

This week, Pastor Sharon concluded the six-part series "To Forgive...Divine" with the sermon entitled "Forgive for Good," which addressed how unleashing yourself from feelings of unforgiveness benefits you. To illustrate this, Pastor Sharon shared the story of how she and Pastor Andy once owned a dog in need of obedience training and had to wrestle the dog into submission each night. Pastor Andy did this over and over, but the dog remained headstrong. One day while at the beach, they secured the leashed dog to an outside trash can while they went into an ice cream place for ice cream. The dog took off running, still hooked to the leash, dragging the trash can behind him! Pastors Andy and Sharon chased the dog for blocks until it ran into the street into traffic. The dog finally stopped running when the leash wrapped around a light pole preventing the dog from running any longer. Pastor Andy unleashed the frightened dog, picked him up, and carried him in his arms back to Pastor Sharon. Freeing the dog from the garbage that he had been dragging behind him had a calming effect. You too can experience that calm by letting go of the garbage that you've been dragging around for years in some cases. That garbage is all the unforgiveness you've been hanging onto.

If you are experiencing deep emotional hurt, unleashing the feeling of unforgiveness will free you emotionally. Pastor Sharon told of a friend whose spouse, while they were in counseling together, had engaged in infidelity with the marriage counselor. He left his wife and married the counselor, and was awarded custody of the children. The woman was devastated and turned to drugs and alcohol. The woman found release from her own feelings only when she chose to forgive her former husband and his wife, the counselor. To do that, she had to give the hurt to God and allow Him to come into those painful areas and provide healing. The book of Job states, "Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple" Job 5:2 (NIV).

Unleashing unforgiveness can also free you relationally. Jesus wants you to treat other people as He treats you. The Bible says, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" Ephesians 4:32 (NIV). Jesus is the model and example for us to follow in our interaction with people. Colossians 3:13 (NIV) addresses this when it states, "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

The state of your heart can have an effect on your physical health, which is why unleashing unforgiveness has the ability to free you physically. Studies link the power of forgiveness to improvements in health, including reduction of stress and better sleep quality. Pastor Sharon tells another story about a lady she was praying for one day who was experiencing back pain. An image of the lady wearing a back pack came to Sharon's mind. Pastor Sharon looked in the back pack and saw that it was filled with rocks bearing the names of people who had wronged the woman. Pastor Sharon relayed her vision to the woman, and they prayed together. The woman chose to forgive the people who had hurt her and when she did, the pain in her back left. The unforgiveness had been the real source of her pain.

Finally, unleashing unforgiveness has the power to free you spiritually. The Bible states that when you forgive others, you also will be forgiven. Mark 11:25 (NIV) states, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." Your spiritual life will benefit when you forgive.

Throughout your life, you will encounter situations that hurt you. The good news is that the forgiveness that comes from God is able to unleash you from feelings of unforgiveness and free you emotionally, relationally, physically, and spiritually. God does not intend for you to carry the burden of unforgiveness throughout your life. He longs to unleash you from the pain through the power of forgiveness. Will you let Him? you ready to forgive for good?