

INTRODUCTION

The week before his wife turned 45, her husband asked her what she really wanted for her birthday. She thought for a moment and said, "I'd like to be 10 again." So bright and early on her birthday, he got her up and they were at the gates of Six Flags when it opened. He ran her from ride to ride. They rode the Texas Giant, the Scream Machine, and every other ride two or three times while eating ice cream and hot dogs waiting in line. Six hours later she staggered out of the theme park with a splitting headache and an upturned stomach. Then he took her to a crowded movie to watch *Star Wars* with all the special effects and the volume cranked up to the max. While there, he fed her popcorn, candy, and soda. On the way home, he stopped by McDonald's and bought her a Big Mac meal (supersized) and then they climbed into all the passages of the little playground out front. Finally when she fell into bed that night, he said, "Well, do you feel like you are ten again?" She looked at him through one eye and groaned, "Actually, I meant dress size!"

The CIA was interviewing three agents for a promotion. Two were men and one was a woman. The supervisor gathered the three candidates in a room and said to the first man. Here's a pistol. The job is yours if you will go into the next room and shoot your wife. He thought about it and declined. He made the same offer to the second man. He immediately said, "no way." Then, he made the same offer to the female agent. "The job is yours if you will go into the next room and shoot your husband." She thought about it and said, "That's pretty tough. I really don't want to, but if it's for my country, well, okay, give me the gun." She walked out the door and the agents heard three gunshots and then they heard a racket like somebody was tearing up the room. They rushed into the next room, and the female agent was holding the splintered remains of a chair and her husband was lying on the floor. The chief agent said, "What happened?" She replied, "The gun only had blanks in it, so I had to beat him with this chair!"

I told you earlier that there is no such thing as a perfect marriage or a perfect family, but our goal is to have healthy marriages and healthy families. Sometimes even the best marriages have problems and a "marriage sickness" can infect a husband a wife.

The title of this message is "Nine Words That Can Heal Your Marriage." It is based on the presupposition that your marriage is suffering. If it is sick, then only God can heal it. But these nine words will be like God's Medicine for a sick marriage. Dr. Jesus, the Great Physician is now seeing patients. Will you let Him heal your marriage? Even the best doctor can't help you if you refuse to take the medicine he prescribes. It's the same with your ailing marriage.

Even the best marriages experience difficulties, especially in communication. One day a husband said to his spouse, "I know you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant."

I've been taking an unofficial poll this week, asking people what some of the most important words are in marriage and what the nine most important words are. I've gotten some interesting answers. They have ranged from the humorous to the serious:

- Yes, dear, whatever you say, dear.

- It wasn’t my fault.
- Did I do/say that?
- Hurry up.
- Buy whatever you want. It’s okay.
- I love you (3x)
- Sweetheart, I just called to say I love you.
- Don’t worry about dinner tonight; I’m taking you out.
- Commitment (9x)
- You look better now than when we first married.

My favorite is the one given me by a sharp lady who said with a twinkle in her eye: Have thine own way, dear, have thine own way.

Those are nice, but I have my own list of nine words that will make a difference in your marriage. Look in Ephesians 5:21 to see what God has to say about marriage. The context of Ephesians 5 is found in verse 18. Paul is talking about the Spirit-filled life. We are not to be drunk with wine; that leads to a wasted life. Instead, we are commanded to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. Then in verse 19, we are told what Spirit-filled worship is like when we sing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to the Lord and to encourage one another. Then we are told that the Spirit-filled life is a life characterized by thanksgiving, for everything. Several years ago, I preached through Ephesians and we have entire messages on those verses in our Tape Ministry if you want more details. Then in verse 21, we see what a Spirit-filled marriage is all about. Starting with that verse we have that great section where wives and husbands are addressed (again, I have entire messages on those in our tape library). I want us to focus on the verse Paul uses to introduce what Spirit-filled relationships are all about:

Actually, the verse we are using today has nine words in it. These aren’t the nine words I’m going to highlight today, but these nine words in this verse serve as the basis for the message today, and it is also true that these nine words can heal your marriage: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21)

Ray Stedman writes:

