

Avoiding the Deadly Sins of Marriage But What If I Can't Forgive?

How to Choose Forgiveness

Grace Fellowship Church / Pastor Brad Bigney / October 5, 2003

I. REVEL in the Fact that God Has Forgiven You!

A. Make Sure that You've Experienced Christ's Forgiveness in Your Own Life

Make sure that you've truly experienced the grace of God's forgiveness in your own life. You can't pass on to others something you don't have yourself... or something that's grown fuzzy... or something you've lost sight of.

Eph. 4:32 "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you."

David Nasser in his book, *A Call to Die*, says, "All of us get hurt from time to time, and most of us are hurt very badly at some point in our lives. But Christians have the incredible resource-and the responsibility to forgive. Not out of our own strength, but out of the strength God provides through our experience of His forgiveness. When we choose through Christ to forgive, we can experience true joy and freedom. We will find the determination and the strength to pray that God will reveal Himself to that person and draw him to God's heart. We can pray that God will help us love that person. Does this sound difficult? It's not difficult. It's impossible unless you and I have **feasted** on the cross of Christ."

A Call to Die, David Nasser, p. 216

- Have you experienced the grace of God in your own life?
- Or are you still trying to win His approval?
- Are you still sweating away on the treadmill of performance trying to please Him?

Paul Tripp writes, "God's grace is most powerful and effective at the moment of my greatest weakness. How practical and life changing is this? One of the most significant problems in our marriage relationships is that there is no economy of grace. With all our obvious difficulties, what is most shocking is the **profound gracelessness** of our marriages. There's no willingness to look within and confess deep-seated sins, so we never find sweet forgiveness. There's no vertical hope to carry us in dark and discouraging times. There's no rest that comes from entrusting each other to the God of grace. There's no faith that God will give us all we need to respond to each other in godly ways. As a result, the relationship is reduced to human demands, human performance, human failure, human judgment, and human punishment. There is no hope or power for change. And **because we're are not daily soaking in the fountain of God's grace, we do not extend it to one another.**" *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, Paul David Tripp, p. 32 & 33

- Do you extend grace to one another? Is that your pattern?
- Is your marriage characterized by grace... or is like living under the law?
- Is there a profound absence of grace in your marriage?

B. Remember Just How Much God Has Forgiven You!

Psa. 103:10-12 "He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

Psa. 130:3 "If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?"

II. RISE Above Your Feelings and Obey the Command to Forgive

Col. 3:12-13 "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as **Christ forgave you**, so you also **must do.**"

Forgiveness is not a suggestion... it's not an encouragement... it's not optional... it's a command.

Matt. 6:12, 14-15 “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors... For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

A. Release the Offender!

Sam Storms in his book *To Love Mercy* says, “Let's be honest with each other: grudges can be fun! We enjoy withholding forgiveness because it permits us to keep our enemies (and even some of our friends) under control. It gives us the opportunity to manipulate them into providing things we want from them. We use their offense against us as a rope to dangle them over the fires of vengeance. If we were to completely forgive them, we would lose our excuse for self-pity. And forgiveness would set them free from their obligation to us to "make good." Few things cut across the grain of human nature like forgiving others. Breathing is easy. Eating is fun. No one thinks twice about blinking one's eyes. But forgiving others is sheer agony! It grates on our soul like fingernails on a chalkboard.” *To Love Mercy*, C. Sam Storms, p. 153

Forgiveness is a choice not a feeling. And REMEMBER - sometimes the feelings keep going in the same wrong direction for awhile even after we've made a new choice to forgive.

Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch woman who survived the Nazi concentration camps during WWII... and she watched her father and sister die there in those camps. So she's had plenty of opportunity to wrestle with this whole issue of forgiveness... and she says something very helpful about those confusing feelings that we live with. She says, “Unforgiveness is like ringing a bell. As long as you pull the rope, the bell in the tower rings. Then you make a decision not to ring it anymore. You let go of the rope, and you are free of the unforgiveness. That's fine, but the bell keeps ringing for a while. Your hand is no longer on the rope. You no longer will it to ring, but the momentum of your emotions does not instantly stop because a decision of the will has been made.” *Streams of Mercy*, Mark Rutland, p. 158-159

We have make a DISTINCTION between our WILLFUL unforgiveness and just the emotional after shocks that time and the Spirit can only gradually heal.

Pastor James MacDonald has a good insight here... He says, “Forgiveness comes in two parts. It begins with a decision, an act of my will. We call this the CRISIS of forgiveness. When I make the choice to release a person from the obligation that resulted when he or she injured me, I am completing the crisis of forgiveness. I am not looking for vengeance; I am not trying to get even; I am not wishing for bad things to happen to them; and I am not focused on their failure. In fact, I am not thinking about them at all. I've released them from all obligation that resulted when they hurt me. Maybe you remember completing the crisis of forgiveness in the past, only to retract that act of grace and begin again to nurse and nurture the injury of someone else's sin. Maybe you have responded publicly in a church service and committed yourself to forgiveness, or knelt alone and promised God that you would forgive but fell into your old patterns of hate or resentment when you crossed paths with the one you had chosen to forgive. If that is your experience, you need to understand the difference between the crisis and the process of forgiveness. Beyond the crisis is the PROCESS of forgiveness, without which you will never experience the healing that forgiveness can bring. In the crisis of forgiveness we say, "I choose to forgive," but in the process we say, "I will treat you as though it never happened.” *Seven Words to Change Your Family*, James MacDonald, p. 51 & 52

When you forgive someone, you are saying THREE THINGS and making 3 new commitments:

1. I will not bring this up to YOU again, except for your benefit
2. I will not bring this up to OTHER PEOPLE ever again
3. I will not DWELL on it MYSELF any more

You might say, “But what if I can't ever forget what they did?”

