

Session Three: Forgiveness

(Source: Wangerin)

Scriptures:

Matt 18:21-35

Eph 4:25-32

Col 3:12-4:1 esp. 3:12-14

Question:

- How many times should you forgive each other?
- Why is forgiveness necessary?
- What is forgiveness?
- How is forgiveness practice in marriage?

Introduction:

- In the previous session we spoke of the importance of forgiveness. If it so vital, why don't couples forgive each other more readily? Forgiveness is most needed but it is one of the least understood. In this session we will attempt to clarify some of the difficulties with forgiveness and map out a strategy to forgive others.
- Humanity is sinful and self-centred and always stands in need of forgiveness.
- One of the areas of communication that a couple will need to cultivate and practice is the communication of forgiveness.

Three Questions we need to answer Re: Forgiveness:

1. Why is forgiveness necessary?
2. What is forgiveness?
3. How is forgiveness practice in marriage?

Why is Forgiveness necessary?

- Forgiveness is necessary to bring us back to the ideal, God intended for marriage. Sin destroyed and continues to destroy and distort this ideal. (cf. p. 56). God created man and woman for each other but sin brought separation, and separation brought loneliness. Loneliness hurts, it debilitates, it feeds on the human spirit.
- Personal meaning and value only arise in relationship (p. 58). In relationships we discover our identity and security; these are essential for an enhanced quality of life. Only as the couple relates to each other, are they complete as God intended. They belong together and together, male and female, they reflect the image of God.
- As sin has tainted the image of God in the first couple, so sin has tainted and continues to deteriorate the image and ideals of God for couples today. Because of sin, love becomes law and ideal becomes ordeal. Before the ideal becomes real once again as God intended, sin has to be dealt with. This is what forgiveness is all about.

What Is Forgiveness?

1. It is Giving up
 - Forgiveness is the willingness to relinquish certain rights. To give up one's rights is to sacrifice something of oneself. There is no forgiveness without sacrifice.
2. It is Giving Notice
 - It is a clear communication to the sinner that he/she has sinned. The purpose of the communication is not to accuse or excuse but to inform. This is also a part of the sacrifice that one has to make to forgive. This communication is the opposite of vengeance.
3. It is Giving Gifts
 - Forgiveness is neither a reward nor a payment. It is a free gift of grace. It is giving love when there is no reason for love and no guarantee that the love will be reciprocated. It is repaying evil with kindness. Only with forgiveness can newness enter a marriage. Only with forgiveness can healing begin. Through forgiveness we can see love, sacrifice, grace, mercy, change and growth in a marriage.
 - This type of forgiveness is a powerful tool for marriage. However, the power to make this tool effective comes from a source that resides outside of ourselves. This source for the Christian couple is found in Christ. He is the source and power of forgiveness. As sin disrupted our relationship with God, so it also disrupts our relationship with each other. Christ is the Source of forgiveness and healing to both human-human and human-divine relationships. Christ is not only the source of forgiveness, He is the example of forgiveness (Eph 4:31-32; Col 3:12-13).
 - As God gave of Himself to bring about forgiveness, so the couple needs to give of themselves to bring about forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration, renewal and healing. The tarnishes image of God is reconstructed; the tainted image is reconstituted through forgiveness.

Four Myths about Forgiveness:

1. Forgiveness is forgetting.
 - That which truly happened and truly hurt, cannot be forgotten
2. Time heals all wounds
 - The sinner seldom changes spontaneously
 - God Himself had to do something to forgive the sin of the world (Jn 3:16),

so must we forgive each other. We need to take initiative and responsibility.

- Forgiveness requires the action of the forgiver (p. 94)
3. Forgiveness is merely a change in our hearts
 - Forgiveness is an act that involves each person who acted out the sin
 4. Forgiveness is merely the words "I forgive you!"
 - The significance of the act must be equal to the damage caused by the sin
 - It must have a time, a place and the full attention of both parties
 - Forgiveness involves both the sinner and the forgiver. Focusing self-consciously on the sin is a sacrificial act (p. 95).

How to Forgive:

Six Steps to Forgiveness:

Forgiveness is always by grace and through faith (Eph 2:7-10). Remember sin is always against God and sometimes against others and self.

1. Be realistic

Three questions that must be answered:

- 1) What exactly was the sin?
- 2) Against whom was the sin committed?
- 3) What exactly are the consequences of the sin?

These three questions are intended to prevent three errors:

- 1) The error of exaggerating the effects of the sin
- 2) The error of blaming the person closest to you for all the sin
- 3) The error of judging something to be sin when it is not

2. Remember your own forgiveness

- The sin we see more readily in others, is what we have often learnt and saw first in ourselves
- We recall our past sins not to torment self, but to rejoice in the forgiveness we have received from God
- You and your spouse are not heroes, but people with "blow holes" in the castings.
- You are able to forgive all the sins of your spouse since God is our enabler and example

3. Sacrifice your rights in prayer

- Forgiveness places the burden of reconciliation on the one who sustains the loss (Matt 5:23-25). Forgiveness is a price we pay for our freedom.
- Jesus is also our example here cf., "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

- Forgiveness comes only when our entire being, words, tones, experience and gestures seek the healing of the other
4. Tell your spouse the sin
 - Set the stage
 - Say what the sin is. Explain the sin, its consequences to you and to the marriage
 - Gentle people shrink from saying and angry people are prone to exaggerate (p. 101)
 - The sin is only explained here with kindness, courtesy, grace and humility
 - Say you have forgiven him/her
 5. Follow words with actions
 - Bring out the ring, the robe, the shoes and the party (Prodigal Son Lu 15)
 - Wash the feet of those who deny and betray you (Jesus and Peter, Jn 13)
 6. Preserve the goodness (advantage) gained in forgiveness
 - The event of forgiveness is not yet complete until we agree upon a covenant, or renew a covenant (p.101)
 - Define your future behaviour
 - You are now wiser because of the incident(s)
 - Talk about persistent sins without shame or blame
 - Determine how to signal each other that the weakness is surfacing - the sin is rearing its ugly head
 - Plan to diffuse anger before it becomes uncontrollable. Consider temperament, needs and resources
 - The covenant should deal with commitment, signals, reactions and affirmations
 - Forgiveness is the road to growth, maturation and development. It is the path to a healthy and vibrant relationship.

Conclusion:

We need to learn to practice the grace of forgiving daily - both giving it and receiving it. We all need it. If we don't need it now, we will later. Our forgiveness is contingent upon our forgiving others. We need to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us (Col 3:12-13; Eph 4:32). Unless we forgive others, our Heavenly Father will not forgive us (Matt 6:14-15)