Ephesians 5:21 is the divine solution to the problem of conflict between individuals, those areas of friction where life is rubbed raw, and the ugly sores of violence and conflict often erupt. The oldest battle of all time is the battle of the sexes. The longest war ever waged is the war that goes on between husbands and wives. Divorce statistics point out the fact that marriage is the greatest area of conflict among human beings, far surpassing the statistics of war. Even in Christian homes the degree of squabbling, bickering, coldness, bitterness, and even violence that is encountered by any marriage counselor is simply unbelievable. The atmosphere in many a Christian home is no better than that of an armed truce. There is nothing more important than that we obey hear these simple words of the apostle as he applies this tremendous formula for marital peace. Subjection, therefore, is not merely to be on the part of one alone, but, in the case of Christian husbands and wives, is to be done by both. The husband is to subject himself to

the wife as much as the wife is to the husband. The method will differ according to the sex, but the principle is the same for each.

In the next verse, we read “wives, submit to your husbands . . .” But I’m not preaching on that today – I’m preaching on what verse 21 says about mutual submission to each other. Actually, there is no verb in verse 22, it literally says, “Wives unto your husbands as unto the Lord.” The verb is supplied from verse 21. There must be an attitude of mutual love and humility toward each other if there is going to be a healthy marriage.

This attitude of mutual submission can change your marriage. I want to give you nine words that I believe best characterize this attitude of submitting to one another. These nine words are in three groups of three and I believe the last three are the most important.

Here are the first three words of the nine words that can heal your marriage:

I. HONESTY: “I WAS WRONG”

It takes real honesty to be willing to admit you are wrong. Nobody likes to eat crow—but it is on the menu for every human being because we all make mistakes.

Ogden Nash has written a little ditty that says, “To keep your marriage cup brimming/with love in your loving cup/whenever you’re wrong, admit it/whenever you’re right, shut up”

One of the biggest barriers to marital happiness is the attitude “It’s not *my* fault.” Sometimes a husband or a wife will think that they are always right and any problem in the relationship is the fault of the other partner. That entire attitude is wrong. And if that’s how you think you need to say “I was wrong.”.... even about that general attitude.

I’ll admit men seem to be much more prone to this “I’m-never-wrong syndrome.” I think this attitude is tied to testosterone. That’s why men don’t like to admit they are lost or stop and ask for directions. When this syndrome surfaces in marriage conflict, it can be devastating.

Here’s a couple that is in conflict. They have argued, they have both become sullen and quiet; they are steaming. Neither of them have enough courage to look at themselves and say to the other, “I was wrong.” That’s a marriage that is going to suffer. You see, fractured relationships of any kind, including marriage, keep you from fully enjoying life. Let’s notice two things the Bible says about relationships that are in conflict:

FRACTURED RELATIONSHIPS:

1. Prevent true worship

Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-24, “Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

You can’t even worship properly if you are out of fellowship with another believer or with your spouse. Why is Jesus talking in the context of worship here? It’s because when you are in worship, you are most likely to realize that certain relationships are not right. In other words, when you see God in all of His holiness, it makes us aware of us in all of our sin. Even at this very moment, some of you are in a long, drawn-out conflict with your spouse. I’m praying that while you are here, listening to the words of Jesus that you will become sensitive to the Holy Spirit convicting you of sin. Will you ask the Holy Spirit to shine the spotlight of His conviction into your heart and will you say at this time, “I need to admit to my mate that I was wrong?” You can’t even proceed any further in worship until you decide to do that. Jesus said don’t drop your offering envelope in the plate until you get that relationship right. The second Biblical truth about relationships in conflict is that they

2. Must be addressed quickly

Ephesians 4:26-27: “In your anger, so not sin” do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

Sure, we get angry. There is a kind of righteous anger that is directed toward a sin or injustice—not toward a person. That is right. So it’s okay to get angry, but be careful that you don’t let that anger cause you to sin. How? By letting your temper make you say unkind and hurtful things that shouldn’t be said. You can be “good and angry” but then blow it by sinning in how you express that anger. Then, we see a powerful principle about dealing with conflict. “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.”

