**The Power of Forgiveness**

**Text:** *Ephesians 4:31–32*
**Theme:** Forgiveness—receiving it from God and extending it to others—is a key step to leaving the past behind.

**INTRODUCTION: The Weight of Unforgiveness**

* Illustration: Carrying a backpack full of bricks—each one a past hurt.
* Unforgiveness is spiritual baggage; it keeps us chained to the past.
* Transition: Paul’s words in Ephesians 4 call us to let go and move forward.

**I. FORGIVENESS IS NECESSARY TO MOVE FORWARD**

**Ephesians 4:31 — *“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger... be put away from you...”***

* Unforgiveness manifests as:
	+ Bitterness (internal poison)
	+ Wrath & anger (emotional outbursts)
	+ Clamor & slander (words used to hurt)
	+ Malice (intent to harm)
* **Illustration:** Harry Houdini – couldn’t escape a cell because the door was already unlocked.
* Application:
	+ Forgiveness opens the prison door of your own heart.
	+ Forgiveness is not optional if you want to move forward with God.
	+ Even science confirms the benefits: better health, lower stress, stronger relationships.

**II. FORGIVENESS BEGINS WITH RECEIVING GOD’S FORGIVENESS**

**Ephesians 4:32 — *“…forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”***

* We forgive because **God first forgave us**.
* Salvation is based on God's forgiveness through the cross.
* **Gospel Moment:**
	+ If you’ve never received Christ’s forgiveness, today is your day.
	+ Christ took your sin, shame, and guilt—offering full pardon and freedom.
	+ *Colossians 2:14 – He canceled the record of debt.*
* Application:
	+ Let God forgive *your* past first.
	+ You cannot give what you haven’t received.

**III. FORGIVENESS IS A COMMAND, NOT A FEELING**

**Ephesians 4:32 — *“Be kind… tenderhearted… forgiving…”***

* **What forgiveness is NOT:**
	+ Not excusing the offense.
	+ Not forgetting the hurt.
	+ Not the same as trust or reconciliation.
	+ Not a one-time emotional release.
* **What forgiveness IS:**
	+ A **choice** to release a debt.
	+ An act of **obedience** and **grace**.
	+ A **decision of the will**, not the emotions.
	+ A personal release into God’s hands.
* **Illustration:**
	+ Corrie ten Boom’s testimony – choosing to forgive a Nazi guard.
		- *“Jesus, I can lift my hand… you supply the feeling.”*
		- Obedience brought emotional healing and love.
* Application:
	+ Forgiveness may be repeated daily for the same wound.
	+ Ask God to help you walk it out even when feelings lag.

**IV. FORGIVENESS IS FREEDOM AND HEALING**

**John 8:36 — *“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”***

* Forgiveness doesn’t just free the other person—it frees **you**.
* **Quote:** “To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner was you.”
* **Illustrations:**
	+ Joseph – forgave his brothers and saw God redeem his pain (Gen. 50:20).
	+ Job – prayed for his friends, and God restored him (Job 42:10).
	+ Jesus – *“Father, forgive them…”* (Luke 23:34).
* Application:
	+ Freedom doesn’t come from revenge—it comes from release.
	+ Forgiveness brings:
		- Inner peace
		- Restoration of joy
		- Healing of past wounds

**V. APPLICATION: WHO DO YOU NEED TO FORGIVE?**

* Self-examination:
	+ Who do you need to forgive?
	+ Is there someone you’ve held bitterness toward?
	+ Do you need to forgive **yourself**?
* Steps:
	+ **Acknowledge the hurt.**
	+ **Choose to forgive.**
	+ **Ask the Holy Spirit to help you.**
	+ **Repeat and trust God with the outcome.**
* **Call to Action:**
	+ Write down names of those you need to forgive.
	+ Pray for release today.
	+ Seek God’s forgiveness if you’ve never been saved.

**CLOSING: THE CROSS IS THE PLACE OF FORGIVENESS**

* **Ephesians 1:7** – *“In Him we have redemption through His blood…”*
* **1 John 1:9** – *“If we confess… He is faithful to forgive…”*
* Final encouragement:
	+ **Let go of the pain, the anger, the revenge.**
	+ **Come to the cross.**
	+ **Receive forgiveness. Extend forgiveness.**
	+ **Step into freedom.**