B. Work on Loving Them... Rather than Trying to Forget

James MacDonald says this about people who say, “I can't forgive if I can't forget.” He says, “No, the reality is that you will never forget until you forgive. Forgiveness is both the crisis and the process of putting a person's sin behind you. It is setting it aside and saying, "I won't think about that anymore. I won't focus on that anymore." It's a choice that begins the process of forgetting. Unforgiveness binds the offense to your heart and ensures that you will never forget.

C. Don't Wait for Them to Come to You!

If you are aware of the hurt or the broken relationship then you are responsible for taking the initiative whether you are the offender or the offended party.

Matt. 5:23-24 "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother HAS SOMETHING AGAINST YOU, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. FIRST, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

Mark 11:25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything AGAINST ANYONE, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses."

III. REFUSE to Retaliate!

I Peter 2:21-23 "For to this (suffering) you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 'Who committed no sin, nor was guile found in His mouth'; when they hurled their insults, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree..."

Romans 12:17-21 "Do not repay anyone evil for evil... If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink...' Do not be OVERCOME by evil, but OVERCOME evil with good."

Gary Thomas says, "I have a theory: Behind virtually every case of marital dissatisfaction lies unrepented sin. **Couples don't fall out of love so much as they fall out of repentance.** Sin, wrong attitudes, and personal failures that are not dealt with slowly erode the relationship, assaulting and eventually erasing the once lofty promises made in the throes of an earlier (and less polluted) passion. All of us enter marriage with sinful attitudes. When these attitudes surface the temptation will be to hide them or even run to another relationship where the attitudes won't be so well known. But Christian marriage presumes a certain degree of self-disclosure. When I gave my hand in marriage, I committed to allow myself to be known by Lisa. -and that means she'll see me as I am-with my faults, my prejudices, my fears, and my weaknesses. The reality can be terrifying to contemplate. Dating is largely a dance in which you always try to put the best face forward-hardly a good preparation for the inevitable self-disclosure implied in marriage. In fact I wouldn't be surprised if many marriages end in divorce largely because one or both partners are running from their own revealed weaknesses as much as they are running from something they can't tolerate in their spouse."

Sacred Marriage, Gary Thomas, p. 96 & 97

Avoiding the Deadly Sins of Marriage

Why Does It Hurt So Bad?

Getting Free from Bitterness through Forgiveness

Steps to Forgiveness

Taken and modified from Neil Anderson's *Victory Over the Darkness*, ch. 11
"Healing Emotional Wounds From Your Past"

1. Write on a sheet of paper the names of the person(s) who offended you or sinned against you. Describe in writing the specific wrongs you suffered (i.e., rejection, deprivation of love, injustice, unfairness, physical, verbal, sexual or emotional abuse, betrayal, neglect, etc.).
2. Face the hurt and the hate. Write down how you feel about the person(s) and their offenses. Remember: It is not a sin to acknowledge the reality of your emotions. It is a sin to live and be controlled or led by your emotions. God knows exactly how you feel, whether or not you admit it or not. If you bury your feelings you will bypass the possibility of forgiveness.
3. Acknowledge the significance of the cross. It is the cross of Christ that makes forgiveness legally and morally right. Jesus took upon Himself the sins of all who would trust in Him - and He died "once for all" (Heb. 10:10). The heart cries, "It isn't fair! Where's the justice?" It's in the cross.
4. Decide that you will bear the burden of each person's sin (Galatians 6:1,2). This means that you will not retaliate in the future by using the information about their sin against them (Luke 6:27-34; Prov. 17:9). All true forgiveness is substitutionary as Christ's forgiveness of us was. Remember when you choose to forgive you are saying:
 - a. I will not bring this matter up to you (the offender) again in a hurtful way in the future
 - b. I will not bring this matter up to others
 - c. I will not choose to dwell on it myself (to rehearse it and nurse it)
5. Decide to forgive. Forgiveness is a crisis of the will, a conscious choice to let the other person off the hook and free yourself from the past. You may not feel like making this decision, but this is a crisis of the will. Since God tells you to, you can choose to do it. The other person truly may be in the wrong and subject to church discipline or even legal action. But that's not your primary concern. Your responsibility is to let him off *your* hook. Make that decision now; your feelings of forgiveness will follow in time. Right feelings follow right action or obedience to God's commands. Don't wait until you feel forgiving. It will likely never happen.
6. Take your list to God and pray the following:

"Dear heavenly Father, I thank You for the riches of Your kindness, forbearance, and patience, knowing that Your kindness has led me to repentance (Romans 2:4). I confess that I have not extended that same patience and kindness toward others who have offended me, but instead I have harbored bitterness and resentment."

Then use the following sentence to go through the list of offenses that you wrote down in step #1. And pray, "I forgive *(name)* for *(list the offenses individually, one at a time)*. "

7. Destroy the list. You are now free. You do not need to tell the offenders what you have done. Your forgiveness is between you and God. The person you may need to forgive could be dead.

8. Do not expect that your decision to forgive will result in major changes in the other person(s). Instead pray for them (Matt. 5:44) so they too may find the freedom of forgiveness (Gal. 5:1,13,14).

9. Expect positive results of forgiveness in you. In time you will be able to think about the person(s) who offended you without feeling hurt, anger or resentment. You will be able to be with them or hear them spoken of without reacting negatively.

10. Thank God for the lessons you have learned and the maturity you have gained as a result of the offenses and your decision to forgive the offender(s) (Romans 8:28,29).