

FORGIVE AND LET GO

Week #7 of a 10-Week Series, "Your Spiritual Quest: The Adventure of Your Life!"

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Welcome! And thank you for welcoming me and my family. It has just been so lovely to be here and have so many of you just reaching out and saying hello and welcome.

It is forgiveness, and so I guess I should say forgive us for having more Californians in your beautiful state. [Congregants laugh] But we are thoroughly in love with it, so thank you.

When Rev. Richard Maraj told me a month or so ago, he said, *"Well, we're going to be in a series called 'Your Spiritual Quest; The Adventure of Your Life.'"* And I thought, *"Well, that sounds amazing!"* Right? And then he added, *"And on your Sunday, the topic will be forgiveness."* Okay then. [Congregants laugh] So we're going to do a deep dive right in there together, huh? With the real serious spiritual stuff.

Because forgiveness is not easy. Am I right? [Congregant: "Right!"] Right! Oh, that was very clear. Okay. Yeah. Because if you want the adventure of your life, if you want a spiritual quest, try a forgiveness practice. In fact, forgiveness may be the number one way to jumpstart your spiritual quest.

Does anyone struggle with forgiveness? [Congregants murmur] Oh, good; I'm not alone. So happy! Yeah, see, forgiveness can be really, really challenging when we know that we need to forgive the person who did something like cut us off in traffic, right? The person who snuck in front of us in the grocery line. The child who drew the crayons all over our brand new painted walls. You know, those are the times that -- instead of getting angry or frustrated or lashing out -- when we can make a new choice to forgive; to breathe; to bless that person; to show compassion towards them.

It's a spiritual quest to apply forgiveness towards someone who has hurt our hearts. We've all had our hearts hurt, whether it's a friend or a family member, a neighbor. That can be hard to forgive.

It's a spiritual quest and probably the biggest adventure of life to forgive ourselves. Forgive ourselves for the things we've done, said, thought that we wish we hadn't done, said, and thought.

So forgiveness is definitely a spiritual adventure and it can lead to our greatest spiritual transformation. Forgiveness can lead to our greatest spiritual growth. And part of why it's so challenging, too, is because forgiveness is a spiritual practice, but it also incorporates two other spiritual practices, being self-awareness and self-care. The self-awareness to know when we need to forgive, and the self-care to do so. And am I going to do so when it's right for me? When I'm comfortable doing so?

So, I graduated from the field ministry program in 2015 with Unity Worldwide Ministries. And in two years of interviews, I could always count on the same two questions: How self-aware are you? And are you incorporating self-care? Because self-awareness is important, right? Are you self-reflecting so that you can then act from a new perspective? And self-care: are you taking care of yourself? Because I'll tell you right now: if I am tired and hungry, it is really hard for me to employ any spiritual practice, let alone forgiveness. [Congregants laugh] I'm actually probably going to be asking you for forgiveness for my "hangry," attitude, right? [Congregants laugh] We need to be taking care of ourselves so that we can employ spiritual practices.

So forgiveness, as most of us have probably experienced, is not easy while we're on our spiritual human journey. And yet, forgiveness frees us. It frees us to have the life we want: a life of inner peace; a life of joy; a life of lightness; a life of compassion.

So in reflecting on forgiveness, I start to really sit with and realize, you know, I think there's four components to forgiveness. And they're not steps, because you can do them in any order. But from my own experience, I realize there's four components:

The first one being forgiving self, right? **FORGIVING OURSELVES.**

The second one being **FORGIVING THE OTHER PERSON AND RELEASING THEM TO THEIR HIGHEST GOOD.**

The third being: **IF I'M NOT READY TO FORGIVE, PERHAPS I COULD SET THE INTENTION TO DO SO** and forgiving myself for being in that space of not being able already to forgive yet.

And then the fourth component: asking myself **HOW DO I WANT TO SPEND MY ONE PRECIOUS LIFE?** Where do I want to put my focus? Do I want my focus to be on the present or the past? Because if we're talking about forgiveness then we're talking about something that's happened in the past. So do I want to stay in the past? Or do I want to be present to the presence of the present moment? What emotion do I want to sit in now?

So with the first component: forgiving myself. Because it starts with us. One of my favorite Unity author ministers, Rev. Eric Butterworth; he used to speak at the Lincoln Center in New York City. But he would always write and speak about how life has really lived from within out. It all starts here within us.

And, if we think about forgiveness, there's usually a situation that has happened where there's anger, pain, sadness. And within that, we start to ask those questions of: Why didn't I? How could I have? We start to beat ourselves up around it. It could sound like: Why could I have put myself in that situation? Why did I say that? Or: Why didn't I say that differently, or do that differently? How could I have let them do that to me? Right? We start to ruminate in these questions that really are just beating ourselves up.

