

## **FORGIVENESS AND LETTING GO**

**Week #2 of the 4-Week Series, "The Foundation of Fulfillment"**

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So how many people have ever been so upset by something that someone said or did to you that you couldn't stop thinking about it? Couldn't get it out of your mind to the point it affected your concentration and sleep? Anybody ever been that disturbed by what somebody did? And how many people have ever made a mistake? I mean, you messed up big time! And you beat yourself up for it for week, months, maybe even years. Anybody ever beta yourself up badly for something? Anybody ever have a tough time forgiving -- or even refuse to forgive somebody -- because of what they did or said? Okay; two of us. Great! [Congregation laughs] Last one; last one; last one! Have you ever had somebody do something to you and it hurt you so bad that you secretly plotted revenge or wished bad things upon them? Alright; just three or four of us! [Congregation laughs] Alright!

So it kind of reminds me of this story of these three guys, and they're having a bowl of soup each on this patio. And these flies come by and a fly lands in each of their three soups. And the first guy: he just calmly scoops out the fly with his spoon and loses a little bit of his soup. The second guy was a little more aggressive; he blew the fly out and lost a little more soup. The third guy was really angry; he was really angry! He didn't want to lose any of his soup! So he picked up the fly by its wings and said, "*Spit it out! Spit it out! Every last drop -- spit it out.*" [Congregation laughs]

You know, I believe that nothing in this life diminishes or deprives us of our peace or joy and happiness than holding on to resentment; of holding on to bitterness and blame; of holding on to judgement and condemnation; of holding on to anger and hatred. Nothing disturbs the calm peace of our soul mor than holding on to a grudge and holding on to the pain of the past.

And I also believe that nothing frees us from these negative feelings, destructive thoughts and toxic emotions like the power of forgiveness. Forgiveness is healing and forgiveness is absolutely liberating. And it helps us get "unstuck" from where we might be holding on to the past to move on to live our lives more positively; more peacefully; and I believe more powerfully. The gift of forgiveness is really the gift of freedom.

And I'll tell you: While I believe that [forgiveness] is liberating and healing, I also believe it is the hardest; it is the most difficult; and it is the least liked of all spiritual practices. Forgiveness, to me, is the spiritual equivalent to eating broccoli; cleaning out the garage; or going to the dentist. You know it's good for you, but you'd rather put it off, because it's something that's just not pleasant. I mean, even the word "forgiveness." When you hear the word "forgiveness," I mean, does that create a lot of warm fuzzies for you? I mean, when you compare the word "forgiveness" to "thankfulness," "joyfulness" or "happiness," you can't compare. Because there is something about it; you know that it's tough ... even though it is good and important for us.

I would say, without a doubt, that forgiveness is an invaluable spiritual practice and a vital life skill if we want to live a happy and fulfilling life.

Last week started a four-week series entitled, "The Foundation of Fulfillment." Because every one of us is always chasing happiness; we want to be happy. We want to be happy! But happiness can really be fleeting, because sometimes when things go our way, we're happy, and when they don't go our way, we're unhappy. And I read an article that said that the most important way to be happy is -- instead of pursuing happiness -- is to find fulfillment. Because there's something deeper about fulfillment. There is something more enriching about fulfillment. It is about meaning; it is about values; it is about a sense of purpose; it's about overcoming and achieving and making a difference. In fact, pursuing fulfillment instead of happiness is actually easier; it's healthier; and it's more effective way to have a happier and fulfilling life.

Last week we looked at the very first foundation of fulfillment, and it's **FAITH**. Faith is that power and belief in a Power that is greater than ourselves that can call forth greater peace and love and joy and

abundance. Faith is that thing that lets us know our dreams can come true. Faith is that thing that, when we get knocked down in life, it knows there's something in us that can help us rise up again, and to live a better life.

And the other thing about faith is that it helps combat the greatest thing that holds us back from living, which is fear. The more faith we build up and make stronger, the less and less we let fear control and guide and hold us back from living.

And the second foundation about fulfillment is about **VALUES**: it's about what's important to us. It's about: What does your life mean to you and what is your purpose? What are your priorities? Because when we are driven by those types of things, then even when life isn't fun or isn't going our way, or it's tedious or difficult, we still find meaning and value and a sense of purpose in all the things that we're going through. Because we know our "why" and we can get through whatever "how" is happening in our lives.

Today we're going to look at two more foundational principles. And they are **FORGIVENESS** and **LETTING GO**. And I would just have to say -- I think you already know this! These are not fun, but they are valuable and they are hugely important if we want to live a more fulfilling life.

So let me ask you: Why do you think forgiving is so hard? Here's some reasons that I think.

