’s actions. If you or someone you care about has been affected by such sins, or committed such sins, pray for healing and forgiveness. Pray for restoration and a renewed heart that only Jesus can give to us.

2 Corinthians 5:17, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”*

SEEKING REVENGE EQUATES TO NOT TRUSTING IN GOD.

Sometimes when you or someone you love are deeply hurt by someone who has sinned against you or your loved one, you might be tempted to obtain retribution; to seek revenge. Or you might wish that something bad would happen to the person who hurt you. You might even pray that they “get what’s coming to them.” If you have those desires, stop and consider what that says about your trust in God. If you are the one deciding who should receive God’s grace and forgiveness, and who should receive God’s judgement and wrath and what that wrath should be, what message are you sending God?

Romans 12:19, *“Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”*

(Pray) Ask God to forgive your human desires to “get even” and to forgive your distrust in God’s plans and in his righteousness. Ask God to give you more faith in his plans; for more patience as God works through your heart and the heart of your offender for His glory.

GOD IS AWARE OF YOUR WOUNDS. GOD HAS YOUR BACK.

When someone offends you, the tendency is to immediately focus on the offense and on the offender. If you do that, you will find yourself becoming consumed with the offense and the offender. You may end up blaming God, being angry with him, and wondering, “God why did you let this...” or “Why didn’t you stop” And once you get to the place where you are blaming God for the trouble in your life, Satan has his noose around your neck and he will lead you along a pathway of deep destruction because you are lost without God.

Where do you think God was at that moment in time?

Do you believe that God was surprised at what happened to you or that he was somehow asleep at the wheel and caught off guard?

Proverbs 15:3 “The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.”

Be assured God sees and knows everything that goes on in the world and in your life, and in the lives of those that sin against you..... Everything..... Every little detail.

Psalm 139:1-3, *“You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.”*

God stands as a gatekeeper to our lives. He prevents a lot of bad things from entering our lives, things that we aren't aware of. But he also gives permission and has the final say as to what comes into our lives. He even uses the consequences of sin to shape us; to get our attention, to deepen our faith and strengthen our dependence on Him because he cares for us.

Romans 8:28 *“And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*

(PRAY) Thank God for watching over you and your life; for taking a keen and loving interest in everything that happens to you.

Ask God to help you to trust that in everything that happens in your life, and in the lives of others, that God has a greater purpose. Ask God to strengthen your faith, your trust in him.

HOW WE FORGIVE

FORGIVENESS HAS EVERYTHING TO DO WITH YOUR TRUST IN GOD.

When Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave, he might have wondered what God's purpose was for his life, but his faith in God never wavered. Because of his faith and his trust in God, Joseph was able to forgive his brothers. These are the words Joseph spoke to his brothers many years later when they were reunited, **Genesis 50:20**, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

Like Joseph, we may not fully understand what God's plans are in the moment. It may be many years later that we are able to see his hand in bringing about change, growth, or accomplishing an even greater good. But rest assured, God is constantly at work behind the scenes to do just that. Know that God is in the midst of our lives as well as those who hurt us.

(PRAY) That you are able to trust that God has a plan for you as well as for those who have hurt you. Ask God to help change your mindset when someone sins against you. Ask God to help you to deepen your faith. Instead of trying to understand the situation and asking God, "Why?", ask God to help you say, "What do you want me to learn from this?" Ask God for you to be able to trust that he is ultimately going to take care of both you and the one who offended you. Ask God to release your worries and concerns over what has happened and what is going to happen. Ask Him to help you, "Let it go" and release all your emotions and concerns over to him. Pray that he deepens your trust and confidence in Him.

YOUR ABILITY TO FORGIVE SOMEONE ELSE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH YOUR OFFENDER.