And so I read this great post on Instagram. It's full of knowledge. [Congregants laugh] But this one said: *"Instead of judging the things you said or did, why not forgive that part of you that is judging?"* Wow. Yeah. Instead of judging the things you said or did, forgive that part of you that is judging.

So maybe we start with the question: How can I be more kind to myself so that I may move forward? How can I be more kind to myself so I can move forward and be in this present moment?

So there's a story of two monks; maybe some of you have heard it before. But there's two monks. And they're not allowed to touch women. And yet they find themselves -- they've been shopping in town and they're traveling back to the monastery -- and they come across a very large river. And there's a woman who needs help crossing the river. So one monk goes ahead and places the woman on his back and brings her across the river and sets her down. And she thanks him and she goes about her way, and they continue on their way. But the other monk, you can tell, is very disturbed. He's very angry, quiet, not saying anything. So they finally make it at the end of the day to the monastery. And finally, he says, *"I cannot believe you picked up that woman and carried her."* And the other monk who'd carried her says, *"And yet I placed her down by the river this morning and you've been carrying her all day."* [Congregants laugh]

Place. It. Down.

Forgiveness opens up the space within us to show ourselves more kindness; to allow more joy to enter; to be lighter; again, to be present to the presence of life. So I often think of those parts of us that don't want to forgive that anger, right? It's like this box or this blob inside of us. And yet, when we release it, we open it up the space within us to bring in what we want more of. What do I want to experience more

of? Let me make room for it! Because forgiveness is for us. So we can keep holding on to the transgression -- whether that's a transgression against ourselves or someone else -- or we can release it.

So, anger is energetic. and it's like this energetic chain or rope, again, that we can keep grasping on to. Or we can let go. Or it's like that fire: that angry fire that burns within us. And we have the power to extinguish it. And when we do -- just like the forest fires -- we see that there's new growth. There's new beauty. It opens up the space for: What do I want to experience?

And forgiveness -- just so we're clear, because I want to make sure that this is real obvious, too. We're not saying what someone has done -- their actions, because there's some really horrendous actions ... We're not saying that those actions were okay. We're not approving of what has been done. But what we are doing is we're allowing forgiveness to release us from carrying the pain. So that we can put it down.

So I have a personal story around forgiveness. At the end of 2015, I suddenly had Bell's palsy in the right side of my face. It's facial weakness. Then by New Year's 2016, I had nerve pain and weakness in my face; top of my head; down the back of my head; down the right side of my body; and then over to both of my lower legs and my feet. So my doctor originally thought it was shingles, and then she thought it wasn't shingles. It set us off on a 14-month-plus journey of a medical mystery and doctors and tests.

I'll just give you the good ending -- is that it turned out to be shingles. But it was a strange chronic shingles that I'm now cured of, so that's yay. [Congregants applaud] Yeah. But in 2016, we had no idea. And so she and the neurologists I saw at that time, they wanted me to do a spinal tap, a lumbar puncture.

Now, usually I'm very, very good at listening to my intuitive guidance. Hello, I'm here at Unity Phoenix! [Congregants laugh] But this time, in this moment, I didn't. And I just knew I should not go to this appointment. I knew I should not get the test done. Everything inside me said I should cancel this. And yet I didn't. I went to the parking; we were in the parking lot. My husband was there: my husband, Juan. And I'm crying, and I'm saying, *"I should not have this done."* And he said, *"I will take you home; you do not have to have this done."* But then I felt bad for the office staff, and the doctors. Any other people pleasers? [Congregants laugh] Yeah.

So then I'm up in front of the door. of the office and I'm bawling, I'm crying. I do not want to go in. I know this is the wrong thing to do, and my husband, Juan, is still saying, *"I can take you home. You do not need to do this."* *"No, let me just go and explain why I don't want to have it done."*

I go in; I have the procedure done. The next day I'm in the ER with a spinal fluid leak. The next day I could not sit without being in excruciating pain for more than five minutes. It actually took me a year to work up to being able to sit for an hour without excruciating pain. [Congregation murmurs sympathetically]

And so this gets us to that question of: And so, how do I go about forgiving? And when do I know when I'm done with this forgiveness stuff? When do I know I have forgiven the situation or the person?

So for myself in this situation, I first started with: with me. I need to forgive myself for not listening to my inner knowing; to not listening to that spiritual attribute of wisdom, discernment. And I told myself, *"You know, I was doing the best I could with the consciousness that I had in that moment. But moving forward, I'm going to be gentle with myself. I'm going to listen to my inner voice. And I'm going to forgive myself a little bit more every day."*

And then to the doctor. Now, sometimes we think in the forgiveness process we need to have that person right there. But I will tell you there's certain situations you should not have that person right

there. [Congregants laugh] And so I would visualize the doctor standing in front of me. And I would say, *"I know you were doing the best you could with the education and experience you had in that moment. I forgive you and I release you to your highest good."*

And as I was saying this, I would place him in this bubble of light. I would place him in God's light: universal love. And so as I said, *"And I release you to your highest good ..."* I would actually feel myself cutting the energetic connection between us. You could take scissors, you can swipe, right? I just imagined us cutting and watching him float away in this bubble of light to his own highest good.