The first one is: It's hard to forgive, because we have this idea that we want to get even. We have this idea that, *"If I just get that person back, it'll make me feel better. Then we'll be 'square.'"* We sometimes think in the "eye for an eye": *"If they do it to me, I have to do it back to them, or otherwise I won't feel good. They'll have something up on me."*

The second one is kind of related. Why it's hard to forgive is because we have this idea of justice where we think they should be punished. *"They shouldn't get away with it just like that for what they did or what they said! They shouldn't get a free pass!"* And our version of punishment is hating them. Our version of punishment is never talking to them or thinking about them or not forgiving them.

The third reason it's hard to forgive is because we sometimes perceive forgiveness as a weakness. And we don't want to seem like we're weak. We don't want to seem like we're doormats. We're already hurting; we don't want to be taken advantage of even more. So we think not forgiving in some way protects us and keeps us safe.

The fourth one is that we think forgiving them is condoning the behavior. No! Forgiveness is just releasing the hurt and the pain; it's not saying the behavior was appropriate. It is not saying that it was okay.

And then the fifth one is that we think forgiving means that we've got to be "chummy" and "pally" with them ... and have lunch with them and stuff. And it's ... No! You release it. And sometimes it's important to set boundaries. Sometimes the person is someone we shouldn't have a relationship with.

And then the final one why it's hard to forgive is: Sometimes we enjoy blaming other people. And even if it is their fault, sometimes it's nice an excuse about why our life isn't going as well as we want it to. And it sometimes absolves us of the full responsibility of our own lives, which can sometimes scare us.

The word "forgiveness" in Jesus' language, Aramaic, means "to loosen; to untie," and connotes this idea of freeing ourselves to be able to move forward.

In the Book of Luke, it says, *"Forgive and you will be forgiven."* And what that's saying is that, when we forgive, we actually free ourselves from bitterness. We free ourselves from regret and resentment and the hurt and pain that we might have experienced.

You remember in Matthew when Peter said, *"Jesus, how many times should I forgive? As many as seven?"* And Jesus said, *"No; as many as 70 times seven."* And Jesus wasn't exactly going for a number here. But in the Bible, the number seven represents completion. So when he said, *"70 times seven,"* he's saying to completely and fully forgive all the time, every time. That forgive when you want to feel peace, and when you want to move on with your life ... which is every time. He was talking about a

consciousness of forgiveness: of perpetually letting go of the things that can keep us stuck in the past. Keep us stuck in pain and keep us stuck with some toxic thoughts and emotions

And so we have to be constantly freeing ourselves -- a mindset of forgiveness -- about releasing it, not holding on to the things and the hurts that we perceive that others do. Don't let it build up!

So the four things that make forgiveness possible.

Number one is that we have to **DECIDE TO RECLAIM OUR POWER**. When we hate somebody, we are actually giving them some of our personal power. We are saying that our happiness -- or part of it -- is in their control. And so what we need to do is to decide to reclaim our peace. Reclaim our power. To take back our personal power and to be fully responsible for our lives. Forgiveness is about freeing ourselves.

The second thing is to **CHOOSE TO HAVE COMPASSION**. We can't have full ... And this is where it starts getting harder! To have compassion for that person. We don't all of their story. We don't know! We know that they're acting from some place of hurt. And even though they act in an inappropriate way, we need some level of compassion to realize that they're children of God. Just like us. They mess up just like us, and could use some healing and some understanding.

And part of that is to have compassion for ourselves for what we went through and are going through, as well. And give ourselves the support that we need.

The third one is to **RISE TO THE DIVINE**. You know that line, *"To err is human; to forgive divine"*? It is to rise to that. And forgive means to "give for." So you give love for the hurt. If you got hurt, but you give back love. You give back understanding. You give back care for the other person. And know that some good will come forth, so to be able to send them blessings of peace; blessings of love; and blessings of goodness is important. And it's going to that higher -- that Christ level of ourselves -- to express that level of love and care for the other person, even when we have been hurt by them.

Gandhi said that *"Forgiveness is not for the weak. Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong."* And this is part of the spiritual practice; it's hard! When someone has hurt us, it's difficult for us to send love. To send them peace. To send them blessings. But that is that high spiritual level of our Christ selves that we have to demonstrate. To send forth that if we want to experience the healing and the peace to really move forward with our lives.

