Good morning, church! How are you doing this morning? My name is Pastor Jeff. I'm one of the pastors here, and it is my joy to get to be here with you this morning and get to teach you from God's Word. I oversee the College and Young Adults ministry, and I get the blast of doing this on a much smaller scale every Thursday night. It's a blessing to do it with you here this morning.

Pastor Steve has asked me to kind of tie a bow around the series we have been covering this summer on healthy relationships. If you have been here for the last few weeks, you've probably heard Steve talk about the four rules of communication, what real repentance looks like, how to deal with bitterness, and how to uproot anger, which was last week. Next week, we'll jump into 2 Peter, and I'm looking forward to that, but this morning, we are going to be wrapping up the series with the topic of forgiveness.

I want to start off with a definition of what forgiveness actually is. Forgiveness is an active and intentional decision to absorb the cost of a debt owed to you by releasing the debtor from any liability for the debt owed. You are owed something. You are owed a fee. You are expecting payment, and instead, you actively choose to take the cost on yourself and then treat the person who owes you that payment as if they don't.

I have titled this sermon, Freedom in Forgiveness, and I think there are many people here this morning who are looking for just that. Have you ever been hurt so bad that you thought it would be impossible to forgive? Have you had a family member crush you to the point where you thought you could never trust them again?

Are you experiencing the pain of a child who has completely abandoned their faith? Have you lost a friendship because of repeated sin? Have you forgiven only to be hurt again? Has the collateral damage of small sin stacked up over time and built to the point where you don't see any possibility of change?

How do we keep current? How do we have healthy relationships when the wounds are fresh and deep? This is such a delicate topic to consider, because there is legitimate sin and damage caused from that sin, but there is always hope, because there is freedom in forgiveness, both for the forgiven and for the forgiver. Freedom comes in the process of forgiveness.
If we want to have God-honoring relationships, it's important for us to understand both sides of the forgiveness coin. You need both repentance and forgiveness to be able to have reconciliation, peace, and a healthy community. If you have forgiveness and no repentance, you have no peace. If you have repentance without forgiveness, you have no peace. We must have both.

This process is necessary to deal with any sin, because there are real boundaries that come up with every offense. It's like sin creates walls that build up between us to where we struggle to love each other. We have a hard time communicating clearly, and it seems impossible to see eye to eye in life. The only way to break down the walls that sin creates is to repent and forgive.

There are different degrees to this. If you wake up your children because you're watching the game and Beast Mode goes all beast mode on someone, this is going to be a relatively quick process. If we're talking about adultery, abuse, or years of deception, this is going to take some time. The bigger the damage and pain, the longer the process is, and, I think, the more people who need to help and be involved.

This is primarily where we are going to camp this morning. What do we do when the walls are up and they're tall and thick? How do we break down these walls so we can have real, lasting peace? In Psalm 32, we are given a great example of this process, so if you're there, why don't you stand with me for the reading of God's Word?

If you are newer here, we stand for the reading of God's Word because it is God's Word. It reveals his character to us. It tells us who we are as Christians and what we can do. Most importantly, it just points us to our Savior, time and time again, and so the opportunity to read it is a bless, and so we want to treat it like that. We'll start in verse 1.

"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer...

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin... Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.

You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance." Then God takes over and says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you."

O Father, be with us this morning. God, there is no way to cover a topic this big in this amount of time, and yet you know exactly what people need to hear this morning. I have something prepared, but I need your Spirit to move, to convict of sin, to give us hope, and to show us what
repentance and forgiveness look like. Help us remember your Son. God, like we sang, we need you. We really need you. Be with us this morning. In your name, amen.

Today we're going to see how forgiveness directly deals with sin, accepts repentance of sin, and promotes change from sin. Asking for forgiveness in repentance gives freedom from past sin and allows us to live differently. Granting forgiveness enables us to live in freedom and love in spite of the sin and damage that has been caused to us. Those are the three points I want to make this morning on the process of forgiveness.

1. Forgiveness directly deals with sin. There is a real need for forgiveness because our sin is real and terrible. It is nasty, vile, damaging, quick-spreading, and incredibly contagious. Small sins can stack on top of each other to become huge. We can sin trying to get rid of other sin. It's a problem, and we need a solution to deal with the sin, because it creates real barriers that hinder our relationships with God and each other.

Verse 5: "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." God takes our sin that is exposed in confession and covers it with forgiveness. We bring sin out into the light, and God directly addresses the sin and then covers it. He says, "I'm not going to hold this over your head anymore. I'm going to move forward with you."

Now let's remember that David, the author here, had incredible consequences for his sin. Forgiveness does not take away the consequence sin brings. He lost his son. He had rebellion from his other family. He had to flee his nation. The rest of David's life was really hard as a consequence of what he did, but he was forgiven by the Lord.