In the context of marriage, that means you shouldn’t go to bed mad at each other. In Bible times they often went to bed pretty close to when the sun went down, so we could call it the “Bed Time Rule.” Here’s what happens sometimes: A couple starts arguing and the volume and intensity of the argument starts going up. Before long they are really into it. About the fifth round of the fight, it seems that they aren’t going to resolve this issue, so they just quit; they don’t settle it. They just give each other the silent treatment. They steam. They get into bed and if they get into the same bed, they turn away from each other without even a “good night.” The next morning they get up mad and hardly talk to each other; they go off and do their daily work, come home and the tension is still so thick you can cut it with a knife.

The Bible says that you should settle it quickly, before you go to bed. Listen, all marriages have conflict but in the healthy marriages, they learn to deal with it and settle it quickly. In unhealthy marriages, conflicts carry over and aren’t settled. These unsettled disputes become like an open sore that is not cleaned or dressed; it may be a small wound at first, but infection may set in and soon you’ve got a real problem.

By the way, look at the last verse we read from Ephesians 4: “Do not give the devil a foothold.” When you don’t settle your marriage conflicts before going to bed, you are inviting the devil to come and stand in your relationship. Why does he want a foothold? So he can get better leverage to divide you further. I’ve said many times that the devil wants to drive a wedge of separation between every husband and wife; between every child and parent; between every brother and sister in Christ.

God creates and unites. The devil’s specialty is to divide and destroy. He wants to destroy the unity of your marriage and family; he wants to destroy the unity of your church; he wants to destroy the unity of every friendship. When you don’t address relational conflict quickly, you give the devil a foothold. Here’s what happens in a healthy marriage. There may be a conflict, a disagreement that might even deteriorate into an argument but when each of the partners are trying to truly live under the Lordship of Christ, they realize they can’t go to bed until the issue is resolved. One of them, will say, “Honey, I was wrong. I was wrong in what I said,” or, “I was wrong in how I said it,” or, “I was wrong in what I *did*,” or, “I was wrong in what I *didn’t* do that I needed to.”

Those are the first three words that can heal your marriage and here are the next three.

II. HUMILITY: “PLEASE FORGIVE ME”

The words “I was wrong” are words of honesty. These words take the next step downward into humility and ask the offended person to forgive them. You may ask, “Aren’t those two phrases the same? Isn’t admitting you are wrong the same as asking for forgiveness?” Absolutely not. Sometimes a person can be proven to be wrong, to the point that they can’t deny it. So they mutter, “Okay, so I was wrong, big deal!” Well, it is a big deal. Unless you are willing to take the next step and ask them to forgive you, the relationship is even deeper in conflict. These next three words are an expression that you want the relationship to be healed and that you are willing to—pay attention—here comes the “R” word: *Repent*. There really is no such thing as truly asking for forgiveness if you are unwilling to repent of your mistakes. Now repenting in our human relationships has some real connection with what it means to repent before God, so we had all better understand what repentance isn’t and what repentance is:

TRUE REPENTANCE IS MORE THAN:

1. Regret or 2. Remorse

Those two words almost mean the same thing, but not quite. Regret means that you did the wrong thing and if you had it to do over again, you wouldn’t do it. You may or may not even be sorry that you did it. You just know it was wrong and you so you regret it. The only sorrow attached to regret is often “I’m sorry I got caught.”

Remorse takes it a step further, but it’s still not repentance. Remorse means that you know you did the wrong thing and you regret it, but you are genuinely sorry that you did it. You feel badly about what you did or said—not because you got caught—but because someone was hurt. That’s why I believe that there is tremendous difference between just saying, “I’m sorry.” And saying, “Please forgive me.”

TRUE REPENTANCE PRODUCES A CHANGE:

1. Of heart 2. In conduct

Repentance and forgiveness are all about change. The Biblical word for repent is "meta-noia" which literally means "with new direction" or "with new understanding." There is never a change of conduct until there is a change of heart.

Also, repentance is never a one-time thing. The Bible teaches that we must first repent of our sin nature to be saved, but we must be continually repenting from various sins in our lives if we want to walk in a healthy relationship with God. The same is true in marriage. It's like when you get married; you repent of your singleness and selfishness in a general way. But throughout your marriage you must continually be repenting of your mistakes and tendencies that harm your relationship with your mate.

Now, let's apply these middle three words to a specific episode of marital conflict. Lest you think I'm picking on somebody; I made this up. This is a minor episode. I'll present a more serious situation later.