And then the final one is to **LOVINGLY RELEASE THEM TO THEIR HIGHEST GOOD and LOVINGLY RELEASE OURSELVES TO OUR HIGHEST GOOD**. It is choosing to move forward beyond this. To say, *"This thing isn't going to define my life or hold me back; I'm going to lovingly release them their highest, and lovingly release myself to the highest."*

And so forgiveness is an incredible liberator; healer; and freer of ourselves to go forth and to live our lives. And you know what the other thing is? Not only does it liberate us from our own pain, but it expands our capacity to love. It expands our capacity for compassion and understanding of others, and still choosing to send them love. So it is a powerful, but difficult, spiritual practice that opens our heart to be able to send love to everyone. Because if we can send love and good wishes and release people who have hurt us, then we can expand our hearts to love everyone and every people.

This forgiveness thing really weighs us down if we keep holding on to resentments and bitterness and blame. I've known a family where two sisters didn't speak for 30 years. I mean, we can hold on to these grudges. We can hold on to these resentments. And what it does is weighs us down from living and from enjoying our lives as fully as we can.

So I want you to think: Who is somebody that you have forgiven in your life? Think back to that. Who is a person you have forgiven? And who is someone you need to forgive right now?

Now looking back on it, you have already forgiven, so you know how to do it. Not easy, but you've done it! So who do you need to forgive now? And what do you need to forgive yourself for? In what way is some resentment holding you back? And are you willing to free yourself?

And so the steps are, again: You've got to be willing to reclaim your peace and reclaim your power. You need to have compassion for yourself and that person. You need to rise to your Divine and send them love; send them peace; send them blessings of good. And then you need to lovingly release them to their highest good and release yourself.

Every one of us is going to say something that's going to hurt someone. And we will have people say and do things in our lives that will hurt us. Our ability to free ourselves from the past and to forgive is vital if we want to live a fulfilling life; is vital if we want to move on to greater joy and greater happiness and success.

One of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves is the gift of forgiveness, because it is the gift of freedom and it is the gift of peace.

The second important foundation of fulfillment is letting go. Letting go is tough for us because, as a culture, we like to hold on. We hold on to so many things! How many people right now have some clothes in your closet that you don't wear or don't fit, but you're still keeping it? [Congregation laughs] Anybody have anything like that? "I know I'll fit into it again one day!" Anybody have exercise equipment or appliances or old furniture that you haven't used? And you still have it! [Congregation laughs] You're still holding on to it for some sentimental reason!

You know the largest -- one of the largest -- growing industries in our country is storage! [Congregation laughs] We want to keep our stuff! I know somebody who's had stuff in storage for six years! [Congregation laughs] Six years! They could have bought new stuff with all the amount of money they paid! We have a TV show named *Hoarders* because we love to hold on to stuff!

And you know how we think: "*Well, I'd better save that, because I might need it one day.*" We've got all kinds of excuses why we hold on. And it is much deeper than just about clothes. Because we hold on in general ways. Hold on to old dreams. We hold on to relationships that are unhealthy. We have attachments; we hold on. We have to have this house, or we have to have this go this way or that way.

I don't know if you ever saw the TV show called *The Prophet*? It's about a guy who comes and helps businesses. And you know the number one thing that has all businesses fail and struggle? It's an unwillingness to ... an attachment to the old way of doing it, and an unwillingness to let go and do something in a new and different way.

There are all kinds of things that we hold on to. We hold on to limiting beliefs like, "*Life is unfair!*" We hold on to habits like smoking or biting our fingernails. We hold on! You know why? Because at some level we think holding on will keep us safe. Holding on is a better way. And in some ways, letting go is scary. "*Suppose I let go and everything falls apart! Suppose I let go and I lose everything!*" Letting go is terrifying! Because letting go feels like, "Oh, I'll be facing the unknown. That I won't be okay."

Michael Beckwith said, "*One hundred percent of spiritual growth is about letting go.*" And you know why? It's because our nature is divine; we are amazing, talented, beautifully, wondrously made amazing spiritual beings created in the image and likeness of God. The light of the world! This is our nature; it's magnificent and unlimited! And yet we have been taught and conditioned and we pick up all these false beliefs about ourselves that we begin to believe. That we're not good enough. We're not lovable enough. That there isn't enough for me. We have all these things of poverty consciousness, and fear and lack, that is attached to us. And we're holding on to some of those beliefs and living out of lack, so we're afraid to let go of these things.

It kind of reminds me of this guy, Jack, who was hiking one day. And he came close to the edge and he slipped off, and he fell 100 feet and grabbed on to this branch. And below was another two- or three-hundred feet, and he was terrified. He started screaming, "*Help! Help! Help! Anybody, help! God, help, help!*"

And he hears a voice: "*Jack, everything's going to be okay.*"

And Jack says, "*Is that you, God?*"

"*Yeah, yeah; it's me. Just listen to everything I say, and everything's going to be okay.*"

*"Oh, God, if you help me, I promise I'll go to church; I'll give the church lots of money ... I'll do anything you want! Anything you want; just say it, and I'll do it!"*

And God says, "Let go."

