

## FORGIVENESS

When mistakes and conflicts are not handled well, resentment can build, adding to a reservoir of bitterness that fuels hidden issues and furthers conflict. Threats to intimacy result. Focusing regularly and constructively on forgiveness can help you keep resentment in check and enable you to stay emotionally connected over time.

### The Need for Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a *choice*.

Believe it or not, forgiveness is really more for *you* than it is your partner! That's right! Who is the one hurting? Your hurt is causing *you* the pain! Forgiveness is a process of learning to let go of the pain and heal. Chuck Swindoll made the comment that refusing to forgive is like locking yourself in your own concentration camp.

### What Forgiveness Is

Forgiveness is a decision to give up your perceived or actual right to get even with, or hold in debt, someone who has wronged you. Webster's Dictionary definition: "1. to give up resentment against or the desire to punish; 2. to give up all claim to punish; 3. to cancel or remit a debt." The picture of forgiveness is a canceled debt. *Forgive* is a verb; it's active; it's something you must *continually* decide to do! When one of you fails to forgive, you can't function as a team because one of you is kept "one down" by being indebted to the other. Important to note that forgiveness doesn't mean you forget, it means you don't hold a grudge.

Forgiveness is the ability to *understand* what the other person is going through. Imagine the pain, frustration, hurt, fatigue of the other. Who knows the extent of the difficulty of what is going on with the other person. Forgiveness can be a series of stages happening over a period of time - perhaps a *long* period of time. The presence of the Holy Spirit working in us will help us forgive.

When you forgive, you're saying nothing about the responsibility of the one who did wrong. The one who did wrong is responsible for the wrong, period. Forgiving someone does not absolve that person of responsibility for her or his actions. It does take the relationship out of the mode where one punishes the other, but it shouldn't diminish the responsibility for the wrong that was done.

## STEPS FOR FORGIVENESS & RESTORATION

- 1. Schedule a meeting to discuss the specific issue related to forgiveness.**
- 2. Set the agenda to work on the issue in question.** Identify the problem or harmful event - be specific. You must both agree that you're ready to discuss it in this time.
- 3. Fully explore the *pain* and *concerns* related to this issue for both of you.** This will take willingness and courage to feel the pain and hurt. This can also be a grief process. You want to have an open, validating talk about what has happened that harmed one or both of you. You shouldn't try this unless each of you are motivated to hear and show respect for your partner's viewpoint. Validating discussions go a long way toward dealing with the painful issues in ways that bring you closer together.
- 4. Asking for Forgiveness.** If you've offended your partner in some way, an outward appeal for forgiveness is not only appropriate but very healing. A sincere apology would be a powerful addition to a request for forgiveness by validating your partner's pain. Saying, "I'm sorry, I was wrong - please forgive me" is one of the most healing things that can happen between two people. Apologizing and asking for forgiveness is a big part of taking responsibility for having hurt your partner. This doesn't mean that you sit around and beat yourself up for what you did. You have to forgive yourself, too!  
  
In forgiving, you are attempting to commit the event to the past and agreeing that you won't bring it up in the middle of future arguments or conflicts. You both recognize that this commitment to forgive doesn't mean that the offended will feel no pain or effects from what happened. But you're moving on. Your vision is to restore the relationship and repair the damage.
- 5. If it's applicable, the offender makes a positive commitment to change recurrent patterns or attitudes that give offense.** This assumes that what happened is a part of a pattern, not just a one-time event. If you have hurt your partner, it also helps to make amends. This is not the same as committing to make important changes. When you make amends, you make a peace offering of a sort - not because you "owe" your partner, but because you want to demonstrate your desire to get back on track. It's a gesture of goodwill. One way to make amends is by doing unexpected positive acts. This shows your investment and ongoing desire to keep building your relationship.
- 6. Expect it to take time.** These steps are potent for getting you on track in your relationship. They begin a process; they don't sum it up. These steps can move the process along, but you may each be working on your side of the equation for some time to come. Even when painful events come between you, relationships can be healed. *It's your choice.*
- 7. The Consequence.** Reflecting back, you realize the consequences of past hurts have been to retaliate and end up feeling deeper hurt and experience more distance in the relationships. Now you can begin to realize that following the above steps can instead lead you to a *reconnection*, and can also bring *healing, freedom, and vitality!*

