



How to Forgive



THE CHALLENGE

When you and your spouse argue, you often bring up the past, rehashing a list of old grievances that should have been settled long ago. The problem? One or both of you may not know how to forgive.

You *can* learn. First, though, consider why a husband and wife may find it so difficult to forgive each other.



WHY IT HAPPENS

Power. Some husbands and wives withhold forgiveness to maintain a sort of power over their spouse. Then, when a conflict arises, they use a past event as a trump card to gain the upper hand.

Resentment. The scars of a past offense can take a long time to heal. A spouse might say ‘I forgive you’ but still harbor resentment for what happened—perhaps craving to get even.

Disappointment. Some people enter marriage fully believing that life will be like a fairy-tale romance. So when a disagreement arises, they dig in their heels, wondering just how their “perfect match” could possibly see things from a different point of view. Unrealistic expectations can make a person more prone to find fault and less inclined to forgive.

Misunderstanding. Many spouses withhold forgiveness because they misunderstand what extending it will mean. For example:

If I forgive, I am minimizing the wrong.

If I forgive, I have to forget what happened.

If I forgive, I am inviting further mistreatment.

Really, forgiving does *not* imply any of the foregoing. Still, extending forgiveness can be difficult—especially in the close relationship between husband and wife.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

Understand what forgiveness involves. In the Bible, at times the word “forgive” means “let go.” So forgiveness does not always require that you forget what happened or minimize the wrong. Sometimes it means that you simply need to let go of a matter, for your own well-being and that of your marriage.

Recognize the consequences of not forgiving. Some experts say that holding on to resentment can put you at greater risk for a wide range of physical and emotional problems, including depression and high blood pressure—not to mention the damage it does to your marriage. For good reason, the Bible says: “Become kind to one another, tenderly compassionate, freely forgiving one another.”—Ephesians 4:32.

Recognize the benefits of forgiving. A spirit of forgiveness allows you and your mate to give each other the benefit of the doubt rather than to “keep score” of wrongs. That, in turn, helps you to create an environment that keeps resentment in check and allows love to grow.—*Bible principle: Colossians 3:13.*

Be realistic. It is easier to be forgiving when you accept your spouse for who he or she is, flaws and all. “When you focus on what you didn’t get, it’s too easy to forget all of what you did get,” says the book *Fighting for Your Marriage*. “Which list do you want to dwell on at this point in life?” Remember, no one is perfect—including you.—*Bible principle: James 3:2.*

Be reasonable. The next time you are offended by something that your spouse said or did, ask yourself: ‘Is the situation really that important? Do I need to demand an apology, or can I just overlook what happened and move on?’—*Bible principle: 1 Peter 4:8.*

If necessary, discuss the matter. Calmly explain what offended you and why it made you feel that way. Do not impute bad motives or make dogmatic statements, since these will only put your spouse on the defensive. Instead, simply relate how your spouse’s actions affected you. ■

KEY SCRIPTURES

“Continue putting up with one another and forgiving one another freely if anyone has a cause for complaint against another.”
—Colossians 3:13.

“We all stumble many times.”
—James 3:2.

“Love covers a multitude of sins.”
—1 Peter 4:8.

WHEN YOU NEED TO APOLOGIZE

If you have hurt your spouse in some way, sincerely apologize. Even if you do not agree with your spouse’s view of the matter, you can ask forgiveness for what you have done that resulted in hurt feelings. If you work hard to avoid repeating the same mistake, you will give your spouse confidence that your apology was genuine.