If you have confidence that God loves you, that he has your back, that he knows what occurred, and if you trust that he will work things out for His glory...You can at the very first point turn your face to God and say, "God, I know you got this. Lord, help me figure this out while I trust you to deal with my offender." You will be able to trust God and praise Him like King David did in **Psalms 13**, "*How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, Lord, my God. Give light to my eyes or I will sleep in*

*death, and my enemy will say, 'I have overcome him,' and my foes will rejoice when I fall. **But I trust in your unfaithful love**; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me."*

For when you fully trust God to deal with your offender, you no longer have to do that or even worry about how things will turn out for your offender. And so you are free to forgive. You are now in a position and a posture to forgive. Those who experience an offense and turn their faces and their focus upon God will end up forgiving their offender every time, all the time, regardless of the sin committed against them.

(PRAY) Ask God to help you understand that forgiveness has nothing to do with your offender, but has everything to do with God being a worthy King who has forgiven you. Ask God to help you remember that God did not forgive you because you deserved it.

UNCONDITIONAL AND FREELY GIVEN; NO STRINGS ATTACHED.

God forgave you for Christ's sake, unconditionally. You forgive people for God's sake in the same manner.

When he asks you to then forgive those who have offended you, do you say, "Sure, I'll forgive him as soon as he..." Do you tend to put conditions on whether you hand out your forgiveness to someone else? Do you wait for the other person to apologize to you first or to ask you for forgiveness before you offer them your forgiveness? Christ like forgiveness, does not wait for apologies or repentance from the other person. It's like giving somebody a blank check. Whether they cash it or not is their business.

As Christ was dying on the cross, he prayed for the people who persecuted him and put him there. From **Luke 23:34**, "*Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*" **Ephesians 4:32**, "*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*"

Just as Christ's forgiveness to you is unconditional, so should your forgiveness be to others. At Easter we are reminded of God's grace extended to us when he sent his son, Jesus Christ, to the cross with our sins, with your sins, to die in your place. How does knowing that and meditating on that cause your heart to feel? How does knowing that God forgives you all of your sins and erased all your debt create a change in how you view those who have sinned against you?

(Pray) Ask God to help you to forgive, as Christ forgives; to move you to respond immediately to your offender with forgiveness and not wait for that person to repent. Ask

God to prevent you from putting conditions on your forgiveness. Instead ask God to help you give it away freely as he intended.

Colossians 3:13 *“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”*

(PRAY) Who do you need to forgive that you have been waiting for that individual to apologize or repent to you? Take time now to pray for this person(s). Ask God to help you give this person over to God and place your offender’s well-being in our Lord’s care. Pray for any personal relationships that have become changed, awkward, or broken because of sin. Consider what you can do to initiate peace and forgiveness.

Romans 12:14-15 *“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”*

(PRAY) That you will not allow bitterness or hostility to grow in your own heart. Ask God to prevent you from becoming a stumbling block to others and thereby spread the seeds of discord and lack of unity and harmony. Pray that forgiveness becomes easier and easier for you to do so that love and peace reign in your heart and in where you live, work, and worship.

FORGIVENESS IS A CONSCIOUS DECISION.

The effort you make to live in peace depends on a conscious decision on your part to do so and forgiveness plays a major role in that. Forgiveness is an action of the heart, but it is also a decision of the mind that you alone must decide to make. Forgiving your fellow man is perhaps one of the hardest things to do as a Christian. Yet it is what God asks of you day after day after day.

Matthew 18:21-22 *“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy seven times.’”*

(PRAY) For God to make forgiveness an ongoing attitude within you; an unconditional without limits extension of love to somebody else, just like Jesus demonstrated to you and extends to you over and over, again and again.

FORGIVENESS IS POWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Forgiveness is not easy. But those things that God asks us to do, those things which separate us from what the world does, rarely are. Do not forget that you are not alone in this undertaking. Whatever God asks of you he will also enable you to do through the power of the Holy Spirit working within you.

(PRAY) For God to give you the grace to forgive through the power of His Holy Spirit. Ask him as you continually pray for someone, that in time, the Holy Spirit will change your heart from one filled with anger and bitterness to one filled with compassion and love. Ask him to help you come to a better understanding and a greater appreciation of what God has done for you, to remember not only his great love for you, but his great love for your offender.

When you do you will become filled with hope that God can and will take care of things. Forgiveness starts to bring about peace and hope.

