FORGIVE & FORGIVEN A Sermon to Myself / By Don Allen

For over 45 years Marlene & I have had 4GIVE and 4GIVEN on the license plate of our autos.

Over the years we’ve practiced **forgiving** as various situations arose. The past few years we’ve faced situations that were far beyond our wildest imaginations, things we never expected, never saw coming, and have struggled to deal with. The inner hurt & pain is difficult to put into words. The negative response from **family members** with their judgments, condemnation, & **un-forgiveness** has been especially difficult to handle. Most recently I have been thinking about this scripture: **Jer.12:5**“If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, Then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, In which you trusted, theywearied you*,* Then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?**” NKJV/ “**From the Message -"So, Jeremiah (Don), if you're worn out in this footrace with men, what makes you think you can race against horses? And if you can't keep your wits during times of calm, what's going to happen when troubles break loose like the Jordan in flood**?”/** For us, troubles have broken loose, like a flood of “Family Rejection!” And thus the sub tittle: **A** **Sermon to Myself:**

The Prerequisite for **Forgiveness**: **Math 6:12** “**Forgive** us our debts,  As we **Forgive** our debtors”/ Debts is another word for Sins. Our basic problem is Sin. Every one of use needs divine **forgiveness**. That divine **forgiveness** comes from Almighty God, through Jesus Christ. But, only if we **forgive** others.

 **Mark 11: 25-26** “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, **forgive** him, that your Father in heaven may also **forgive** you your Debts -Sins. 26 if you do not **forgive**, neither will your Father in heaven **forgive** your Debts-Sins.”

 Here comes a reality check: **Forgiveness** is a tough thing to do! It’s not in my nature to **forgive!** Without Christ I can’t do it! Only when we’ve received radical **forgiveness** from Jesus for our sins, and having been Born Again, with a new life, are we able, **with God’s help**, to radically **forgive** others. Jesus did not mince words:

**Luke 6:37** “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. **Forgive,** and you will be **forgiven**. 38Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”
We all need divine **forgiveness** and God provided that through Jesus Christ shed blood on the Cross at Calvary. It’s up to each individual to be willing to receive His or her **forgiveness** from God through Jesus. Then we also need human **forgiveness** and to exercise human **forgiveness**.
 **(1)**
As long as we live, we will encounter people who hurt us, reject us, disappoint us, use the wrong tone of voice with us, fail to understand us, or let us down in times of need. Those experiences are part of human nature and they are part of the territory that comes with relationships. Why should we ruin our lives over other people’s bad behavior? We can take the high road in Christ and **Forgive!**

 **Luke 17:3 “**Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, **forgive** him. 4And if he sin’s against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall **forgive** him.”
Not easy ! But possible with God’s help. If I fail to exercise human **forgiveness** when someone sins against me, and continue holding a grudge, bitterness, & **un-forgiveness**, it will kill me. It’s like drinking a glass of poison and expecting the other person to die! **Un-forgiveness** will make me miserable until I have Totally **forgiven** that person. Many physical ailments people have can be traced back to bitterness & **un-forgiveness**.
 **Eph. 4:30“**And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving** one another, even as God in Christ **forgave** you**”**
 **Col 3:12 “**Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13bearing with one another, and **forgiving** one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ **forgave** you, so you also *must do.*
14But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.**”**

 Yes, it hurts me deeply when I’m wrongly judged, falsely accused, and even slandered. But nowhere in Bible does it say I have a right to retaliate. But my flesh sure wants to set the record straight. That’s when I must pray: **Lord, let this situation make me Better and not Bitter.** And remind myself of this scripture**: Math 7:1 “**Judge not, that you be not judged. 2For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. 3And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? 4Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank *is* in your own eye? 5Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.**”**
**“Men with clenched fists cannot shake hands”** It is essential that we learn how to express true **forgiveness** , with open hands and open hearts, and with no leftover residue of resentment**. (2)**
**Forgiveness** is the willingness to change my attitude about a strained relationship.
**Forgiveness** is the perfume of a crushed flower on the heel of the one who trampled it. **Forgiveness** is the key that unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hate. It provides the grace to change my course in life, preventing collisions that otherwise might prove to be catastrophic.
**1**. I must **recognize** that **forgiveness** is an act of my will --- not my emotions. If I wait until I feel like **forgiving**, I will live with bitterness in my heart --- and that bitterness will destroy me**.
2. Recognize** that **forgiveness** heals me**!** **Forgiveness** is not necessarily for the person who hurt me -- it sets **me** free. I’m not submitting to their brutality, condoning their injustice toward me, or whitewashing the words or deeds of my offender. I’m **forgiving** to bring cleansing to myself. To **Forgive** my enemies is the only way to liberate my mind and emotions from the toxic poison of that painful memory.
**3. Recognize** that **forgiveness** is my immediate priority**!**  **Matt. 5:23-24** Jesus said: “therefore if you bring your gift to the alter, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the alter, and go your way. First be **reconciled** to your brother, and then come and offer your gift**”** Jesus essentially said, “Stop praying! **Forgive** the one who has hurt me, and then return to the place of prayer! All the other good things I do in the name of the Lord are worthless until I decide to deal with my own **un-forgiveness.”**

