

The Gift of Forgiveness – April 2023

LWCC Marriage Ministries Email for April 2023

Well, it's that time again for another communication from The Marriage Ministry Team.

Recently, I have had a few things happen that have reminded me of the importance of Forgiveness. I'm sure that you, like us, have probably had a few experiences in life that have tested you in this area. Family life, church life, friendships, work situations and many more situations can test us in how we handle forgiveness. We've certainly had a few situations in church life, in a business partnership, and in the breakup of a personal friendship of 25 years standing. Each caused much grief and heartache, and tested us big-time in the need to forgive and move on. And some took quite some time and energy to work through.

Forgiveness is a crucial part of our Christian walk, including, and especially, in our marriages. All couples will experience times when they will let each other down, or worse, face times of conflict and hurt. Without the Gift of Forgiveness administered properly, trust can be eroded or even broken, peace and relationship can get lost, and often anger and resentment can creep in. On the other hand, Forgiveness, sensitively and authentically introduced, strengthens a relationship by washing away anger and resentment and then comes the resetting of a sense of peace. But is it as simple as saying, "I forgive you?" Often times no!

You can say you forgive your spouse for a transgression, but what if your heart isn't really in it, or you're doing it because you know it's the thing to do, but you're not being sincere or genuine? Or, you can ask for forgiveness, but what if your spouse isn't ready, or doesn't recognize your request? Or, what if your spouse has fully forgiven you, but, what if you haven't forgiven yourself?

The truth is, forgiveness is not only a one-way street on the part of one spouse or the other, it can also be a shared journey, or a process that only happens as you each give one another enough time. For small lapses in judgment or consideration, it can be something you do on a daily basis without much thought, but for major betrayals, it can require intentional and emotional "work" over a period of time.

Often, we 'get there' with each other because we need to, but I wonder if we shifted the way we think about it, we might inject something 'special' into our relationship. Instead of it being just an action to check off after one partner has been hurt by the other, we might think of forgiveness as a thread that is woven throughout our relationship, founded in mutual intent. In other words, we don't take it for granted, but rather make a conscious and deliberate decision together, to be intentional about it: be intentional about forgiving promptly, be focused and intentional in receiving it, and thirdly, take some time to talk together – either straight away, or a day or two later – to check in on how things are now. *How about having a conversation together now about what that process may actually look like in reality. Maybe, make a fresh commitment to each other to Both be intentional and receptive.*

Much like communication or conflict resolution, there is both a practical, actionable aspect, and a dynamic aspect, that can evolve throughout our marriage. The 'actionable' is in the reaching out when you know you have done something to cause offence. It's also in the decision, or choice, to give up the right for revenge and retribution, or to be resentful and angry. The 'dynamic' aspect is infused into your marriage every time you both intentionally commit to the forgiveness process: one offended the other and quickly – respecting your joint commitment to the forgiveness process – seeks out the other and asks for forgiveness; the other refuses to allow resentment and judgement and retribution to rise up within, and is open and receptive when the other comes to offer their forgiveness.

Sometimes, one is not aware they have hurt or offended the other, and the offended party may need to approach the other and point out what has happened, and how it impacted them – the 'actionable' part. The 'dynamic' part is in the fact that you have made a commitment to be intentional about forgiveness, and so you receive the other, and their hurt, without resentment or further upset. The 'dynamic' part is simply that you are intentional and deliberate about always focusing on the moment and not taking it for granted.

Dr. Charles Stanley makes a couple of important points that are also very important. When asking for Forgiveness don't name the problem, and don't defend yourself. Think about it: how often have we inflamed the situation by asking forgiveness and then saying but you did..... or we try to justify or explain why we reacted or behaved the way we did.

Take some time to have the conversation suggested earlier. Talk together about how you both have handled giving and receiving forgiveness. If you both feel you have it working well, encourage each other in that. If it's not been working so well, talk together about what you can do to make it more meaningful going forward. Be prepared to say how it is for you, and please, hear each other without interrupting: hear what your spouse is saying and feeling. Then talk about how you can do it better, and make a commitment to it.

We trust this is helpful, and by the way, we hope too, that Date Time has taken on a new dynamic in your relationship since last month's email.

Blessings from The Marriage Ministries Team.