

This Exercise Can Help Restore Forgiveness in Your Marriage

Something that can clog up any marriage is gook. “Gook” refers to those sins and mistakes by which we willfully or unknowingly hurt people.

Gook appears in every marriage, Christian or not. Sometimes we can create gook outside our marital relationship that we bring into the marriage.

I tell people at marriage conferences that it would be a living hell to be married to a perfect person. Why? Because then all the problems in the marriage would be your fault! As it is, with two sinners married to each other, any issue could be either spouse’s fault or even the fault of both.

I really wish my spouse were the only person I sinned against. Unfortunately, my sinful nature can manifest on almost anyone. I can be unloving, arrogant, irritable, rude and self-centered to almost anyone, even the people I like or love.

Like me, you’ve sinned against others throughout your life. To live a forgiveness lifestyle, you need to do a rigorous self-examination of your sins toward others.

I’m now going to share with you an exercise that can bring you a long way from unforgiveness into forgiveness. I know this is uncomfortable. I didn’t like doing this exercise either. But I made a list of employers, parents and professors—everyone I could think of—and yes, I went back to every person and asked for forgiveness. Initially I felt odd doing this, but afterward, I felt great!

What this process gave me was freedom from shame and guilt. I

no longer was ashamed of any hurts I caused others. I can run into anyone from my past and keep my head up. Once I owned the junk from my past, I could get rid of it.

I caution you, though: I strongly discourage you from going directly to an ex-love for forgiveness. Revisiting a previous lover is never a great idea for a married person. You can stir up old feelings, reignite attachments, compare that person's strengths to your spouse's weaknesses or hurt your ex-love's life with your interruption. You should never attempt fresh communication with a former love without the direction of a counselor. Also, if your confession could cause legal issues or significant pain because the person doesn't know you sinned against him or her, consult a pastor or counselor for guidance before attempting this.

Better yet, leave the past love in the past and use the empty-chair method of asking for and receiving forgiveness. (I give a great example of how to do the empty chair method in my book, *The 10-Minute Marriage Principle*. Essentially, you will be speaking to an empty chair and imagining the other party sitting there. This way you get to own—and release—your mistakes without risking a potentially damaging encounter.

If you are brave enough to ask forgiveness for past sins, you can clean up any gook you have in relationships. This makes you lighter in your soul and much easier to live with. The humility this adds to your life can be a lifelong gift. This process also allows you to be more honest about your sins.

For me, asking forgiveness is as easy as saying, "Thank you." I know I need to do this regularly, so I am prepared. I have learned to apologize quickly to my wife, children, myself, my staff, coworkers, clients, business associates and others I come in contact with. I am not perfect, and apologizing regularly reminds me of this fact.

Knowing I need forgiveness myself allows me to forgive my wife

and others I love. I know I am going to do my best to forgive even when no one asks for it. This helps me continue to love on days when I would rather build a wall of unforgiveness. This lifestyle helps me personally maintain a marriage of service to my wife. I don't have to keep bringing up Lisa's past or respond out of shame to my past. When we ask forgiveness easily, there's no silent resentment building up, so we can be honestly loving toward one another. That alone is worth the work I have had to do in the area of forgiveness.

I liken seeking forgiveness to climbing a mountain. If I am going to do something difficult, it is helpful to have checkpoints along the way so I can mark my progress. If checkpoints are helpful to you as well, take a sheet of paper and make a forgiveness checklist. List the person you forgave or who forgave you as well as the date each occurred. You'll have a visual record of the work you've done.

I encourage you to schedule a few minutes a day or a half hour a week to work on this. As you get rid of the gook, all of life will be more beautiful! As you complete the forgiveness process, you will grow stronger as you climb this mountain. As you climb, keep in mind the view you will have for yourself, your spouse and others: somehow you will be different, more grounded and grateful than you were before you climbed.

I want to leave you hopeful that if you climb the mountain of forgiveness, your life and your marriage will change. Sometimes when our family goes hiking, the difficulty of the trail makes us want to give up, but if we climb just a little farther, the panoramic view we experience is absolutely incredible.

So go ahead: Climb, see and breathe a new lifestyle. Forgive, and you'll feel and be freer than ever before. {eo}

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