And Jack says, "Huh?"

And God says, "Let go and everything will be okay."

And Jack looks down and sees how far it is, and he goes, "Help! Help! Is there anybody else up there?"

Letting go scares us! I mean, it sounds simple, but there's a lot of things we hold on to that aren't healthy; aren't supportive of ourselves.

And you know what the number one principle behind the ability to let go is? Trust. Do you trust that everything's going to be okay? Do you trust that God loves you enough, and God has a plan for you that -- if you let go of this, whether it's a limiting belief or whatever: a relationship; whatever -- that there will be something greater and better?

Proverbs says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding, but in all ways acknowledge him, and he will make clear your paths."

Letting go is more powerful than you realize. It liberates us and it opens us to the unlimited goodness and possibilities of God.

Sometimes when we hold on so tight we're actually limiting and repelling the very good that we desire. But to let go, even of our dreams; to let go of our problems; to let go of our fears and our concerns; to let go of the fear ... Whatever it is, can you just let it go to God? To just let go and let God.

Because what happens is peace comes; a reassurance that you're loved; that everything's going to be okay. And it opens the way for other greater possibilities or ideas.

And the other thing about letting go: there's no past or present. There's only now. And we are powerfully in the present moment. We are aware and more engaged -- more alive in life -- the more we're willing to let go.

I would say this is my favorite and most consistent meditation that I do. It's not asking for this and that; it's letting go and giving way to allow the wisdom of the Divine to come forth. And it is in the letting go and the trusting that we open ourselves to know that God loves us. And if you're willing to let go, we can open our lives to so much more. That our dreams will come true, our hurts will be healed, the more we're willing to let go and let God.

Now I want to tell you about the second practice. Anybody every read David Hawkins' book, *Letting Go*? It is a really, really cool book. And here's what he says: When we hold on -- the thing that's most damaging of what we hold on to -- is the emotion and the feeling. That feeling of betrayal. That feeling of hurt. Or that feeling of fear. Whatever it is, that's the thing that he says that we need to be able to let go of. But his thing about letting go is: The best way to let it go is to actually welcome it. To actually bring it in so he could move through and we can be freed of it and let go.

So here's the four ways that he says about the practice of letting go.

The first is **THINK OF A FEELING YOU WANT TO LET GO OF**. And maybe it's sadness or hurt or betrayal. But just recognizing, "I'm feeling sadness" Or, "I'm feeling hurt or betrayal." Just acknowledging what it is.

And the second thing is to **ALLOW YOURSELF TO FEEL IT**. To feel that sadness. And actually to notice in your body where you feel tight or upset and just be aware. Let yourself feel it and just be aware. And try your best to relax your body. And to feel it and relax to it.

Let me give you a Scripture that kind of describes it: 23rd Psalm. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me." Yea, though I walk through the valley of sadness, or walk through the valley of betrayal, or the valley of hurt, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me.

So you can actually allow yourself to feel a feeling of hurt or betrayal or pain and relax into it. Be aware of it and walk through that valley. And what he says is it begins to cleanse and move through you.

And you know that line, "*What we resist, persists*"? It's exactly what it's saying. That the best way to let it go is to let it move through us.

And then the third question to ask is: **COULD I LET THIS GO?** And that's to check in to make us realize: we have a choice! That we are empowered to free ourselves.

And the last one is: **WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO LET IT GO?** Meaning, would you be willing to stop telling the story? Or keep making excuses? And would you be willing to use that energy to help you actually move forward and utilize it to live your life in a newer and greater way?

Forgiveness is not -- and letting go is not -- easy. But I'll tell you it's one of the most valuable and important things if you want to move your life to another level of living. To a higher level of fulfillment.

How many people ever drove your car with your emergency brake on? Anybody ever had that experience? [Congregation laughs] Your car will still go forward, but it's a lot of wear and tear, and you can feel the resistance and its sluggishness. And trying to live your life with resentment or holding on to grudges, or not forgiving and not letting go, is like driving with your emergency brake on. It wears on us on our inside. Even though our lives look like it's moving forward, the inside is not going as well. But when we release the break -- which is the equivalent to forgiving and letting go -- we move down the road of life with greater ease; greater peace; and greater joy.

We all want happy lives. But if you want to go deeper and have a more fulfilling life, work on the foundations of fulfillment. This week I want you to practice FORGIVENESS and LETTING GO.

God bless you all!

[Congregation applauds]

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