

From Broken to Beautiful
A Primer on Marriage Counseling
Week 3 – Clearing Away the Rubble of the Past

Introduction:

Last week we considered the fact that conflict is the **DEFAULT** condition of every marriage because of the presence of sin and God's curse on humanity for our part in the fall of creation. James is clear, however, that every external conflict has an **INTERNAL** origin. We tend to want the wrong things, or we want even a good thing too much (respect, love, success, comfort, etc.).

So, you have conflict any time two people find themselves in the same moment in time with different desires for the outcome of that moment. The amount of intensity in that conflict is directly related to how much each person wants what they want.

This morning, we are going to consider the Biblical process of clearing away the rubble of the past in order to rebuild something new. That process can be summed up in two key concepts: **FORGIVENESS** and **REPENTANCE**.

Homework Review:

1. Memorize the three questions from the last session.
2. Complete the Forgiveness Worksheet

Those **three questions** must be internalized and habitualized or people will continually locate the center of their struggles outside of themselves. That isn't to say that the other person doesn't have some problematic behaviors that need to be addressed but when a couple comes in, they're so focused on those behaviors in one another and they largely refuse to look at their own.

You also want to make sure their understanding of Biblical forgiveness includes the reality that it is **costly** (Heb.9:22), that it is **volitional** (Ps.103), that we forgive because **we are forgiven** (Matt.18:21-35), and that the **Gospel** sets the standard of Biblical forgiveness (Eph.4:32 and Col.3:13), and there is an **obligation** to move first no matter what side of the offense you are on (Matt.5 and Luke 17).

You want to challenge any current unforgiveness because it's like a cancer. It turns into bitterness and bitterness seeks to consume everything. Any offenses noted in the final question becomes the foundation for future homework assignments so don't lose sight of them.

Forgiveness:

Knowledge Check:

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1. Apologizing is essentially the same thing as seeking forgiveness. T / F | False |
| 2. If you haven't forgotten an offense, then you haven't forgiven it. T / F | False |
| 3. You don't have to forgive if you don't feel ready to forgive. T / F | False |
| 4. Christians must always forgive no matter what. T / F | True and False |
| 5. If we don't forgive, we will not be forgiven. T / F | True |

Forgiveness means to **LEAVE BEHIND** (aphiemi – Strongs # G863).

Matthew 6:12–15 (ESV)

¹² ...and **forgive** us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³ And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴ For if you **forgive** others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also **forgive** you, ¹⁵ but if you do not **forgive** others their trespasses, neither will your Father **forgive** your trespasses.

John 4:28-29

²⁸ So the woman **left** her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?”

Romans 1:27 (ESV)

²⁷ and the men likewise **gave up** natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

1 Corinthians 7:12–13 (ESV)

¹² To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not **divorce** her. ¹³ If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not **divorce** him.

I think there's something poetically appropriate about this connection because if a couple refuses to leave their offenses behind, they will, eventually, leave their spouse behind. Sin is too heavy a burden when it is allowed to accumulate in the heart. It never just goes away. It builds up.

Forgiveness also means to **PARDON** or to **GRACIOUSLY** give or restore (charizomai – Strongs # G5483).

Luke 7:41–43 (ESV)

⁴¹ “A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

⁴² When they could not pay, he **cancelled** the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

⁴³ Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he **cancelled** the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.”

Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)

³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving** one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Romans 8:31–32 (ESV)

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him **graciously** give us all things?

Again, I think it's appropriate that there's an intentional connection between forgiveness and grace. To forgive isn't to ignore the offense or to treat it as if it didn't happen. It's to give something to someone who, by their actions, have demonstrated that they don't deserve the gift they are being given.

See Luke 17:3-10

Forgiveness is not a feeling. It is a **DUTY**.

Forgiveness establishes a **COVENANT** to lift the charge of guilt from another. It is a formal declaration of the fact that a promise has been made and kept never to remember the wrong against said person in the future, to not dwell on it mentally, not to use it as a weapon or to manipulate the other person, not to use it as a source of gossip, and not to let it be a wedge between you and the forgiven offender.

Forgiveness is not excusing sin. It is letting the **GOSPEL** work to restore **INTIMACY** in the face of marital conflict.

Forgiveness is based on **REPENTANCE** which, by definition, means **CHANGE**. Therefore, a Christian must be willing to forgive immediately in their heart (Matt.6), but they should hesitate to verbalize that forgiveness until it is asked for (Luke17).

I would encourage you to think about forgiveness as a coin. A coin has two sides – a heads and tail. We call the whole coin “The Covenant of Forgiveness” and on one side the offended person promises to forgive and on the other side, the offender promises to change. But what does that change look like?

See 2 Corinthians 7:8-11

Question:

Paul presents us with two types of grief or sorrow. One is godly and the other is worldly. How would you describe the difference between the two?

Godly sorrow will involve a hatred of sin and not just hatred of the consequences of sin. Worldly sorrow hates that they got caught. Worldly sorrow is angrier at the person who caught them than they are at themselves for committing the sinful act (“I can’t believe you don’t trust me” when they are shown to be acting in an untrustworthy way). Worldly sorrow is often very shortly lived and doesn’t result in long term change.

One leads to repentance and the other leads to death. What I can tell you is that tears and expressions of regret tell you nothing about which kind of sorrow you’re seeing.

Godly grief will include a desire to prove you’re not the person you used to be, a hatred of your sin, a fear of consequence, a longing to be restored in the relationship, a passion to do whatever you need to do, and willingness to accept the natural consequences of your actions (you bought it all).

A person who is Biblically repentant will demonstrate...

- A willingness to **CONFESS** sin.
- A willingness to seek **FORGIVENESS** from those he has sinned against.
- A willingness to make the wrong **RIGHT** (Exodus 21-22).
- A willingness to live within new **LIMITATIONS**.
- A willingness to **SUBMIT** to new levels of accountability.
- A willingness to **EARN** back trust over time.

A note on letting love cover a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8, Proverbs 10:12):

This can be a noble and well-intentioned thing to do, but a person must understand that they are obligating themselves to forgive even though the offender makes no commitment to change. This is a **ONE - SIDED** covenant.

Some people will use this a reason why they don't address conflict and sin, but if there's bitterness, then it isn't working. One should also expect that the offense will happen again, because the offender isn't committed to pursue change. I would contend that this is best used when a person does something out of character for them, or when you choose not to make a point out of everything and you're focusing on the major issues and letting love cover the minor issues (for now because those minor issues may become major issues in time).

Question:

What questions do you have about forgiveness, repentance, or the dynamic between the two?

[Allow for questions – check time]

Conclusion:

The first thing that sin kills in any relationship is intimacy. Forgiveness is the only thing God has given to mankind that is powerful enough to take sin away. People will often seek to avoid it because it requires **HUMILITY** by both parties, therefore, it can make people uncomfortable.

Forgiveness is one of the hardest things that God ever asks us to do because we only have to forgive when we have been wounded by the sin of another. The covenant of forgiveness reorients both people from being back-to-back to being face-to-face and puts them back in community with each other. Repentance is the path forward toward something new and godly that both people can walk down in **PARTNERSHIP** with one another.

Homework:

Forgiveness – Part 2

Individual Repentance (as needed)

The Covenant of Forgiveness (as needed)

Understanding Why We Fight (as needed)