

Myths About Forgiveness That Prevent Healing in Marriages

Tom and Renee were a great Christian couple. To know them was to love them. They were successful in business, had great children in a Christian school and both were involved in ministries within the mega-church they had attended for almost 20 years.

So what was a couple like this doing in a counseling office? When they walked through the door, they didn't know the answer to that, either, but they just felt like something was missing. They couldn't pinpoint the problem to any large sin in their life. There was no infidelity. They were, for the most part, structurally healthy as far as dating, finances, sex and friends.

Yet there was something blocking the depth of intimacy they had earlier in their marriage. After some observation, we found the culprit—unforgiveness. They discovered a lot of little sins began to clog up the love they once experienced. Many are stuck in a cycle of unforgiveness by believing myths about forgiveness that were designed by the devil to prevent healing and joy.

Myth No. 1: The person who has sinned against you has to be present to forgive them. Some people don't believe they can forgive anyone unless the person is right in front of them. Most of the people I have forgiven in my life were not present when I forgave them, and yet I was able to forgive them anyway.

I have seen thousands of clients forgive those who hurt them without their perpetrators being present. Some were able to forgive all types of abuses and abandonment by those who were supposed to love them, including their spouse.

Forgiveness is possible whether the person is present or not. Since forgiveness is a decision, it can be made without their presence. Your spouse can forgive you without being present, and you can forgive them, too. This forgiveness can be just as complete in your heart whether your spouse is present or not.

Myth No. 2: They must repent for you to forgive them.

Forgiveness is your decision alone. When you believe the myth that they must repent to be forgiven, you give your power to forgive over to the person who offended you. I don't think that someone who offended you is the greatest choice to give the power of forgiveness to.

You wouldn't want them to decide when you get to exercise forgiveness and free you from the impact of their sin in your life. Remember, Christ died for us while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8). He didn't wait for humanity to ask forgiveness before He sacrificed himself for the forgiveness of our sins.

No, He exercised His right and power to forgive even through you were not present or able to ask forgiveness 2,000 years ago. So, we can forgive without our spouse repenting. It's great news that we can free ourselves and offer forgiveness at will.

Remember, as a Christian you are not only allowed to but also commanded to forgive. It is great that we can forgive without the other person having control of when and where.

Myth No. 3: They must change before I forgive them. I can't tell you how many times I have heard Christian men and women say this. Although I believe it's great if we all change and become more Christlike, not all spouses will change. Even if you are the greatest, most loving spouse God ever created, that doesn't mean they will choose to change.

But your spouse changing is not a prerequisite for you to forgive or not forgive. Let's get real about some of this self-righteous, moral superiority some of us have while

walling ourselves off from our spouse or others. That's just wrong.

Jesus didn't say to me, "Doug, you change; then I will forgive you." If he did that, I would be on an endless process of trying to be good enough to be forgiven. No, what Jesus said was, "Doug, I forgive you." He even knew I would sin again. He even knew I would sin in the same area again. He even knew some sins would take years or decades before I obtained victory over them.

What was He thinking to forgive a sinner like me before I changed? I think He was thinking His forgiveness would eventually penetrate my heart and that my will to sin would become less and less as His grace became more and more apparent in my life. It is a much better approach to forgiveness than waiting for my spouse to change.

All I need is a gentle reminder by the Holy Spirit about how much sin Christ has forgiven me of to be more forgiving of my precious but slightly flawed Lisa. Forgiveness can flow from us by our choice whether the other person is present or not. What a great force forgiveness can be in your lives and your marriage.

What I love about the love agreement of forgiveness is that it's up to us. We hold a great ability to empty out the anger and bitterness, which will, in turn, better our lives. {eoa}

*The preceding is an excerpt from **Dr. Doug Weiss'** book, The 7 Love Agreements.*

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