Another reason for immediate priority of **forgiveness** is because of my IMAGINATION! I’ve seen it in others and also experienced it myself, that if **un-forgiveness** is held onto, my imagination will grow things way out of proportion from what actually happened in the first place. That’s one more reason why **forgiveness** should be applied quickly. The longer I wait, the more my imagination grows in the negative.
 **4. Forgive Totally !** **Matt. 18:21-35** **“**Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I **forgive him?** Up to seven times?” 22Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. 26The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ 27Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and **forgave** him the debt.
28“But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ 29So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.**’  (3)**
30And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. 31So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. 32Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I **forgave** you all that debt because you begged me. 33Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?**’**

34And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 35“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not **forgive** his brother his trespasses.”

 No doubt, when Peter asked, “shall I **forgive** him up to seven times?” he was fully expecting Christ to praise him for his magnanimous gesture and personal holiness. But Jesus shocked Peter by saying: “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” That’s 490 times! The message is: **Forgive** until it becomes a habit. Quit counting offenses**!**
If someone sins against Me or offends Me in some way, I Must **forgive** them ---and keep on **forgiving** them.
I don’t have to be a doormat, but I do have to **forgive** Totally, Completely, and Continually. **Forgiveness** saves the expense of anger and the high cost of hatred, which waste My physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual energy!

 **5. Recognize** that **forgiveness** is not optional! **Forgiveness** is not something I can do if and when I’m “good and ready” God makes it very clear that if I choose not to **forgive** others, He cannot **forgive** Me. Jesus said: **Matt. 6:14-15“**For if you **forgive** men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also **forgive** you. 15But if you do not **forgive** men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father **forgive** your trespasses.**”**
The New Testament mentions **forgiveness** 62 times. 22 of those instances instruct us in the necessity to **forgive** others. We must **forgive** now because Christ has already **forgiven** us.

Paul writes in **Ephesians 4:30-32: “**And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving** one another, even as God in Christ **forgave** you.**”**
And in **Col 3:12** “Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13bearing with one another, and **forgiving** one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ **forgave** you, so you also must do*.* 14But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.**” (**I know I quoted these verses earlier, but they bear repeating again)
 **(4)**

The message is clear! My choice determines My future. If I will not **forgive** someone else, God will not **forgive** Me. He who will not **forgive** others burns the bridge over which he must pass into the gates of heaven. We have no time to harbor grudges, bitterness, or resentments from the past**.** We must **forgive** from our heart and **forgive** completely. **Forgive** now! **Forgive** Totally!
**Forgive** and be free! The Prerequisite for **Forgiveness** : **Math 6:12** “ And **forgive** us our debts, As we **forgive** our debtors.”

WOW ! It’s so easy to sit here writing this as though I were pointing to someone else. I’m the one needing to hear this message the most. More importantly, I need to live it, put it into practice, “Walk the Talk and not just Talk the Walk!” Truthfully, I’m not up to the task! That is why I must remind myself of what God’s Word says**. Philp.4:13 “** I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me**.”
James 1:22-25 “**But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.  23For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it,* and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.**”**
So, I must do God’s Word, and I can do it through Christ Jesus who gives me the strength! As seen in this next true story, there are some steps that God expects me to take regardless of my feelings or emotions. I must do it as an act of my will because I know it’s the right thing to do, and because God said do it.
**Forgiveness Matt 18:21–35, / Eph. 4:17–31** **Corrie Meets Guard**You are probably aware that Corrie ten Boom, along with her sister and father, were sent to Ravensbruck, a Nazi concentration camp, for hiding Jews. Her sister and father died there, but Corrie was released, due to a “clerical error.” And the Kingdom of God is better off for it. Corrie ten Boom likened **forgiveness** to letting go of a bell rope. If you have ever seen a country church with a bell in the steeple, you will remember that to get the bell ringing you have to tug awhile. Once it has begun to ring, you merely maintain the momentum. As long as you keep pulling, the bell keeps ringing. Corrie ten Boom says **forgiveness** is letting go of the rope. It is just that simple, but when you do so, the bell keeps ringing. Momentum is still at work. However, if you keep your hands off the rope, the bell will begin to slow and eventually stop. It is like that with **forgiveness**. When you decide to **forgive**, the old feelings of **un-forgiveness** may continue to assert themselves. After all, they have lots of momentum. But if you affirm your decision to **forgive,** that **un-forgiving** spirit will begin to slow and will eventually be still. **(5)**

