

Finding Forgiveness from Your Spouse

Video <https://skitguys.com/videos/item/tell-her>

- I. Words are important, aren't they? Especially when it comes to solving conflict in marriage. The most important words in the married life might be only three. Ready for them? I am sorry. We might want to write those down. The use of these three words can lead to a meaningful rich life together. Their absence can lead to the opposite. But there is much more that goes along with that, isn't there? Today we are continuing our series by looking specifically at forgiveness within marriage. I realize some of us are not married here this morning. A couple of thoughts on that. If you are a single lady or man, and if you listen carefully, you can end up with some serious relational skills that can help in dating as well as marriage. But if you are single again and have no interest in "getting back out there," maybe there will be something you hear this morning that you can share with a struggling friend, niece, or son. And finally, if you are a married man sitting there thinking, "I just hope my wife listens up" but you plan to zone out, then this sermon is especially for you because you need it more than you think.

- II. Let's start off and agree marriage is hard. Don't get me wrong. It's an incredibly beautiful thing...with incredible moments, like the wedding itself when you first see your soon-to-be bride or groom. That moment your child is born or adopted, and your world narrows down to just three. That moment when you get your first apartment or buy your first house and begin to create a new life together. The romantic moments away on your anniversary. Marriage has unbelievable highs. But if you have been married for a while you know there are some lows. Like the first time you see your spouse without make-up or scratching himself watching the game. But honestly, there are many "less than" romantic moments. I will share one of my own.

- III. As soon as Megan and I got married we went off to Germany where I was assigned by the army. In our downtime we would travel. Rothenburg (**pic**) was one of our favorite destinations. It is one of the quaintest villages in Europe, complete with a medieval wall surrounding it. It would have been an incredibly romantic weekend if it wasn't for the fact that Meg came down with the stomach bug. She was nauseous and miserable. Despite the fact that my German boiled down to only a few key phrases like "Where's the toilet?" I decided to go to the pharmacy to get her some relief. I ended up having one of the most comical conversations in my life with a German pharmacist whose English was not any better than my German. I communicated to her primarily through hand gestures. The one I did over and over was this (moving my hand from my mouth to the ground and then rubbing my stomach.) I was impressed how well the pharmacist seemed to understand and how quickly she prescribed what I thought was exactly what Megan needed. She handed me a bottle of "Vomix." Yes. That was the name of it. I assumed it was to treat nausea. I felt like a medical hero as I proudly walked across the little town back to the inn where we were staying. Megan was less than enthused when she saw the name on the bottle. I said something like, "Honey, it's just a German version of Kaopectate. The pharmacist said to drink all of it (I think)." Then as if I were at frat party, I began chanting "Go! Go! Go!"

encouraging her to drink it all...to the last drop. Does anyone want to guess what happened about 30 seconds later? With explosive ferocity? I will leave that scene to your imagination. Romantic it was not even in the slightest of ways. After the smoke cleared Megan wanted to throttle me... for good reason. And that goes back to my initial statement. Marriage is hard! For as many mountaintop experiences, there are those Vomix moments. And to get through them with our relationship intact we need to learn the biblical art of forgiveness.

- IV. Adam Hamilton in his book Forgiveness points us to Paul the church planter's letter to the Colossians as a guide. **Col 3:12-15 NIV** Here Paul is not addressing the marriage relationship specifically in this passage, but rather he is telling the Colossian church (which was made up primarily of recent converts) in short, "Hey, you are now God's people. And if you want to live and act as God's people, this is what you are going to have to do. You are going to have to dress for it. You are going to have to dress up in Christ-like clothing." He is essentially saying this is how you are going to have to live and relate to others if you are going to follow Jesus. He uses the analogy of clothing to get this idea across. Now it might seem off or odd to mix Christian virtues with garments, but I believe Paul was communicating several timeless points by tying the two together. And they are true and timeless for all relationships, but especially the marriage relationship.

- V. One of the many things I love about pastoring here at G3 is that I rarely have to wear dress pants. Yet occasionally I do. Perhaps for a hospital visit or a wedding. Honestly, I find them very uncomfortable. More importantly I find people more receptive to talk with me as a pastor if I am dressed causally. But I have found the more I wear dress pants, the more comfortable they become...even if they feel awkward or ill-fitting at first. And this goes back to Paul's word to the Colossians and to the church throughout generations. He encourages us to "wear," or put on, certain Christ-like virtues such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience and forgiveness despite how we are feeling at the moment. And the truth is the more you "wear" these virtues, the easier it is to live them out. The more you practice patience, the easier it is to be patient. It can, with work, become your default response. And this is true in marriage. If we treat our spouses with kindness and compassion even when we don't feel very kind or compassionate, our marriage will remain strong. Essentially the more we act in this Christ-like manner, the more natural it becomes, like a well-worn pair of dress pants. For example, you come home after a long day at work and ask your spouse, "What's for dinner?" and they reply, "Cheerios al carte!" we might feel great frustration and anger. What do we do? Our natural response is to grill them for the lack of planning or preparation. But let me ask. Does that ever really seem to work? It sure doesn't in my house. How about instead we "put on" compassion, which in a biblical sense means seeing the world from another's perspective, and offer to pick up Chinese food or pour the milk. And "put on" humility, which in this verse means to act in a servant like way. Again, the principle is the more we wear something, the easier or more comfortable it becomes. This includes the Christian virtues.

