

5 Steps to Fully Forgiving Your Spouse

Every human longs for intimate connection with another. Marriage offers that intimacy of body, soul and spirit, but only if we follow God's laws for marriage. One of those laws is the law of purity.

Just as Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed in the Garden of Eden—until sin entered their lives—true intimacy is only possible in an atmosphere of purity. For many marriages, unforgiveness is the sin that introduces impurity to the relationship. Maybe there's something in your spouse's life that you have not forgiven. A past hurt or offense may be affecting your ability to love each other as you should.

That issue can be resolved with forgiveness. You won't know real intimacy in your marriage until you deal with it.

The Bible says unforgiveness poisons our hearts (see Heb. 12:15). In marriage, unforgiveness is like a dead skunk in a basement: It makes the entire house stink. If you've ever been around unforgiving people, you've heard them speak venomous words about the people they resent. But you don't have to hear their words to know what's in their heart. You can see it on their faces and in their actions.

The venom of unforgiveness damages the vessel it is stored in worse than it hurts anyone you can spit it on. In other words, when you do not forgive others, the person you hurt most is yourself.

Unforgiveness doesn't just poison an individual's heart. It also poisons a marriage, even if the unforgiven offense isn't related to the relationship. Harboring resentment or bitterness toward others in your life will still have a negative effect on your marriage. In so many marriages, I've

seen one spouse become the outlet for anger and frustration unrelated to the marriage relationship.

If unforgiveness is poison, then forgiveness is a purifying agent. When we forgive others—especially a husband or wife—we get rid of unhealthy thoughts and feelings. Forgiveness cleans out the house. It blesses a relationship. It even impacts whether or not God forgives you, according to what Jesus taught in Matthew 6.

Forgiving other people is a serious issue with God and one of the requirements of a marriage that follows God's law of purity. There are five important steps to forgiveness:

1. **Release.** Release the guilty person from your judgment. Do not keep replaying the offense in your mind. Do not dwell on your hurt feelings or pain. Let God be the judge and let it go.
2. **Decide.** Forgiveness is a decision. Make a decision to love the person who has offended you, then let your behavior reflect that decision. In cases of abuse or destructive behavior, of course, you might have to limit your exposure to certain people. But your spirit toward them should be loving—not hostile.
3. **Bless.** Pray for that person. Jesus taught us to bless those who curse us and pray for those who mistreat us (Luke 6:28). This is one of the most powerful ways to change negative feelings toward a person. I've seen prayer transform deep resentment and hurt into love and compassion—even without the presence of an apology. This is the most important step to take in healing the hurts of your past. Though it may take days or weeks, God uses this posture of prayer to heal us.

By the way, the refusal to bless or pray for a person is proof-positive that you aren't forgiving toward them.

4. **Move on.** Refuse to bring up the hurt in the future. When God forgives us, He removes our sins “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps. 103:12). He doesn’t simply forgive; He forgets. Though we cannot erase hurts from our memories, we can make the decision not to dwell on past offenses. This decision alone can have enormous positive impact on a marriage.
5. **Repeat.** Forgiveness is often a process, so repeat these steps as many times as necessary. Keep going through these steps until you sense a genuine release of the unforgiveness in your heart.

A successful marriage is 100% possible if we follow God’s laws for marriage. A marriage that obeys the law of purity must be one in which forgiveness is present. As you walk in forgiveness, you’ll see a marked difference in the atmosphere and pleasure of your relationship.

Purity is the environment where love and intimacy find their deepest and most beautiful expression. Forgive your spouse. Forgive those who hurt you. Be diligent to remain pure, and God will bless you beyond your wildest dreams. {eoa}

This is an excerpt from The Four Laws of Love: Guaranteed Success for Every Married Couple by Jimmy Evans. He shares that God created love and marriage, and He created laws to guide and guard them. When God’s laws are honored, marriage is the safest relationship on the earth. Available now at

Jimmy Evans is the founder and CEO of MarriageToday, a ministry and nationally syndicated television program devoted to helping couples thrive in strong and fulfilling marriages and families. He is senior pastor of Gateway Church, one of the largest churches in the nation. He and his wife, Karen, have been married for 47 years and have two married children and five grandchildren.