The process of forgiveness is dealing with sin biblically. It's not a covering up or a minimizing of sin. It's not ignoring the problem. It's acknowledging the offense head-on, both in repentance and forgiveness, because repentance considers and addresses the damage sins have caused. This is thinking critically on what sin has done and how it has damaged relationships.

David knew this well. Psalm 32 was written after a slew of incredibly serious sins that compounded and ended up impacting an entire nation. I'll just lay out the big ones. Lust, adultery, deceit, and murder. David had deeply wounded the people against whom he had sinned and his relationship with God.

He says, in Psalm 51, his confession letter, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment." David isn't saying he did not sin against other people but that primarily he sinned against God. He thought through the effect of his sin.

We need to consider how our sin affects us and God and how it affects our standing with the people against whom we've sinned. "How did my sin affect my spouse? How has my bitterness affected the people who love me? How has my anger damaged the relationship with my kids?"
When we go through this contemplation process in the counseling room, it takes some time, sometimes a few weeks of talking it out, praying through it, and writing it down. This time is crucial to the repentance process, because we must think about the effect of our sin before we can deal with our sin. That's repentance.

On the other side of the coin, forgiveness is a readiness and willingness to deal with the sin against them. It's a readiness to forgive. We don't look for repentance so we can lord it over someone or say "I have this card that I will play at the opportune time" but so we can achieve peace.

This is something we have been crying out to God to see. We want peace, Lord. If you read Matthew 18, it is a constant call to repent so forgiveness can take place. God pursues David, as we see in the chapter, in verse 4. It says God's hand was heavy upon him. This is a loving, healthy pressure that would only relent when repentance came.

The reason why God was constantly reminding David of that sin was because God was ready and willing to forgive David as soon as he came. Do you have a mindset that is ready to forgive your offender? If they came to you in repentance, would you be ready to forgive? Could you forgive? Are you praying for your offender to be restored? Do you have other people around you who are praying for the same thing?

Forgiveness is active and intentional. For some people, they can do this right away, and for others, this is going to take some time. Yet hear me when I say there is freedom in forgiveness, because we get the opportunity to fully acknowledge the sin that's done to us. You can say, "This hurt me deeply. I'm still hurting, but I will choose to forgive." God did that. He did it with his Son. He sent his only Son to be hurt, to die for the sins we committed so we could have freedom and life. God doesn't say "no big deal" to sin. He covers our sin with the blood of his Son.

2. Forgiveness accepts repentance. Let's look at verse 3. "For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer." Jump down to verse 7. David now says, "You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance."

David goes from wasting away in verse 3 to completely secure in verse 7. What made the difference? David's repentance and God's forgiveness. Isn't it amazing to know we can go to God, confess our sin, and then actually rest in his forgiveness? Yet this message is primarily about us forgiving other people. How do we do that? How do we forgive?

Jesus says, in Luke 17, "Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, "I repent," you must forgive him." If they repent, forgive. This seems pretty straightforward.
Yet how do we determine what is real repentance? What if the word seems perfect, but the offense happens a week later...or a year later? What if they stumble over their words and they don't seem to have put in the effort you think would be necessary? What if they just don't seem to understand how much you're hurt?

There is real danger, for us as the forgivers, to which we can fall prey. We have to watch out in our call to forgive. I think one danger is forgiving without hearing true repentance. It is unnecessary and potentially unwise to forgive when there is no repentance. Simply saying, "I'm sorry," or, "I feel bad," is not repentance. We can really set ourselves up to be hurt again and worse because we forgive without the other person being really willing to change. That's one danger.

I think the other danger is the other extreme, withholding forgiveness when repentance is really there. While forgiving too quickly can be unwise, withholding forgiveness is sin. It gets really slippery when we try to judge someone's heart behind confession and repentance, because only God can do that. We are called to forgive when people repent, as it says in Luke 17.

This is admittedly really tough. How do we know it's true? How can we judge the validity or sincerity of the person who has just shown himself or herself to be untrustworthy? This is a really narrow road we need to walk. If we fall one way, we open ourselves up for pain that's unnecessary. If we fall the other way, we try to take over as judge, and only God can do that. There are a lot of dangers here, and we have to avoid them.

I think one way we can do this is through community. We need community to come and help, especially when the hurt is big. Do you have a Life Group leader to whom you can go? Do you have a friend who is a mature Christian and who knows and is praying for your situation? Can you seek them out? Will you go to a pastor and seek counsel? This is one of the blessings of Christian community, to be able to help point you to Scripture and your Savior when life hurts and when the decision isn't very clear.

Forgiveness must accept repentance, but what does repentance even look like? Repentance is a total and complete admission of sin. Confession alone is not repentance, but true repentance always includes an honest confession. This is complete, without excuses or justification. Again, the main principal verse in this chapter, verse 5: "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD...'"

