Saying "I Was Wrong" Can Transform Your Marriage – *Part 1*

By **Authentic Intimacy -** Thriving Marriages Email - January 25, 2023

Do you recall the sitcom Happy Days? Henry Winkler played the character of Arthur Fonzarelli, the coolest guy in town. The Fonz in his leather jacket and perfect hair could get all the ladies with the snap of his fingers. Despite his bad-boy persona, the Fonz was a warm-hearted guy who could surprise you with sage advice. But the Fonz had one fatal flaw: he could never admit that he was wrong. In those rare cases when he erred, Fonz would humorously try to say, "I was wwwrrrr . . . " or "I'm sssoorr . . ." but couldn't finish his statement.

Do you know anyone like that? They simply never own up to their mistakes. They may be kind or generous as an unspoken way of making up for faults, but the words, *"I was wrong"* will never cross their lips.

It never feels good to own up to our failings. We may get the words *"I'm sorry"* out of our mouths, but we quickly follow with some justification; even making the case that the other person has *even more* to apologize for.

Admitting your faults isn't the same as giving in to them. We all know people who excuse their destructive behavior by saying, *"That's just the way I am!",* and so discounts the harm their behavior causes. Instead, we're to have a humble spirit that seeks true reconciliation when we've been wrong.

Getting Past Black and White Thinking

The biggest barrier we face to being honest with our faults is destructive thinking that goes like this: Admitting, *"I was wrong"* will be the first domino that triggers a downward spiral of negative thoughts. *"I was wrong"* leads to *"I'm a terrible person,"* which leads to *"how can anyone love me,"* which leads to *"I hate myself,"* which leads to *"God must hate me."*

Although it's illogical, admitting a fault can feel like accepting the blame for everything that's wrong with your marriage, your children, or your workplace. A woman often believes that admitting her faults as a wife would mean letting her husband completely off the hook for his offenses. No wonder we don't want to say, *"I'm sorry"* if it ends in conclusions like these! But why do logical, intelligent people fall into this trap?

I don't mean this to sound patronizing, but the core of the issue is that we haven't moved past pre-adolescent black-and-white reasoning. Think about the cartoon characters represented in children's shows. There are good guys & bad guys, villains, & superheroes, cops, & robbers. Pre-adolescent minds have great difficulty holding the concept that people aren't all good or all bad. A small child being disciplined feels incredible shame for his misbehavior. He goes beyond, "I *did* something bad" and believes "I *am* something bad." "I was wrong" becomes "I *am* wrong."

As we grow, we develop the intellectual capacity to accept that people are never *all good* or *all bad.* Your best friend is capable of doing something cruel, and a selfish person is capable of an act of kindness. We have the intellectual ability to understand this, but sometimes we lack the emotional maturity to apply it to ourselves. Even as full-grown adults, we can fall into black and white thinking. "I was wrong" all of a sudden gets blown into "I must be a terrible employee. I can't do anything right!"