- VI. Here is the thing. If we are honest, too often we don't wear these Christ-like clothes, do we? Just last week we had the youth over at our house. So about an hour before they came, we starting frantically cleaning. I was still a little worn out after preaching that morning, so I was not eager. Especially when Meg asked me not only to take out the trash (no biggie) but to clean the area around where we store our trash (a huge biggie!) Two unnamed people

who live in our house have a habit of missing the can despite it being only 3 inches away. It often lands “next to” rather than “in” the garbage. Then it begins to fester and grow into what looks like a new species. All this to say, it’s totally gross, to borrow a pre-teen term. So what did I do when she asked me to clean it? I whined like a 5-year-old, “Why me?! I didn’t make that mess!” rather than just manning up and getting it done. And I continued to complain even as I did it...at least to myself. And I know that reaction irritated my wife. I certainly wasn’t wearing any Jesus clothing at that moment.

- VII. Going back to our Scripture, what does Paul say to do? **Col 3:13a** “Bear with each other” What does Paul mean here? Paul is saying that we need to put up with those irritations and annoyances we will feel towards others, especially our spouse. Let’s return to the rock and stone metaphor we used last week. Let’s say those small irritations like failing to put the toilet seat down or whining about having to do a household chore is like our spouse is adding a small pebble to our backpack. Let our backpack represent our seat of emotions or psyche or core of who we are. Now, if our spouse put a few of these babies in, they are really not going to weigh us down much, are they? This is especially true if our spouse is also putting on or acting out kindness, compassion, etc. towards us. Like making our favorite meal, taking care of the children so we can have a break, getting us flowers, or taking us out on a quiet romantic dinner. If this is happening, we can bear the minor irritations because in a real sense, these acts of kindness are like they are taking the pebbles back out. And if our husband or wife does these kinds of things enough, they in a sense can make our pack float...like they are adding helium balloons instead of pebbles. So they are truly lifting us up rather than weighing us down. The point being, the marriage relationship can add immense joy to our lives when we follow Paul’s commands. And bearing the occasional irritation like forgetting to turn on the dishwasher after loading it is no big deal and won’t ruin our relationship.
- VIII. Unfortunately, pebbles are not the only thing that we or our spouses add to each other’s pack, are they? Too often in marriage we do things that add much more weight. Hamilton names a few of the more serious offenses such neglect, hurtful words, public embarrassment, deceit and a failure to love, cherish, or keep awake for your husband’s sermons. ☺ Doing these kinds of things are like spouses adding sizeable rocks to our pack. Sure, we can bear up with these for awhile but unless something is done, it’s not going to only weigh us down but drag down the entire relationship. What do we do? Or, sticking with our metaphor, how can we unload all this weight? As Paul tells us in **Col 3:13b NIV** “Forgive one another.” Aww, thanks Paul. Why didn’t we think about that? No problem, right? Just forgive our spouse of all those things, dump our pack and move on, right? But it’s really not that easy, is it? Especially when the wounds are deep, and the stones seem to weigh on our very soul.
- IX. I agree with Hamilton here when he says, “**Forgiveness is most freely and fully given when the one who has done the wrong repents.**” And what might that look like? Hamilton suggests that **biblical repentance** has four steps. The first is **awareness** of what we did wrong. Second, is **regret** or truly being sorry over what we did. And next comes

confession... to our spouse and I would say to God. And finally, one of the most important steps is **change**; as in don't repeat the hurtful behavior again, if at all possible. If you didn't get all that, let's offer a real-life example. Let's say my wife and I are out with friends and I end up sharing a very painfully embarrassing moment in my wife's life. I don't even think anything about it because it was so long ago and well, I am an ignorant man. ☺ When I get home, I can tell she is upset. She has become quiet and withdrawn. It then hits me what I did. I become aware that without even intending, I added a good-sized rock to her pack. I then reflect on our past conversations where she shared that this event is still a fresh wound. I begin to truly regret my actions. So I go to her without trying to defend my actions in the slightest bit and I say those three words. Do we remember what they are? I am sorry. I confess what I did was wrong and insensitive. I promise never to do that again. Only then is she able to dump that good-sized stone out of her pack and truly begin to forgive. The four steps to biblical repentance are awareness, regret, confession, and change. It is critical we learn these to help keep our spouse's packs light.

- X. Let me tell you about a woman named Alice. Alice was married to her emotionally abusive husband Larry for 16 years. Almost daily Larry added enormous-sized rocks to her pack. He never physically harmed her but by his constant insults and razor sharp negative comments, he weighed her down and over time destroyed her heart. Then one day Larry committed his life to Christ. This surprised everyone, especially Alice who had given up praying for him years before. Larry stopped drinking, began attending AA, stopped the abuse and joined Alice in bible study and worship every week. Everyone expected their marriage to fully recover and the two of them to live happily ever after. But it didn't. Day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year Larry had buried Alice in stones. Alice knew Paul's words well. "Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you." But she felt stuck. Larry, feeling the joy God's forgiveness, was impatient to receive Alice's too. As hard as she tried, she just couldn't dump out all the stones in her pack. A year later their marriage ended in divorce, with many blaming Alice. Why tell that story? Because of this. There are some things that a spouse can do that adds rocks so large that the relationship might takes years to recover, years for the offended spouse to be able to forgive. Adultery and abuse are at the top of that list. This is why Jesus who otherwise is completely against divorce makes an exception in Matthew's gospel chapter 19. This is not saying that the spouse shouldn't pursue forgiveness, but some hurts are so deep, the stones too big, for the relationship ever to recover. Yet some do. If the couple works together, with the power of God's grace, counseling, prayer, and time, it is possible even for these boulder-sized stones to be removed. But the forgiveness process can't be rushed or it will just crumble.
- XI. So in short. Marriage is a gift from God but it is also hard work with many vomix moments along the way. On top of that we will add pebbles, rocks and sometimes even enormous stones to each other's packs. But if we can learn to say those three words and repent through awareness, regret, confession and change, we will be able to lighten our spouse's load. And if we wear those Christian virtues that Paul talks about on a regular basis, not only will we be taking out those pebbles and rocks, we can even make our spouse's heart float.