

## Forgiveness as a Marital Language

### Evaluate why forgiveness is hard for you

1. You can't give what you don't have
2. You have not embraced your not goodness- you are more sinful than you ever thought possible and more loved than you could ever imagine.
3. You are on the guilt-blame seesaw
4. You don't understand what it really is
  - o Forgiveness and repentance
  - o Forgiveness and consequences
  - o Forgiveness and reconciliation
  - o Forgiveness and forgetting
5. You don't understand the gravity of a lack of forgiveness
  - o "The first and often only person to be healed by forgiveness is the person who does the forgiveness...When we genuinely forgive, we set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner we set free was us." Lewis Smedes

### Evaluate the myths about forgiveness

Do not build a good marriage on a bad theology of forgiveness. It is as important to know what it is not as much as you know what it is.

1. **I don't need to forgive to have a good marriage-** Letting minor things go in marriage is healthy but make sure that those small things are not accumulating a mountain of resentment. Proverbs 19:11, Proverbs 17:14
2. **Forgiving means forgetting-** "If forgiveness is to embody and exemplify God's forgiveness of us in Christ, we will understand that Christ does not "forget" our sins in order to forgive them. Quite the opposite, in fact, is true-we are told he forgives and then chooses not to remember." Jeremiah 31:34
3. **I need to learn to forgive myself-** Forgiving yourself is not in the Bible. What happened at the cross is that Jesus paid the full price for our sins and bore the full wrath of God to atone for your sins. It may be hard to grasp but this is the meditation that will move the dial when you can't forgive yourself. (Psalm 32:1-2) "To claim that I have been forgiven by God but cannot forgive myself betrays that I do not understand, believe, or appreciate the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a sinister attempt of the Enemy to get us to depend upon my own righteousness, rather than the grace of God." H.B. Charles
4. **I don't need to forgive if they are not repentant-** This is a debated topic among writers on forgiveness, most likely from passages like Luke 17:3-4 being taken in isolation from other verses on forgiveness. Read Mark 11:25 for clarification on withholding forgiveness without repentance and set your mind to understand the 2 aspects of forgiveness in our Bible (vertical and horizontal). "This vertical commitment to forgive and entrust the other spouse to God is key in enabling you to extend forgiveness horizontally. It also prevents superficial forgiveness-forgiving in word but not in deed and heart." Jonathan Holms

5. **Forgiveness is the same as reconciliation-** Forgiveness is an event that prepares the way for reconciliation. God's greatest desire for every rift between you is the fullest blessing of forgiveness which is reconciliation. Forgiveness means you are willing to reestablish trust, but reconciliation is a process that may take a minute, a month, years or may never happen. Forgiveness and reconciliation are two separate topics. Reconciliation (at times) requires repentance, forgiveness does not.
6. **Forgiveness erases consequences-** Spouses often withhold forgiveness because of a felt fear that the offending spouse will "get away with it" without consequences. Scripture is clear that there are consequences for our actions. Galatians 6:7. Forgiveness does not remove consequences it just gives you a foundation of love and acceptance to deal with the consequences.
7. **Forgiveness is a feeling-** Forgiveness is often in our culture associated more with a feeling than obedience. If you ground the work of forgiveness in feelings more than obedience you will not feel like forgiving because we live in a Genesis 3 world. To wait for the absence of negative feelings runs contrary to Scriptures imperative demands to obediently forgive. Gen 4:6-8 "If we demand the benefits of forgiveness before we take the risk of forgiveness, we become trapped at the crucial point." Brad Hambrick

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### **Helps to Cultivating a Culture of Forgiveness**

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1. **God's forgiveness is both our motive and our model-** The gospel (GOOD NEWS) message that Christians hold to at its core says that the one who knows me the best loves me the most. That is your model and motivation for marriage. So when you are struggling with forgiveness in marriage, contemplate the gospel. (Ps 32) Remember what God has chosen not to remember about you. "It is this simultaneous and conscious choice to forget faults and remember grace that makes forgiveness so beautiful...When we fail to follow up cycles of sinful behaviour and corrosive conflict with biblical forgiveness, we lose an opportunity to display the life-changing power of the gospel." J. D. Holmes
2. **Understand that forgiveness happens at 2 levels-**
  - o Vertical offense is releasing the offense against you to God. This is essential to guide the heart to forgive horizontally. It is unconditional and between you and God. (Mark 11:25, Luke 23:34, Acts 7:60)
  - o Horizontal forgiveness is the extension of forgiveness to the other person based on their forgiveness. Is repentance required? Maybe Matt 18
3. **Know that forgiveness is costly-** At times there are offenses in marriage that are small and little is required more than overlooking, or gentle words of restoration, but at times offenses are deep, emotional, internal and you think you won't survive. It helps to remember that what was required for God not to hold our sins against us and to live constantly in the language of "I payed for that!" cost God the very life of his son, how could it be any different for us. "Forgiveness is a God-sized action that when written into our life pushes at the edges of our humanity to such a degree that it is sometimes deathly painful." Brad Hambrick If it cost Him, it will cost you.
4. **The greatest help to living the language of forgiveness in your home is to study, read, meditate, memorize, saturate your soul in the Word of God.**