Romans 5:5 *“And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”*

FORGIVENESS IS A PROCESS.

Although the Holy Spirit enables us to forgive, forgiveness doesn’t always happen in an instant. When the wounds are deep or long-standing don’t expect that your heart will be okay the instant you decide to forgive someone who has hurt you deeply. God needs to have your whole heart - in order to soften it, to heal it, to remake it. That may take some time. Be patient. Forgiveness is often a process that can take many, many prayer-filled days.

(PRAY) Take some time now to pray and ask God for the grace and the power to forgive whoever is on your heart (a parent, spouse/former spouse, or sibling; a boss, a co-worker, neighbor, or friend, etc.)

Ask God to help you to fully trust in him and allow him to deal with your offender, to allow the Holy Spirit to work on his/her heart to bring about change in them. Ask God to also change your heart, your attitude towards him/her, as well.

THE TEST OF TRUE FORGIVENESS

Is there someone who you have “forgiven” yet you are not sure if you have been “successful” in doing so? Ask yourself, if whenever you see them, or whenever someone mentions their name, does your heart rate increase, your jaws clench, or your blood pressure starts to rise? Who is that person for you? What was their sin? If you still experience any of those things, then you haven’t fully forgiven them.

LOVE YOUR ENEMY AND PRAY FOR THEM.

So how do you know if you have come to the point where you have fully forgiven someone? It is when you can pray for them and wish them well, and mean it. It is when you think of them and your heart is at peace. It is when your only concern is for their well-being and their relationship with God. It is when your only emotions are ones of compassion and love. Then God says, “Alright, you have forgiven them. Now love your enemy.”

Matthew 5:43-44 *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,”*
And again, Jesus instructs us in Luke **6:27-28, 31** *“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you...Do to others as you would have them do to you.”*

LIVE IN PEACE.

And thankfully now you’re free to love them because you have given your ‘enemy’ to God and decided to be a peacemaker instead of a trouble-maker.

Matthew 5:9, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”*

However, when you refuse to forgive someone, when you withhold God’s forgiveness, you are not acting with love. You are not sowing the seeds of peace. You are not doing what is right in God’s eyes.

1 John 3:10 *“Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.”*

The three most powerful words in a marriage or in any relationship, are not, “I love you.”, but rather, “I forgive you.” Forgiving someone when they have wronged you is a very real and tangible way of demonstrating Christ’s love.

1 John 4:19 *“We love because he first loved us.”*

We love others because Jesus loves us. We forgive others because Jesus forgives us. We bless others when we choose to forgive them.

BE A BLESSING.

Romans 4:7, *“Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.”*

Has anyone ever spoken a word in anger or did something that wounded you that they regretted Instantly? Did they say, “I am sorry,” or did they say, “Please forgive me?” Which one has a more powerful impact?

(PRAY) Ask God to make forgiveness an integral part of all your relationships - especially with your spouse. Whenever you act unlovingly, ask God to help you to ask for forgiveness and to better reflect Christ’s love to those you love.

Someone once wrote, “The refusal to forgive, though it may be morally appropriate always extends the reign of the original sin into the future so that it can end up dominating a whole life or the life of a whole people.”

Who do you think benefits more when you forgive someone else, the person that sinned against you, or yourself?

BE FORGIVEN AND FREE.

Forgiveness frees a sinner to a glorious future. Forgiveness gives you back a future. It gives those who offended you a future. Forgiveness demonstrates what God is like. Forgiveness is what we are called to do – to show our world what God is like. Forgiveness robs Satan of his power. It frees us to an everlasting life with God. What can be more freeing, more liberating than when you let go of past hurts by giving them to God, and forgive the person who wronged you?

We, the elders and Pastor Rod, pray that this prayer journey has blessed you, that you have gained a better understanding of forgiveness and how vital a role it plays in your walk of faith and in your relationship with God and with your neighbors. May you now be even more ready to love and forgive as Christ both demonstrated and instructed you to do.

1 Peter 3:8-9 *“Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.”*