Let's say one Monday morning Marsha asks her husband, John, if he can come home early and take the kids to soccer practice because she has a hair appointment that afternoon. John is rushing off to work, but he mumbles that he will try. Well, you can imagine what happens. He has one of those days when everything goes wrong at work. He is frustrated all day long. Equipment in the office breaks down, employees are mad at each other—a totally manic Monday. He completely forgets about taking the kids to soccer until he drives into the garage and sees a soccer ball. About that time Marsha drives up, feeling good about her new hairstyle. The kids come screaming out of the house, "Hurry, mom! We're thirty minutes late to soccer practice!" They pile into her car and she drives like a maniac to the practice field and sits there steaming the whole time. When practice is over she drives home, getting madder by the mile. Meanwhile, John has gotten over his disappointment at forgetting to take them to practice. He takes a couple of Tylenol, and sits down to read the newspaper. Marsha returns and sends the kids to their rooms to clean up. What do you think happens next? Well, it could go in a couple of directions. Here's scenario #1:

Marsha stands in front of John waiting for him to put down the paper and talk about what happened. Her arms are crossed, her brow is furrowed and she is tapping her toe. He knows she's there, and he has been reading the same sentence in the paper six times, but he isn't going to even acknowledge her. Finally Marsha says something like, "You aren't even going to say anything are you?" John lowers his paper and says a very husband-like thing: "What are you talking about?" And there's the bell. The fighters come out of their corners toward the center of the ring. A verbal battle ensues. She swings: "You told me you were going to take them to practice." John ducks and counter-punches: "No I didn't. I said I would *try*—I never promised that I would." Marsha tries a left jab: "Oh, no, you told me you would do it. I told you that I couldn't be here because of my hair appointment. If you knew I couldn't do it, whom do you think was going to drive them? Jason is a little young to drive your car." (sarcasm slips the punch in). John is hurt, so he tries a hard right cross. "Well it's all your fault. We agreed last year that you would take them to practice during the week and I would take them to the games on Saturday; that was our agreement. And it's also your job to fix supper, if you remember. If you hadn't made your stupid hair appointment at a bad time, none of this would've have happened." By now, Marsha is reeling, that last punch hurt her. She's not far from tears. "Oh, so now you think my hair is

stupid, huh?” He continues the attack, “I didn’t say your hair was stupid, I clearly said ‘stupid hair appointment.’ Stupid was the adjective modifying ‘appointment’ not ‘hair.’ Didn’t you ever take English?” (Condescension lands the punch). By now, she backs away, stung by the verbal abuse and goes to her private corner to grieve. He sits down with his stomach churning—the winner and still champion, John, the meathead husband!

They are hurt. They are angry. They are full of hostility. When the kids come in for supper and find nothing is on the table, they sense something is wrong between mom and dad. And without a word being spoken, they return to their Nintendo, beaten and wounded from the fight that just took place.

Now, obviously, all of this could have been different if John had used the first six words. Here’s scenario # 2:

She returns from practice and she’s still mad. But this time, her husband meets her at the door and when the kids are gone, he says, “Honey, I blew it. I got so busy today that I forgot about taking the kids to practice. But that’s no excuse. It’s my fault. I was wrong, please forgive me.” Marsha is still upset. “I can’t believe you forgot, I don’t ask you to do it much.” John continues to demonstrate humility. He says, “I don’t have any excuse. I’ll try to make sure it doesn’t happen again. By the way, I love your hair. As soon as the kids get cleaned up, I’ll take us out to eat.” And after he picks his wife up off the floor from where she fainted, they are okay.

What’s the difference? The husband didn’t try to shift the blame; he took responsibility for his mistake—that’s honesty. Then he demonstrated true humility because he asked his wife to forgive him, and he expressed repentance by saying, “I’ll try to make sure it doesn’t happen again.” What a difference between scenario #1 and #2!

In the early seventies there was a terrible movie called *Love Story* starring Ryan O’Neal and Ali McGraw. Kids, if you haven’t seen it; don’t watch it. The famous line from that movie was: “Love means you never have to say you’re sorry.” I still gag every time I hear that little tidbit of popular philosophy. In fact love means that you have to say, “I’m sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me,” over and over in a good marriage.