There are no excuses here. He didn't blame his past. He didn't blame a condition. Total ownership of sin. He didn't hide anything. He went before the Lord and just humbly admitted his faults. Repentance isn't, "I'm sorry you feel that way. I'm sorry I got caught. I'm sorry; I've just been really tired. I'm sorry you made me do this." Repentance isn't throwing flowers or chocolates at the problem with a note that says, "Sorry."

Repentance is going to the person against whom you sinned and saying, "I need to ask for your forgiveness. I said words against you that were terrible, and I said it in front of a lot of people. At the time, I thought I was just getting some laughs, but I realize how much those words hurt you."
I'm supposed to use words that build up, and I broke you down. The more I thought about it, the more I realized how wrong I was. Will you please forgive me?

This process takes time. The way we communicate is crucial in our confession, and so there has to be much thought and much prayer that goes into something like this. On the other side of the coin, forgiveness receives repentance compassionately. I'm so thankful for forgiveness. It is a gift from God because it releases me from a sinful response. I can let it go, because being sinned against does not give us license to get even or settle the score. Forgiveness does not and will not hold on to sin.

Ephesians 4:31-32 says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." There's real danger in how we approach forgiveness. There's also great danger in our hearts when we delay in forgiveness, because we put ourselves in the position to sin right back.

If you're here this morning and it has been years, and you're holding on, you're in danger. If you want to be bitter, don't forgive. If you enjoy the wrath and anger you have, continue to be unforgiving. If you want to scream at the top of your lungs and tell the world what they did to you, or if you want to systematically go and whisper in everyone's ear, don't forgive.

Yet you are in grave danger, because the Bible says, rather than having bitterness, wrath, or anger, we're called to be kind to one another, to be tenderhearted, and to forgive. To do this is a choice to put away the opportunity or the leverage we have to get even or make the other person hurt. We actually have a call to be compassionate to the person who has sinned against us.

"How do I do that? I'm the one who's hurt, and the hurt is real. The pain is intense. It has been going on for years. How do you just be kind, forgive, or be tender?" Just as God in Christ forgave you. We are never called to do something God hasn't already done for us. That's the gospel. When you forgive someone, you get a fresh reminder of how God forgave you.

You might be thinking right now, "I haven't sinned against God the way they have!" I get that. I really do. Those same thoughts have crossed my mind, but then I'm reminded that Jesus had to die for the smallest sin I committed, the most insignificant little lie. The worshiping…just the small worshiping of myself and my preferences over the Lord…required that cross.

This is not to minimize the pain or hurt you have from being sinned against, but forgiveness does help us remember what God did for us with Jesus. So when the hurt is real, you can keep your eyes on the cross, and you can walk forward in forgiveness. Look to Jesus. He is your ultimate freedom. He is your Savior. Forgiveness accepts repentance, yet this isn't the end of forgiveness. It doesn't stop with confession. Forgiveness continues in the process of change.

3. Forgiveness promotes change. When God forgives, he not only gives us the opportunity to change, but the expectation to live differently. In verse 8, God says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you." God forgives
David for going the wrong way, and then patiently, lovingly, and intentionally shows him the right path.

There is instruction. There is teaching. There is counsel. There is oversight. It's beautiful. David showed real change. If you look at the rest of his story, you see he thought about the wickedness of his sin, he confessed it, and he lived differently. God was there to forgive him and help him to continue to walk correctly. God does this because repentance is only complete after change happens.

There must be real change in the actions of the person who has sinned. Repentance turns from sin and lives differently. It's like you're going south on I-5 and you realize you're going the wrong way, and you get off on the next exit and you immediately start going north. It's not an, "Oh man, I'm going the wrong way. Well, I'll try this out for a couple more exits, and I'll just see if it ends up being correct." It's immediate, total change.

This isn't simply well-crafted words or thoughts but a change of behavior, because considering our sin is in our head. True confession is in our hearts, and change shows up with our hands in our actions. Ephesians 4:22-24: "...put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and...be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and...put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

It's a total turning from sin, a putting off of the old self and putting on the new self. If you look at the rest of Ephesians 4, you see an exhaustive list of put-offs and put-ons. The transformation is honestly pretty obvious. Rather than being known as a liar, you are now known as a truth-teller. Instead of being a selfish thief, you become a generous worker. A habit of words that hurt turns into a habit of words that build up. A lifestyle of anger, bitterness, and gossip turns into kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness.

This is change. This is what real, biblical repentance looks like. Just like it takes time for fruit to grow and ripen, change takes time to see and observe, but this is how you take down the wall. You break down the wall with repentance. You consider the effect of your sin. You confess that sin, and then you change.