Now, how many times did I have to do this? So Jesus answers this question in Matthew 18:22. He says, *"Not seven times, but I tell you seventy-seven times."* Meaning: as many times as it takes.

And so, for me, sometimes whenever I felt that twinge of anger, sadness, frustration, emotional pain, I would go through this visualization process. Sometimes it was several times an hour. Sometimes then it was once a day; became once a week; became once a month. To now I can tell this story and there's no emotional attachment to it. I don't have any charge -- emotional charge -- around the doctor or the situation. And so that's when we know. know that we're all done. That's when we know we've completed that forgiveness with that person or the situation: when there's no more emotional attachment to it.

And so here's where I want to bring in the third component to forgiveness as a spiritual practice. But what if I can't forgive? Has anyone been there? But what if I just can't forgive right now? So recently, even myself -- as an ordained minister -- I found myself being really resistant to wanting to forgive a friend who had really hurt me. This person really hurt me. I was really angered and my heart hurt from what they had done and said. And so I was having this resistance.

And so we get back to those first two tools within forgiveness of self -awareness and self -care. So first I had to be aware: *"Okay; I'm not ready. I'm not ready to forgive right now, and that's okay. That's going to be part of my self-care. But what I can do right now, is that I'm going to place that person in this situation, again in God's love: in universal light. I'm going to put love around this situation, I'm going to put love around me. I'm going to detach myself energetically from this -- from them -- and I'm going to release both of us to our highest good."*

And I kept seeing that, and I kept feeling that. Because, really, with our affirmations, it's the emotional energy behind it. And so I was really feeling, *"Yes; I'm going to surround both of us and the situation in love and release both of us to our highest good."* And sure enough, it opened up the space for the highest good to happen.

And another part with this situation, too, was I started to ask myself, *"And when have I done that? And when have I done that?"* You know when you're in traffic, and you're angry because they have cut you off? *"And when have I cut someone off? Hmmm."* And it's not to guilt or shame, but to get curious. *"So when have I been unkind to someone? When have I not maybe told the whole truth because I was afraid of the person's reaction?"*

Because once we start to ask those questions -- and it may not apply all the time, but I have a feeling it will apply more often than you think ... But when we start to ask, *"And when have I ...?"* Then we can start to employ more self-forgiveness. more self-compassion, which in turn allows me to be more forgiving and compassionate with another. Because we're all human and we're all divine.

Eric Butterworth wrote this: *"Jesus says love your enemies, not because they deserve it, but because you deserve it."* Because, see; it is your divine birthright as an expression of the one Power and one Presence of the universe to live an adventurous, joy -filled life. It is your birthright! And so, as we release

ourselves and others to their highest good and our highest good, we open up the space in our lives to live the life we want to live.

So here's my last point on forgiveness. You have one magnificent life. One conscious; one that you're conscious of, right? One conscious, magnificent life. How do you want to spend it? Still holding on to the woman that you carried across the river this morning? Because you can live in the past; you can carry the pain. And that's a choice. Or you can open up the space inside of you to make room for your healing; your spiritual transformation; your spiritual growth; your purpose; and for love.

See, when our hands are closed and a fist, we can't receive anything. But when we open them up, the opening invites more of what we want in our lives.

So the time to salute the divinity in another person is the very time it's the most difficult to do so. And yet, it's the very time to do so, because you deserve to be liberated. Because you deserve to be liberated. Because you, my friends, are an extension of God; of love itself. You are God in human form. And so treat yourself with all the loving kindness you would in expression of God. Because that is what you are.

And by applying the spiritual practices of forgiveness, you embark on an adventure of your life that allows you to show up fully; to go deeper than you have before; to roll with the changes; to dream big; to love large. In other words, to be fully engaged in your spiritual quest and a life well lived.

Are you ready? [Congregants quietly: "Yes."] Are you ready?!? [Congregants loudly: "Yes!"] Okay!

Well then, you've been giving an affirmation card. Will you say this affirmation with me please? And you'll place your name in there. Here we go. Ready?

"Forgiveness is a priceless spiritual practice. I free myself from the pain of the past by forgiving myself and everyone for everything. I, [Stacy], release all bitterness, blame, regret, and shame to move forward to a fuller and richer experience of life. I choose to FORGIVE AND LET GO!"

Absolutely! We say, "Amen. Amen!" Aramaicly means: this is the truth from which I proceed. So this is the truth from which we proceed for today and for this week as we embark on this spiritual quest together.

And I look so forward to embarking on this spiritual journey with all of you here at Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center. Thank you so much, everyone. Blessings! [Congregants cheer and applaud]

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