But there is one final triplet of words. And, in my opinion, they are the most important. Without these final three words, there can be no healing. They are words of:

III. HARMONY: “I FORGIVE YOU”

Of course, the first six words are spoken by one partner and these three words are spoken by the other partner—the one who has been offended. When these nine words are spoken sincerely, harmony will be restored to a bad relationship.

This is a good time to insert this thought: While this message is directed primarily to marriage partners, these nine words work for any relationship that needs mending. These nine words can heal a broken relationship between estranged friends. They work great for other family members who aren’t getting along well with someone in their family. Even if you aren’t married, these

nine words may need to be spoken by you and someone else to whom you were once close but now there's a problem. Now, before we go deeper into this point, let me paint another marriage-buster that is much more severe than that of forgetting to take the kids to soccer practice.

John and Marsha have been married for 12 years. They are both busy with jobs, active in their church, and they have two growing kids who demand much of their attention. They have a pretty good marriage, but Marsha regrets that the romance seems to have evaporated from her marriage. Her love life with her husband is nothing like she reads about in the glossy magazines or the romance novels. While on a business trip, she meets a handsome stranger and after a few drinks, she finds herself doing something she never thought she would do. It's a classic one-night stand and she feels absolutely miserable when it's over. Months go by, and John knows something is wrong. He wants to know what it is, but she refuses to tell. Finally, Marsha can stand it no longer so she tearfully confesses what she did. She is broken and repentant. She admits she was wrong and she begs John husband to forgive her. She promises him that she will never do it again.

What is John going to do? Of course, he feels betrayed, rejected, hurt, mad and a few dozen other emotions, as well. He *must* respond but how? It may take him a while to sort out all his feelings, but if John responds Biblically, he will say through his pain and betrayal, "I forgive you."

Some of you say, "Wait, a minute! Didn't Jesus say adultery was grounds for divorce? If my mate is unfaithful to me, don't I have a right to divorce?" Divorce is an option, but it is never a right. In the book of Malachi God says, "I hate divorce." (Malachi 2:16) When Jesus spoke about marriage, the bottom line was, "What God has joined together, don't let man separate." (Mark 10:9) If there has been sexual sin, then divorce is permitted, but it is not commanded. God's first plan is for the offended mate to forgive their unfaithful partner.

I have heard an offended mate say, "I just can't forgive him for what he did to me." No, the truth is, you won't forgive him, because forgiveness is a choice, not an emotion.

In the Tyler Morning Telegraph this week I read the quote of the parent of a teenager who was murdered say, "I hope I can find it in my heart to forgive those who killed my child." It's hard to forgive someone who hurts you. Let's learn some of what the Bible teaches about forgiveness:

BIBLICAL FORGIVENESS IS:

1. NOT forgetting what happened

Sometimes we try to put forgive and forget together as if they are the same thing. Someone may say, "Forgive and forget?" That's not possible.

John might say something like, "Well, I'll forgive you, but I can't forget it." That's okay. God never asks us to forget it, but we are commanded to forgive those who sin against us. Forgiveness is not the same as forgetting. No, you won't forget what has happened, unless you get senile, have brain damage, or undergo some kind of hypnosis. If your mate is unfaithful to you, you will never forget it—until you die and become like Jesus.

Now, when God forgives us, He does forgive and forget—perfectly. In Isaiah 43 God says, “I am He who blots out your transgressions and remembers your sins no more.” (Isaiah 43:25) God is a perfect “forgetter” but we aren’t. You can forgive someone and still remember what was done.

2. “Letting go” of any desire for him/her to be hurt

The word that Jesus used for “forgive” was *aphiemi* (almost sounds like “a female”). It was a word that literally meant to “let go” or to “send away,” as in “send away from punishment.” In the Old Testament, on the Day of Atonement, two male lambs were used. One was killed and its blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. The other ram was called the “scapegoat.” It was left alive, and after the High Priest had come out from the Holy of Holies he would walk outside the city walls and grab that scapegoat by the horns. He would symbolically confess all the sins of the nation of Israel onto that sacrificial goat but rather than kill that goat, do you know what he would do? He would “forgive” it. He would *aphiemi* it; he would let go of it—send it away without hurting it. As the goat was led away it was a picture of God “taking away the sin of the nation.” That’s what John the Baptist meant when he introduced Jesus by saying, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)

That’s what forgiveness is. When you come to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith, He is faithful and just to forgive you and to cleanse you of all unrighteousness. It’s as if He has grabbed you to take you to the judgement for your sins—death and hell. But instead of punishing you for your sin, He lets you go. He releases you. He sends you away from your punishment.

