

Forgive Your Spouse ≠ Ignore Your Feelings

PART ONE

By **America's Family Coaches** – Thriving Marriages Email - January 27, 2023

How do you forgive your spouse? Many marriages don't work through the pain, honesty, and tension that true forgiveness requires. Instead, they bury their feelings, build resentments, and slowly drift apart. This is a great reminder that forgiving isn't the same as ignoring.

There is one thing that's a guarantee in any relationship: We hurt each other sometimes, even if we don't want to. The marriage relationship is certainly no exception—so forgiveness needs to be an ongoing element of a healthy marriage relationship.

Forgiving love is the love that brings you and your spouse back together when the inevitable offenses of a marriage relationship have pushed you apart. Forgiving love heals hurts, resolves conflicts, and helps you feel accepted and connected again. Forgiving freely is what Jesus has done for us and modeled for us to do in our own relationships—including marriage.

Forgiving love is a good place to start in a relationship because that's where God starts with each of us. When we come to him by faith, confessing our sin and accepting Christ as our Savior, he forgives us and welcomes us into his family. The sins that stood between us were sent “as far away from us as the east is from the west” (*Psalms 103:12*). God's grace-driven forgiveness cleared the way for the loving relationship we enjoy with him.

When we extend forgiving love to each other as husband and wife, we enjoy the same kind of relationship-restoring experience. Biblical forgiveness means that you willingly and actively choose to give up your grudge despite the severity of the injustice done to you. Now, you may not be able to hurl the offense to the other side of the compass as God does, but you can choose to let go of it. Once you “drop the charges,” as it were, the path is clear for restoring the relationship.

It is also important to realize a couple of things that biblical forgiveness in marriage does not mean.

First, in forgiving your spouse, you are not denying that he or she hurt you in some way. Of course, your spouse's offense hurt you, perhaps deeply. There is nothing wrong with feeling the hurt and admitting it while deciding to let your spouse off the hook by forgiving him or her.

Second, in forgiving your spouse, you don't have to minimize what happened. You may be tempted to say, “It's alright, honey, it didn't really matter.” But it did matter. You were offended in some way. The intimacy of your relationship was disrupted. There was a violation—no matter how slight—of the marriage vow to love, honor, and cherish. It's okay to acknowledge that something wrong happened as you choose to forgive.

Wonderful things happen when you choose to forgive your spouse for offending you. They parallel the great benefits we realize when God forgives us. Here are just a few of them:

(See PART TWO next week)