

FULFILLING FORGIVENESS IN MARRIAGE!

God created the marriage relationship to be unique in human experience! We must fulfill the unique demands of forgiveness in marriage.

1. There is no other relationship so demanding yet so potentially rewarding.
2. Marriage requires us to live with another person in the closest union known to mankind.
3. Such intimacy can be intimidating. We are compelled to reveal our true selves, often prompting a fear of rejection.
4. Once we move beyond our fears of transparency, we discover that there is no relationship more wonderful.
5. It is in this divine union we have our greatest opportunities to forgive and love again.

I. WE MUST CHOOSE TO FORGIVE IN MARRIAGE!

- 1 Love and forgiveness find their greatest test and enjoy their greatest fulfillment in marriage.

Do you remember the story of the repentant prostitute who bathed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair (Luke 7:36-50)? After she had exhibited such respect and love for the Master, He told a story about two men who owed money to a lender. One owed 500 denarii; the other just 50. Neither had the ability to repay the debt, So the lender graciously canceled both debts. Then Jesus posed the question, "Which man will love the lender more?" The obvious answer was the man who was forgiven more loved more.

- 2 Forgiveness generates love in its fullest form. When we are forgiven much, we love much. Although Jesus had in mind our loving responses to God's forgiveness, the principle holds true on the human level as well.

A. WE must Forgive Repeated Offenses! (Matt 18:19-21)

- 1 In marriage generous forgiveness for repeated offenses generates deep and abiding love.
- 2 When Jesus mentioned forgiving someone "seventy times seven," He must have had marriage in mind.

When two people live together certain offenses will be repeated -- count on it! I know you have a ready list of things your mate does that drive you to the edge of sanity (or he or she has a list for you)! You each have certain annoying habit patterns that seem to persist no matter what you say or do! It is important to recognize that forgiving each other's repeated offenses and praying together for growth and change is essential to the marriage relationship.

B. KEEP Short Accounts With One Another! (Eph. 4:26,27)

- 1 Each couple ought to have Eph. 4:26 on a plaque in bold letters above their bed: "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." Or a paraphrased version: "Forgive you mate or stay up late!"
- 2 The message is clear -- don't go to sleep until you clear up anything that has hurt your relationship during the day.

If we do not practice this -- we give Satan a toe hold in our lives. How can the devil get a foothold in your marriage? Often very subtly! At dinner your husband makes a remark that irks you. You say nothing because the children are there. You put off talking about it until later, and before you know it you are both heading for bed. The next thing you know, your husband makes loving advances. You are still angry about what he said at dinner, but you know he won't even remember it. He senses your reluctance and it bothers him, but he refuses to say anything. He simply rolls over and falls asleep. Meanwhile your adrenaline flows, fueled by your anger, and keeps you awake. You struggle to get to sleep and find that your anger only grows every time you hear him snore.

The next day you both wake up feeling a bit empty. You are not really sure why? Your unresolved anger has become a foothold for the great destroyer of families. Every time you fail to deal with offenses, you allow Satan to get a firmer grip. The better his grip, the easier it is for him to push you apart. That is why the Bible commands us to forgive promptly -- especially before the day ends. We must keep short accounts or pay an incredible price for our stubbornness. **Forgive daily.**

C. WE MUST STRIVE for Marital Oneness!

- 1 Marriage is unlike any other relationship. Only in marriage can two persons be forged into a physical, emotional and spiritual oneness.
- 2 Lack of forgiveness strains and interrupts this oneness at every level.
- 3 You turn away from each other in bed, or one of you stomps away to sleep on the couch. Or one or the other stomps out of the house, or goes through doors, slamming them.
- 4 Unforgiveness disrupts emotional unity; you stop talking with each other.
- 5 Worse of all, unforgiveness severs your spiritual oneness. You stop reading and praying together, or you continue to have devotions as hypocrites, pretending everything is okay between you -- when you know that it isn't!

If there is unforgiveness in your marriage you might as well forget worshiping together. Jesus warned us not to bring a gift to the altar if there is something between us and a love one (Matt. 5:23-24). Paul instructs us to examine ourselves before celebrating the Lord's table (I Cor. 11:27-29). This self-examination includes our horizontal relationships especially the relationship of marriage. If your marriage is in disorder, your capacity to develop spiritually is in danger.

What does I Peter 3:1-6 tell us, what does I Peter 3:7 tell us?

- 6 A husband is to understand the way God made his wife, treat her considerately because she shares in the gracious gift of eternal life and is a fellow heir of the things of God.
- 7 What happens if he fails to do this? His prayers will be hindered. If a husband does not treat his wife properly, he may not be praying at all or his prayers will be turned away from the throne of heaven.
- 8 Oneness in marriage depends on each partner seeking and extending forgiveness to the other -- continually restoring their unique relationship.
- 9 The act of forgiveness is a wonderful way to experience the grace of God while extending to each other what God has graciously extended to you.

II. LEARNING TO LOVE AGAIN is also REQUIRED in a GOOD MARRIAGE!

Consider:

When you were 1st married your emotions ran high. There was nothing more exhilarating than your wedding day, and it was capped off by a wonderful honeymoon. Romance, passion, and celebration escorted you as you paraded into the marriage covenant. You were sure nothing could come between you and your spouse because you both were so deeply in love. But once you settled in, your emotions changed. Romance was occasionally overcome by anger, rage and passion by pain.

So what do we need to do?

1. Guard our hearts as we forgive others and pursue emotional healing.
2. Guard our hearts, because our expectations for marriage make us so vulnerable.
3. We expected the romance to continue at a fever pitch -- but it hasn't we expected the passion to always be there -- but it comes and goes.
4. If we fail to forgive and love again in marriage, we will find our relationship becoming emotionally bankrupt, emotionally dead.
5. Marriages can survive a great deal of external stress, but few marriages survive emotional death. Forgiveness, reconciliation and striving after oneness are essential to maintaining a healthy emotional relationship.

III. CONFRONT Each Other Gently and Lovingly.

1. Marriage demands an accountability relationship before God and man.
2. The willingness to confront each other can be our first line of defense against moving away from God.

The husband who sees his wife ignoring spiritual disciplines is the one who needs to encourage her to change. The wife who sees her husband exasperating the children and/or neglecting leading the family spiritually is the one who needs to take him aside and warn him, gently.

3. You must confront each other sensitively and with the right attitudes (Psa 51:17; 34:18; James 4:6-10)
4. You must speak when a wrong needs to be addressed -- Heb. 3:9-13
5. If you truly love your mate, don't remain silent when he or she lives a pattern that is self-destructive or harmful to you, to your family, or the cause of Christ.

IV. RECONCILIATION IS REQUIRED!

- > Forgiveness is required in all our relationships -- but *confrontation* and *reconciliation* are dependent on the circumstances and the Holy Spirit's leading.
- > Marriage is the exception. The God-ordained oneness of the marriage relationship requires that husbands and wives not only forgive each other's offenses **but also follow through with the steps necessary to assure reconciliation!**

In many relationships there may be a gap between forgiveness and reconciliation. There are natural intervals of separation built into most relationships. These are cushions of time affording us the opportunity to bring our emotions under control and spend extended time absorbing the truth of God's Word before we consider making a move toward reconciliation.

1. In Marriage there are different requirements! Marriage involves living together continually. I Cor. 7:1-5 instructs us to live together and share physical oneness together on a regular basis to avoid temptation, only refraining from togetherness for short periods of time and then only for fasting and prayer!
2. Marriage is not a casual relationship -- we must do everything we can to be a peace with each other (I Pet 3:11) and cultivate a relationship that reflects the kind of loving, unbreakable union that exists between Christ and His church. (Eph. 5:30-32)
3. In marriage, reconciliation means being continually committed to **closeness, oneness and divine partnership**. There may be times when you want some personal space to deal with extremely intense conflicts, between you -- but then only long enough to settled the issue -- God commands married couples to be reconciled to one another. -- Do whatever it takes to make your relationship what God wants it to be.
Follow HIS truth -- NOT YOUR EMOTIONS!

V. TEACH and MODEL FORGIVENESS BEFORE YOUR CHILDREN!

1. If your marriage has been blessed with children -- you realize the kind of world in which they are growing up.
2. Hostilities abound and your kids will experience significant relational hurts in the years ahead.

3. One of the best gifts you can give your children is the forgiving spirit you exemplify and teach.
4. You have many opportunities, daily, to encourage forgiveness.
5. Use sibling rivalry to help your children learn what it means not to keep a record of wrongs done.
6. Require that they ask for and extend forgiveness.
7. They may do so through clenched teeth, but at least they will know what they should do in conflict situations.

Conclusions:

- Applying these truths in the midst of your children's skirmishes is essential, but its impact is nominal compared to your model of forgiveness as a couple.
- Your children need to see that you love each other enough to always forgive.
- As you forgive each other, you provide your children much-needed security.
- Your willingness to forgive your mate will always be a great stabilizer to your home.
- The marriage relationship is unique and so is the application of forgiveness, confrontation and reconciliation within marriage.
- Forgiveness will be tested to the limits between husband and wife.
- Confrontation will need to be approached with the utmost of care.
- And reconciliation must be sought and achieved in the fullest measure.
- Are you willing to give it a try? Go ahead! Do what the BIBLE says!

Trust God and see HIM Work.