Now, let’s apply that to personal forgiveness. Jesus taught us to pray in the Model Prayer, “Forgive us our sins as (in the same way) we forgive those who sin against us.” (Matt. 6:12)

Let’s use our example of John and Marsha. John is holding on tightly to the possibility of justice against Marsha. Adultery is wrong—no question. He is in the position of judge; he holds the right to condemn her for her sin. But Mary has demonstrated confession and repentance. “I was wrong. Please forgive me.” For John to forgive her he chooses to let go of his prerogative to punish her and instead chooses to show mercy and forgiveness—the same way God has treated us. And so, he does a very Christ-like thing: He forgives Marsha and he expresses it by saying, “I forgive you.” What a gift of mercy and grace He has given her. It’s more valuable than a 25-carat diamond.

How do you know that you have truly forgiven someone? When you “let go” of the desire for them to be hurt or punished by you. Some people are still hanging on to a bitter spirit of unforgiveness for something their mate did to them years ago. You think because you can’t forget it that you can’t forgive them. Do yourself a favor: Let go of your grudge. Release them and send them away from your personal court of justice.

To the lady who said she hoped she could find it in her heart to forgive her son’s murderers: You can forgive those people and still allow the authority of the state to inflict punishment on them. The difference? You personally do not want to “get even” or “extract revenge” or “hurt them.” Let go of your anger. Allow the God-ordained authority of the state to execute His justice.

Is forgiveness a choice? Yes it is, but you need to know that for true Christians, it is a pre-determined choice.

GOD'S PERSONAL FORGIVENESS BRACKETS:

1. Matthew 6:14-15. "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Don't misunderstand what Jesus is saying. Your salvation or the forgiveness of your sins is not dependent on whether or not you forgive others; that would make it salvation by works. And the Bible teaches in Ephesians 2 that. "Salvation is *not* of works lest any man should boast." I think Jesus is saying that once you have been truly forgiven, you are transformed into a person who is willing to forgive others because God has forgiven you. It doesn't *cause* your salvation; it is the *result* of your salvation. Ephesians 4:32 says, "Be kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake has forgiven you."

You say, "Okay, I have forgiven him/her before. How many times do I have to forgive? Here's the answer:

2. Matthew 18:21-22. Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." In the Greek language it's a phrase that means seventy "folded back in on itself." The lowest number would be 77, or it could be 70 times 7 (490 times) or even 70 squared which is 4,900 times. But don't get hung up on the exact number. When Peter offered to forgive someone seven times he thought he was being very generous. Jesus blew him away by telling him that we should be willing to forgive as often as the Father is willing to forgive us, which is an unlimited number. The only person who can afford the luxury of unforgiveness is the person who doesn't need to be forgiven.

"I forgive you" are three powerful, liberating words. I believe that all three of these phrases must be spoken sincerely if you want to see healing in your marriage. Carrying a spirit of unforgiveness can damage your soul. When you release someone by forgiving him or her, you are also releasing something within yourself. You are letting go of the desire to get even or to hurt them for what they have done. Forgiveness is healthy for the one who does the forgiving.

You many wonder: Does my spouse have to ask me to forgive them before I forgive them? Not necessarily. When you came to Christ, He forgave every sin you ever committed and every sin you will ever commit. Thankfully, you don't have to request forgiveness for every sin you commit after you are saved. You must confess your sins to stay clean, but to be forgiven to stay saved. If we are going to forgive the way God forgives, sometimes we must forgive our mate even if they don't ask the question.

