

A 4-Step Strategy to Start Cleansing Your Marriage of Sin

As a Christian, you've heard the prodigal son story (Luke 15: 11-32) preached time and time again. However, I've never heard anyone really explain the power of intentionality in this story:

Then He said, "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that falls to me.' So he divided his estate between them.

"Not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together, and journeyed to a distant country, and there squandered his possessions in prodigal living. When he had spent everything, there came a severe famine in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and hired himself to a citizen of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. He would gladly have filled his stomach with the husks that the swine were eating, but no one gave him any.

"When he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have an abundance of bread, and here I am perishing with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."' So he arose and came to his father.

"But while he was yet far away, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and ran and embraced his neck and kissed him.

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him. And put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. Bring here the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this son of mine was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ So they began to be merry.

“Now his older son was in the field. As he came and drew near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. He said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him safe and sound.’

“He was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! These many years have I served you. Nor have I ever transgressed your commands, yet never have you given me a goat, so that I might be merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed the fattened calf for him.’

“He said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. But it was fitting to be merry and be glad, for this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found’” (Luke 15:11-32).

The story is straightforward. A boy takes his inheritance, moves to a far-off land and intentionally self-destructs through alcohol and sex. He goes broke.

Then he comes up with a plan of telling his dad he sinned, asking for forgiveness and hoping his dad will hire him on the ranch. However, when he hatched this plan, he was in a far-off country. He had to intentionally and consistently walk daily for weeks or months to get back in his father’s house.

Intentionality only works if you actually do it. Reading about it isn’t doing it. Even planning to do it isn’t doing it.

Doing it is doing it. Now if for whatever reason you are in the habit of not being an intentional lover toward your spouse, I'd follow the principles of the prodigal.

The first part of his plan was to go to his dad and take responsibility. I find as a Christian couple if one or both of you have been irresponsible with being a lover, verbally repenting is very helpful. Unlike the prodigal son, I wouldn't try to overcome years or decades of self-absorption, immaturity, inattentiveness, taking the other person for granted and not being there for them in one conversation.

You could begin to undo some of the damage by writing out the mistakes (sins you made in your relationship with your spouse) and going through this list with them. As you present your list, you could state, "I need you to forgive me for ..." This list could comprise actual things you did, things you didn't do, didn't follow up on, needed to be reminded about repeatedly, attitudes or even just bad ideas.

Taking responsibility also gives you some ideas about creating a plan. You can see where things have to change, and you need to do differently than before.

A few suggestions I have from my couples' work are:

1. Write the plan up for yourself.
2. Review the plan with your spouse to make sure it achieves what you hope it will.
3. Make the goals achievable and measurable. You don't have to do it all in a week but make goals ones you can do and sustain.
4. Review your goals with someone of the same gender—a mentor, pastor or cell group leader. This kind of accountability always accelerates your success with such goals.

Doug Weiss, Ph.D., is a nationally known author, speaker and licensed psychologist. He is the executive director of Heart

to Heart Counseling Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and the author of several books, including his newest title, Partner Betrayal Trauma. You may contact Dr. Weiss via his website, or on his Facebook, by phone at 719-278-3708 or through email at heart2heart@.