For the forgiver, forgiveness supports a changed life. Repentance shows fruit and change, and there needs to be a support to see the change in the person's life, to acknowledge that change. Galatians 6:1-2 says, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

I can already hear the questions and concerns, because I have them in my own mind, in my heart. "What about me? What about my situation?" There are hundreds of people in here this morning, all with individual situations that you guys are thinking through and processing as I talk. All of these things…
"What about me? What if it isn't safe for me to jump back in? What if I'm struggling with trust because the offense happens again and again? Are you telling me just to jump back in and act like everything is okay?" No. Supporting repentance can look like a few different things. I've come up with three general ones. There are more, but hopefully this will help give you some clarity or some guidance in how to support a changed life.

One way to approach it is that you're in the situation, supporting change in the background. I will stand by you. I will cheer you on. I'm rooting for you. I'm in your corner. I'm praying for you. If you need something, if you call me, I will be there, but I'm just going to stay in the background for a minute. I haven't left, but I'm taking a step back, and I want you to change, but I want you to take the reins of that change.

Another way is that you're in the situation, supporting change up front. I am going to jump in fully and help you change. I'm going to hold you accountable. I'm going to be very involved with you, step by step in the process, and together we are going to make this happen whether we like it or not.

One other way is that you're out of the situation, leaving it to others. I am not advocating that in every situation of forgiveness you get right back into life with your offender. Not at all. In the case of abuse, adultery, or manipulation, sometimes the best way you can support repentance is to get out of the way and let other believers jump into the situation.

You can say, "I forgive you. I love you. I can't be around you, because I can't trust you. I want to see you change. I'm praying for change. I hope we can be reconciled back to the point where it was like it never happened, but right now, there's no possibility of that. I have to take a step back."

We are always hoping, praying, and rooting for change, but how we help looks very different for every circumstance, so I hope you'll walk away with hearing that supporting change needs to be done with wisdom and community. I mean, this is a highly emotional situation. I can't trust myself to be fair or balanced when I've been sinned against. I'm either going to ignore the sin and not make much of it or I'm going to make way too much of it. There are always complicating factors in every situation.

It gets sticky, messy, and ugly, which is where godly people can come in and help. Supporting repentance is not something to be done solo. We need community in the support of repentance. If you've been coming here for any length of time, you know we have people who come up to pray after every service. Come pray with someone today.

There's nothing too small that we can't pray for, and there's nothing too big that God can't cover with prayer. If you're in a Life Group and you need to talk about something, go to your leader. Talk with your Life Group leader. Those are people whom we trust and people for whom we have prayed and people whom we have trained to care for you. Get some practical wisdom. Get some insight into your situation. We love you. You're family. Let us help. The best way we know how to help, initially, is to pray for you.
Forgiveness directly deals with sin, it accepts repentance, and then it promotes change. Like I said in the beginning, there are people here today who need freedom. Some of you are here and you need to repent to God for salvation. You might remember that prayer you prayed a long time ago, but there hasn't been any change in your life since. I hope you heard this morning what repentance really is and that you would do it today and get right with the Lord.

Some of you are hiding sin and need to go to God like David did, in complete, total, humble confession. Some of you need to repent to others. Don't let sin be a barrier between you and the people whom you love anymore. Really love them. Repent of your sin. It's hard. It's like pouring alcohol on a fresh wound, but that's how you can start the healing process.

Some of you need to forgive. It has been years. Some of it is legitimate. Some of it isn't. I hope you heard this morning what forgiveness is and how you can do it. I'm amazed how God does that with us. In 1 John 1:9 it says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

He is faithful to forgive and he is just in his forgiveness because he already sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die to pay for that sin. He's ready to forgive. We repent imperfectly. We forgive imperfectly, but God forgives completely, fully, with perfection.

After I'm done praying, we will have people up here who want to pray with you. If you are here and you don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ, I just want you to hear me say I love you. I want you to come and be part of our family. Jesus loves you. He is ready to forgive you. Come, repent, and change. Live new. Let's pray.

Father, there are a lot of people here this morning. There are a lot of situations going on in the hearts of your people, of your children, and you know them all. Be with us, Lord. God, there are people here who don't know you, and I pray that they would repent of their sin and trust in you. God, there are people here who have been hiding sin for a really long time, and I pray that they would confess it and start this process of repentance.

God, I pray for the people who are holding onto forgiveness. They're holding onto it, withholding it. They're not allowing someone to be free. God, I pray that they would see that they can really trust you to deal with it correctly. God, lastly, I pray for the people who are hurting, for the people who are legitimately suffering and are having a hard time with life because of what sin caused to them.

God, help them breathe. Help them sleep. Help them walk. Help them live, not in their own power, Lord, but in yours. God, remind them how much you love them and how you have forgiven them. Strengthen them, Lord, to do your will. Be with us today, Lord. We are so thankful for your Son. It's in his name we pray, amen.

Thank you, guys. Have a great week.