**Forgiveness** is letting go of the "rope" of retribution. You get past the bitterness by refusing to hang onto it. Let go of the rope.
Stop nursing the grudge. This is **un-forgiveness**, and it is sin.
And that sin will destroy not the person you’re refusing to **forgive**. It will destroy you.
Let me give you something else from Corrie ten Boom:
After the war she returned to Germany to declare the grace of Christ.
“It was 1947, and I’d come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God **forgives.** It was the truth that they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander’s mind, I liked to think that that’s where **forgiven** sins were thrown.
‘When we confess our sins,’ I said, ‘God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever. And even though I cannot find a Scripture for it, I believe God then places a sign out there that says, ’NO FISHING ALLOWED.’
The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. And that’s when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a cap with skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush—the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister’s frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. Betsie, how thin you were! That place was Ravensbruck, and the man who was making his way forward had been a guard—one of the most cruel guards.
Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: "A fine message, Fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!" And I, who had spoken so glibly of **forgiveness**, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women? But I remembered him. I was face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.
"You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard there." No, he did not remember me.

"But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has **forgiven** me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein,"—again the hand came out—"will you **forgive** me?"

And I stood there—I, whose sins had again and again been **forgiven**—and could not **forgive**. Betsie had died in that place. Could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking? It could have been many seconds that he stood there—hand held out—but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. **(6)**

For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God **forgives** has a prior condition: that we **forgive** those who have injured us. "If you do not **forgive** men their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in heaven **forgive** your trespasses." And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart.

But **forgiveness** is not an emotion—I knew that too. **Forgiveness** is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling." And so, woodenly, mechanically, I thrust out my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands.
And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.
"I **forgive** you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!" For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God’s love so intensely, as I did then. But even then, I realized it was not my love. I had tried, and did not have the power. It was the power of the Holy Spirit.
[Holocaust Victim Forgives Captor, Citation: Corrie Ten Boom, Tramp for the Lord (Berkley, 1978), pp. 53-55]

At the beginning if this message I stated that it was logical to start with easy things first. Well, I’m not sure any **forgiveness** is easy, especially when the other person involved is being hailed with awards and praise while my best friends and I are being demonized. That seems to be where God is leading me to start.

Because if I can’t **forgive** them, how will I ever **forgive** our daughter-in-laws for what they have done to our two sons!? No details explained, just in comparison, it’s far worse than what my friends & I have been demonized over. Enough said!! It’s been a real struggle for me to move forward and put **forgiveness** into practice, but I have taken the first step, small as it is, and I’m determined, with God’s help, to **Forgive** others, even as God has **Forgiven** Me.

Folks, here’s the bottom line: To **forgive** is to be like Jesus.
Jesus refused to be bitter toward His torturers and executioners. He refused to withhold **forgiveness** to those who had manipulated the system to bring about His death. Jesus knew that **forgiveness** was the ultimate Kingdom purpose. **Forgiveness** of sinners so they could live forever in His presence and the presence of the Father and the Spirit.
He bought your **forgiveness** and modeled how we should give it. **(7)**
Will you , a person who claims to love and follow Jesus, withhold the very thing He died to bring? Never let it be said of us!
Never let it be said of this congregation that **forgiveness** is not freely given.
Never let it be said of this church that bitterness and anger reign in the hearts of any of its people.
Never let it be said of this fellowship that **forgiveness** is just something we just talk about but never really experience between our people.
Rather, let it be said of us that the love and grace and compassion of Jesus is alive and well here.
Let it be said of us that we handle our differences and conflicts in the way Jesus laid out for us, in the spirit Jesus commands us to.
Let it be said of us that we follow Jesus in the area where it is probably the hardest, on a personal level – the area of **forgiveness.**
Let it be said of us that the spirit of this church, of this congregation, of this fellowship, is not one of bitterness and **un-forgiveness**, but rather one that reflects our inability to hoard the grace of Christ and allows it to overflow to everyone. Let it be said of us. Let it be said of you.

I wrote this when my wife & I were going through deep troubled waters with family members. And I shared this at our former church in 2014. Little did we know that 6 years later this message would become even more relevant and personal to us. I can testify that we’ve “Walked the Talk” about Forgiveness more than once. And this Biblical Truth is real and actually works. There is a small element of inner pain & heart ache that still lingers in the loss of a relationship. However, all anger, bitterness, & un-forgiveness are totally gone.

**Preachers Blessing**: And now may the Lord bless you & keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you & be gracious unto you, giving you His peace. May you be set free at last from everything in your past that has tormented you, from everything that the prince of darkness has tried to place upon you. Cast your burden at the base of the Cross & walk away free. For whom the Son sets free is free indeed.

**1 Peter 5:5-7** “Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.” 6Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7casting all your care upon Jesus, for Jesus cares for you.”

In Jesus name, Amen! Don Allen.

 **(8)**