A grandmother, celebrating her golden wedding anniversary, told the secret of her long and happy marriage. She said, "On my wedding day, I decided to make a list of ten of my husband's faults which, for the sake of our marriage, I would overlook," A guest asked the woman what some of the faults she had chosen to overlook were. The grandmother replied, "To tell you the truth, I never did get around to listing them. But whenever my husband did something that made

me hopping mad, I would say to myself, ‘Lucky for him that’s one of the ten!’” That’s forgiveness the way God forgives.

CONCLUSION

Zig Ziglar tells a true story of a couple who went to see their pastor as a last stop before seeing their lawyers about a divorce. It seems that little things had escalated into big things. Past hurts were piled up and card cataloged. And the marriage had gone cold. When they showed up, the tension was electric. The husband sat on one side of the room hurling accusations. The wife sat on the other side, cold as ice, but occasionally blasting away with bitter fireball-type put-downs. The preacher suggested to this couple that they start over. He suggested that they go back to that point in time where they were in love. To which the man replied, “But I don’t love her anymore.” The preacher said: “You do respect the Bible, don’t you?” The man replied. “Yes.” The preacher went on, “Well, then, Scripture says, ‘Love Your Wife.’” “Yes,” said the man, “but we’re not living together as husband and wife. We have separate bedrooms.”

“Oh, you’re living in rooms next to each other? Well, Scripture answers that, too. ‘Love Your Neighbor.’”

The young man retorted, “But I don’t feel like she’s a neighbor. We relate to each other more like enemies.” To which the preacher replied enthusiastically, “That’s great, because Scripture covers that base, too. It says, ‘Love Your Enemies.’” Both husband and wife told the preacher, “But we just don’t feel like loving each other. You don’t want us to be hypocritical, do you?” The preacher said, “Why don’t we suspend the discussion of hypocrisy for a week? Go back to treating each other like you loved each other.” To the husband he said, “You call her from work. Send her flowers. Tell her you love her.” To the wife he said, “You have a nice meal prepared. Buy him a card. Tell him you love him.” And then to both of them he said, “Speak kind words to each other, even try to show some physical affection with an occasional hug or touch of the hands. Let’s see what happens in a week’s time.”

The following week, the couple returned. The preacher was surprised to note that instead of taking seats on the opposite side of the office, both sat down on the same couch, holding hands. So he asked, “What’s the deal?” To which the wife replied, “He’s been nicer to me this past week than he has been since we were married ten years ago.” Smiling, the husband said, “Well, I guess you can love your enemy and forgive those who persecute you.”

Forgiveness is the great healer. Try these nine words; watch as God uses them to heal your marriage.

OUTLINE

I. HONESTY: "I WAS WRONG"

Fractured relationships:

1. Prevent true worship

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." *Matthew 5:23-24*

2. Must be addressed quickly

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. *Ephesians 4:26-27*

II. HUMILITY: "PLEASE FORGIVE ME"

True repentance is more than:

1. Regret or

2. Remorse

True repentance produces a change:

1. Of heart

2. In conduct

III. HARMONY: "I FORGIVE YOU"

Biblical forgiveness is:

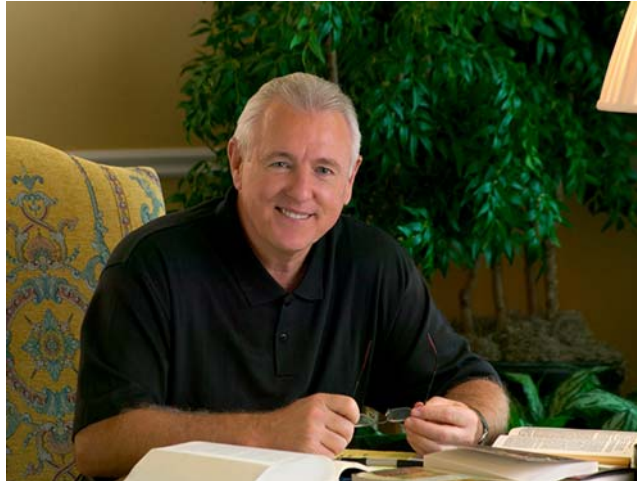
1. NOT forgetting what happened

2. "Letting go" of any desire for him/her to be hurt.

GOD'S PERSONAL FORGIVENESS BRACKETS

1. "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." *Matthew 6:14-15*

2. Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." *Matthew 18:21-22*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes