

Forgiveness

Forgiveness

The Key to Lasting Joy

ROLAND & GAYLE TAYLOR



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Authors' Note



WHY WOULD A couple of senior citizens feel compelled to write a book about forgiveness? Because over the years we've seen devastation in lives when individuals reject God's forgiveness and refuse to forgive each other. By contrast, we've seen the miraculous transformation that forgiveness brings. Life is all about forgiveness—receiving God's forgiveness and extending it to others.

Our insights come from our perspectives as a minister and a teacher in addition to our roles as parents and grandparents. We write about what we've heard, seen, and experienced in our own family, our church family, and in the life journeys of our friends as well as those we've only read about.

The motivation for writing this book is our desire to help people experience God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ and learn to forgive.

If you haven't received God's gift of forgiveness through Christ, we invite you to do that now. If you don't know how you can be sure God has forgiven you, please turn to the end of this book and read "How You Can Experience God's Forgiveness."

Forgiveness: The Key to Lasting Joy

The Christian's mission is to tell people that God loves them and wants to forgive their sins. Life, now and eternal, is all about forgiveness. Receiving forgiveness and extending it to others is the key to lasting joy.

—Roland and Gayle Taylor

Forgiveness: The Key to Happiness in Marriage



UNTIL DEATH US *do part.*
Has it ever crossed your mind that your marriage is killing you and you want out? You may think your marriage isn't *that* bad, but you realize it isn't as good as it once was.

Peter Marshall, two-term chaplain of the U.S. Senate, called marriage “the halls of highest human happiness.” Forgiveness is the key to that happiness we all seek in marriage.

When a man and a woman come together and promise before God that they will love, honor, and cherish each other as long as they live, and they keep that promise, marriage truly does become their highest human happiness. Conversely, when two people break their promise to each other and to God, marriage can become the halls of highest human misery.

We know from Scripture that God blesses marriage. It is so important that the Bible compares it to God and His people and to Christ and His church. All who receive God's forgiveness through Christ are a part of the church, which is called the bride of Christ.

My husband and I have truly had “the halls of highest human happiness” marriage. God had special plans for Roland and me, as He does for all of us. It was by obedience to those divergent plans that our lives converged at Twentynine Palms, California.

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After I completed my BA degree, I enrolled at Whittier College for postgraduate studies, but two weeks later my dad asked me if I would come home and manage the ice cream parlor where I had worked from my early childhood. To love and honor my parents, and to follow what I felt was God's will for me, I went home.

It was a little lonely living in the homestead house by myself because when I was growing up there it had been bursting at the seams with six children. By this time, most of my friends had moved away, and my parents and my younger brother and sister had gone to Arizona for rest and recuperation. I didn't have time for a social life anyway because our business was open from eleven a.m. to eleven p.m., and after closing I often made ice cream until two a.m. Don't get me wrong. I may have been tired at times, but I knew I was in the place where God wanted me, and it really was a great experience to operate a successful business. I may not have been the foreign missionary I'd hoped to be, but I had been called to my own mission field behind the counter. I had great opportunities to share my faith with my customers.

I was in many weddings in college and I knew it had been said of me, "Always a bridesmaid, never a bride." I had romantic dreams of falling in love with Mr. Right, who of course would be a dedicated Christian. He might even be a Rev. Right, and we would serve the Lord together.

In the meantime, a young man of great character and talent had dedicated his life to serving the Lord. He was preparing for ministry at California Baptist Seminary. Roland put himself through the Bible Institute of Los Angeles and California Baptist College by selling Bibles, vacuums, and sewing machines from door to door. He continued as a door-to-door salesman throughout seminary. With work, and his desire to maintain the highest grade point average, he had very little time for dating. He knew that in God's good time he would find the girl God had kept just for him.

In his final year of seminary, Roland was assigned to assist in the preaching and teaching ministry at a church in Twentynine Palms. A boy in his Sunday school class told him about a Christian girl who would be a perfect match for him. It was inevitable that

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Roland would go to the popular ice cream parlor at Smith's Ranch, and it was there over a delicious ice cream soda that he met me, his future wife.

Roland and I were married in the Little Church of the Desert on May 5, 1956. The *Desert Trail* newspaper wrote:

The wedding of Gayle Smith and Rev. Roland Taylor was probably one of the greatest events in Twentynine Palms history. As a wedding it was a gorgeous display of the beauty and sanctity of the most sacred of all relationships. It was one of those weddings where "God joined together," and where dignity and plain common sense dominated; no man will ever "put it asunder."



If you are single and think it's time to get married, but the right one hasn't burst onto your matrimonial screen, don't get impatient and settle for Mister or Miss Wrong. Wait and continue to pray for the one God has for you in His perfect timing. Many people get ahead of God and come to the point in life where they say, "If I'd only waited. If only I hadn't married...." You don't want that to happen to you. God's timing is perfect.

One of our greatest joys is that our children have wonderful spouses to whom they have remained happily married. Our older son has celebrated twenty-six wedding anniversaries, our second son, twenty-five, and our daughter, fifteen. Each anniversary is a celebration of God's goodness in bringing these special couples together. Roland officiated at the wedding of each of our children.

Long before each child met the one he or she would marry, Roland and I prayed that God would keep them and their future life's mate committed to Christ and to following His standards. We asked God to keep each of them for the person of His choosing.

Our conviction was that whom our children married was of far greater importance than even the choice of their life's career, as significant as that is. The first most important decision in life is to commit to follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The second most important decision is the choice of whom you will marry.

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Roland and I both knew that we could only marry someone who was a Christian. Scripture tells us: “Don’t team up with those who are unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14 NLT). There is no closer team than that of husband and wife.

As a young man, Roland traveled as a soloist with a well-known evangelist. This wise man gave him many pearls of good advice. Chaplain Anderson said, “Never date a girl you know you wouldn’t want to marry.” Following that admonition prevented him a lot of hard feelings and potential misery, to say nothing of the financial drain it saved on his limited resources.

Our emphasis in this book is primarily on forgiveness, not marriage counseling; however, a lot less forgiveness will be needed and there will be fewer painful arguments for which forgiveness is required if you marry the right person. This doesn’t mean your mate will be perfect, and certainly, you won’t be either. Love doesn’t mean you’ll never have to say, “I’m sorry.” But in all probability you’ll have to say it less often if you and your spouse have compatible goals and convictions. The question comes to us: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3 KJV).

There are certain important issues that need to be agreed upon before a couple becomes too serious about spending their life together. Faith and family should be prominent in planning for a future as husband and wife. How many children you hope to have, where you would choose to live, and the way you view finances should be compatible. You certainly will want to agree on your choice of a church home.

When Roland and I became engaged, we talked and planned for our own Christian home. We wanted to have children and train them in the love and fear of God. We knew we would read the Word together. We would give a tithe of our income to the Lord, and we would serve Him with gladness.

There are many misunderstandings that can be avoided if agreement is reached on these big issues of life before marriage. Of course you will have disagreements—you can’t resolve every potential problem before it arises. You are individuals with many years of differing interests. The kind of music you enjoy, the kind

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of food you prefer, and the sports you like may not be the same. Your differences may be part of the reason you were attracted to each other.

When major purchases you make or vacation destinations become an issue, try to be considerate of the other person's reasons for an expressed preference. You can come to an agreement, but it often will require that each of you gives a little or sometimes gives a lot. Let's remember the good advice, "... in honor giving preference to one another" (Rom. 12:10). You'll be surprised how happy it will make you to give in to the preferences of the one you love.

When Roland and I moved into a new home after we retired, he let me have free rein over decorating the house. He didn't quibble over cost (of course I'm very thrifty, and he appreciates that fact). He knew he would have input because I always value his opinion and approval.

When it came to landscaping our backyard, Roland wanted a cascading fountain. I thought the bank where it was to be installed was too steep and that a fountain would require too much upkeep. I saw the problems; Roland saw the beauty. Without making a big fuss, I deferred to his wishes. We now have a lovely fountain, which is a source of continuing pleasure as we listen to the music of the splashing water and watch the hummingbirds drink and bathe. I often thank Roland for his good-natured stubbornness. The fountain has added a wonderful touch to the enjoyment of our home.

The words came to me again, "Be kindly affectionate one to another with brotherly [wifely] love, in honor giving preference to one another" (Rom. 12:10).



We remember our wedding as a harmonious occasion. The groom's brother arrived a little late and postponed the ceremony a few minutes. An uncle on the bride's side of the family became overly zealous with the rice and we found it in our gifts and clothing for months, but nothing could tarnish the luster of our special day.

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As pastor of a youthful congregation, Roland performed lots of weddings. Congregations often fall into one of two categories: elderly or youthful. The first requires many funerals, and the second is blessed with many weddings. Christ's love and the love of bride and groom for each other and for the Lord were preeminent in each ceremony Roland conducted.

Your minister may have said something like the following in your wedding ceremony:

The ring is made of gold, that metal which is least tarnished of all metals. It is circular in shape, indicating that it has no ending, signifying the permanence of the vows that are sincerely made. The ring is given in token and in pledge of your constant affection and abiding love.

The ring's message is the permanence of the marriage covenant. We are to remain true to the promise made to God and to our mate.

Not all weddings retain the occasion's solemnity. Roland's first wedding was made memorable by the bride's uncontrolled hysterical laughter. This lovely girl continued to laugh throughout the entire ceremony. Despite her hilarity, she was able to affirm her love for her groom, and to Roland's relief the service came to a successful conclusion. To the best of our knowledge the couple has remained faithful to each other.

Roland has always quoted 1 Corinthians 13 in his wedding ceremonies. This beautiful treatise on love is very meaningful in the King James Version of the Bible, but it is also helpful when read from a modern translation such as the New Living Translation:

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing. If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing. Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous

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or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever! Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture! But when full understanding comes, these partial things will become useless. When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely. Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

—1 Corinthians 13:1–13 (NLT)

Although this entire chapter in 1 Corinthians is of great value and can speak to our hearts without interpretation, let's focus on what love is and then make the contrast to what love is not.

What love is:

- Love is patient.
- Love is kind.
- Love never gives up.
- Love never loses faith.
- Love is always hopeful.
- Love rejoices whenever the truth wins out.
- Love will last forever.

What love is not:

- Love is not jealous.
- Love is not boastful.
- Love is not proud.

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- Love is not rude.
- Love does not demand its own way.
- Love is not irritable.
- Love keeps no record of when it has been wronged.
- Love is never glad about injustice.

Love looks for the good. It requires that we express appreciation to God and to our spouse. We should have thanksgiving in our hearts and on our lips every day. It's too easy to see others' faults and the problems around us if we don't realize that the eyes of love look for the good in people and circumstances.

When I look at my home I can see dusting to be done, windows to be washed, and showers to be scrubbed, or I can see a cozy hideaway with books, pictures, and comfortable furniture. It's all in how I choose to look at it. I like to say that I don't wear my glasses to clean house because I see too much dust.

When I walk in my yard I can see beautiful flowers or I can see ugly weeds. The flowers are there and the weeds are there. What do I look for? Unless I'm looking for a good weed-pulling workout, I choose to focus on the flowers.

I don't want to wear my critical glasses when I look at my husband, and I certainly don't want him to wear his when he looks at me. I'm sure I look much more attractive in candlelight or moonlight than in a spotlight or magnifying glasses.

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.

—Philippians 4:8 NASB



Kindness is a vital key to a lasting marriage. Kindness is the key to keeping your husband. Kindness is the key to keeping your wife. Let's spend some time focusing on kindness before we address the forgiveness needed when you fail to be kind.

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I have at various times felt the urge to add my drop in the bucket to the volume of marital advice that is flooding today's market. Unfortunately, much that is being written is not to anoint marriage with the oil of kindness but rather to rub it with the crude oil of self-gratification.

There's a simple little key hidden away in Proverbs 31:26 that can unlock the door to your husband's heart, ladies. It is the key of kindness. In the Living Bible, it reads, "Kindness is the rule for everything she says." When kindness becomes the rule or law for everything we say, our marriage will be transformed.

My mother, and probably yours too, always said, "Think before you speak" and "if you can't say something good about a person, don't say anything at all." Most of us never stop to think that maybe this includes what we say to or about our spouse.

The book of Proverbs reminds us that "it is better to live in the corner of the roof than in a house shared with a contentious woman" (25:24 NASB), "it is better to live in a desert land, than with a contentious and vexing woman" (21:19 NASB), and "better is a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of feasting with strife" (17:1 NASB).

These verses all seem to tell us that regardless of where you live or what you eat, you won't be happy without kindness in your home.

We need a kindness key. When it is misplaced, we should search diligently until we recover it. Then remember: a sincere apology with a request for forgiveness will restore harmony in the home. We should try to keep our kindness key with us at all times. When we lose it we need to ask forgiveness.

Husbands also need to remember that kindness is the key to a happy home. Your kind, thoughtful comments to your wife might even make her a better cook and housekeeper. They could also motivate her to become more glamorous and affectionate. You can't lose. Kindness brings very positive results and it goes a long way in promoting a happy marriage.

Husbands and wives, let's pray the prayer in Psalm 141:3 (KJV): "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips."

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We need to think before we speak. Remember that “a gentle answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger” (Prov. 15:1 NLT). How obvious it is that kind, soft words calm anger. We are admonished to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32 NASB).

After we retired, we took a trip to China. There were twenty-eight people in our tour group from all over the United States. Although we had been married for more than forty years, some of our traveling companions were convinced we were newlyweds. We may have held hands and chosen to sit with each other, but we certainly were not overly affectionate in public. In trying to analyze why they thought we were recently married, we came up with only one logical answer: we treated each other with kindness and respect.

We’ve noticed that some couples belittle each other (often unintentionally). Sometimes a spouse tells a joke at the other’s expense. This often comes off as ridicule, causing hurt feelings, resentment, and discouragement. We need to build up each other’s sense of worth and self-esteem, not tear it down.

We cringe every time we hear a radio commercial featuring a prominent talk show host in our area. In promoting a hair restoration system, he says his wife has used this product to keep her hair beautiful. He says, “She has beautiful hair, but everybody knows the rest of her is a mess.” We know this is meant to be a joke, but it’s a prime example of a hurtful joke.

I don’t know any wives who take kindly to their husbands’ jokes about their hair, weight, cooking, or housekeeping. Roland doesn’t know any husbands who appreciate their wives joking about their weight, strength, or golf scores either.

It doesn’t make one appear smart or clever to tell a joke at his or her mate’s expense. Instead, it makes them seem mean and inconsiderate of the other’s feelings. Inconsiderate teasing often requires an apology to repair the damage caused by thoughtless and hurtful humor.



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And now we come to the subject of nagging, on which I am an expert. Sometimes I feel a little grouchy for no reason. Maybe I hear something on the news or experience a little annoyance, and my usual positive thinking becomes negative and I turn into a nagging wife. When I feel a bit grumpy and want to take it out on my husband, this verse hits me on the head: “It is better to live alone in the corner of an attic than with a contentious wife in a lovely home” (Prov. 21:9 NLT).

I always like to keep our home as beautiful as finances will permit, but the beauty I enjoy becomes unattractive even to me when an ugly atmosphere of strife creeps in. I tell myself to snap out of it, and I ask God to give me a thankful heart.

The verse, “A nagging wife annoys like a constant dripping” (Prov. 19:13 NLT) speaks loudly to me because nagging is one area where I sometimes exceed the bounds of a loving wife and become that constant dripping. At such times I don’t think Roland wants to hear me say, “I love you.” I think he’d much rather hear me say, “I’m sorry,” or say nothing at all.

Is there any excuse for nagging? I like to think there are two areas in which nagging is a virtue because they are both prompted by love. I am a backseat driver; my mother was, and I am. I backseat drive because I love my husband and I don’t want to get us killed. Another excuse is that we live in Southern California and drive the freeways.

The second thing I nag about (out of love, of course) is what my husband eats. I’m especially judgmental when we go out for breakfast and he orders bacon. Once again, my motive is pure because it comes from my love for him. I want him to eat healthfully and live a long life. But I think he’d gladly give up a year or two of life if I’d be quiet and let him enjoy his bacon! We’ve solved this problem—we just don’t go out to breakfast anymore.



As you look at the wedding ring on your finger, you are reminded of that special day when you exchanged rings with the one you

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married. Although your ring may be very beautiful and valuable, its real value is not its purchase price; rather, it is the symbolic meaning of the golden band you wear. The ring's message is the permanence of the promises you made on your wedding day. You pledged to be true to each other in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow.

Marriage is a wonderful relationship that God has ordained for humankind's happiness. It is a joyful experience to be married to the right person, but there will be times of sickness and sorrow when matrimony's ties are tested. During these difficult times, couples need to cling closely to each other and to God.

There can also be danger in good times. Sometimes affluence and success pose a greater challenge to a marriage than hard times do, because when we feel too self-sufficient we often fail to rely on God and each other.

There may come a time when your emotional attraction to each other is diminished. One partner can become disillusioned and desire to return to the freedom of single life. He or she may be tempted to disregard your marriage vows. It is at such times that couples should read a good book dealing with the subject of faithfulness in marriage, seek counseling, or attend a marriage enrichment seminar. Emotions may fluctuate, but the commitment you made to God cannot be subject to your feelings.

We have known and counseled couples that were at the very brink of divorce. Sometimes the husband and sometimes the wife would say, "I just don't love [her/him] anymore." When they were willing to be reminded of the promises they had made to God and to each other, some of them chose to work to save their marriage. With God's help and with prayerful resolve, the seemingly impossible becomes possible. We've known many couples who have gone through contentious times but have chosen to work out their differences and have stayed together.

Marriage is like a tree buffeted by the wind. It can sink down deep roots and become stronger because of the tempest. When the quarrels of the past are forgiven and there is a mutual desire for reconciliation, love can grow and flourish again.

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God honors those who keep their promises and remain married, even when well-meaning friends or divorce lawyers suggest an “easy” way out. He rewards a faithful couple with a loving and happy marriage that can last a lifetime.

Do you feel you and your spouse are drifting apart? If so, you may be trying to ignore that nagging thought, but little things keep you wondering if your love is a thing of the past. Take action—don’t let your love wither and die like some neglected vine. Love needs to be cultivated and nourished. Maybe it’s time to review what love is and what love is not. Read, study, pray, and obey the message found in the “love chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13.

Perhaps you’ve heard of best-selling author Janette Oke’s book *Love Comes Softly*, which was also made into a Hallmark film. Love does come softly sometimes, and it also returns softly to a broken relationship when there is forgiveness.

If your marriage hasn’t been the “halls of highest human happiness” experience, it can be, starting today. It doesn’t matter if you’ve been married one year or fifty years. Ask for forgiveness and begin again. It all starts with you. You’ll be amazed at how your partner will respond. A long and happy married life is all about forgiveness.



A delightful elderly couple came for lunch every week to Carol’s Kitchen, where we serve lunch to disadvantaged people. They were absent for a few weeks and then their granddaughter brought her grandmother, but the grandfather was missing.

I asked, “Where’s your husband?”

She replied, “He fell and broke his hip, and he’s in a nursing home.”

Weeks passed before both of them finally came back to lunch. They were radiantly happy, together again, after an unfortunate separation. The bride of seventy-two years patted her groom’s hand and said, “He’s the best man there is.”

There’s lots of good advice to be gained from couples that have lived happily together for many years. The book *Married for Life*:

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Secrets from Those Married 50 Years or More by Bill Morelan contains what he calls “inspiration from those married fifty years or more.”

The most frequent tidbit of advice seasoned married couples share is, “Don’t let the sun go down on your anger.” That means you shouldn’t go to bed angry or even leave your home angry. Ask for forgiveness, kiss, and make up. You’ll have a more peaceful night’s sleep or a better day at work.

I’ve known many thoughtful, caring people, especially my mother, but I’ve never known anyone who didn’t need to apologize to someone at some time in his or her life. It doesn’t take an intentional act of meanness or cruelty to hurt someone. Neglect or lack of attention can wound. Never having to say, “I’m sorry” is a myth. Never saying, “I’m sorry” is a mistake—a very big mistake.

We often hurt those we love the most. A careless word, an insensitive joke, or a sarcastic remark can hurt someone deeply. At such times love doesn’t mean we never have to say, “I’m sorry.” Real love can’t wait to say, “I’m sorry.” It is also true that real love can’t wait to accept an apology.

God wants us to ask for His forgiveness and He will freely give it. Our spouse wants to know that when he or she asks for forgiveness we will give it unconditionally. We might want to get historical and rehash old issues, but God doesn’t do that to us. When He forgives, He forgets. We should too.

We should enter into marriage with the heartset and mindset that it is a lifetime commitment, but every couple will experience times of testing. At such times a sincere apology and a recommitment to God and to each other becomes essential. When we do this, we will not need to ask for forgiveness as often because we will be sincerely putting God and our spouse first in our lives.

We’ve heard people say, “I’ll never forgive him/her for that.” It’s almost said with pride, as though there is virtue in such resolve. There are times when we just don’t feel like forgiving. We don’t want to apologize. We think that the situation will get better by itself. There are also times when we get a strange pleasure by letting the storm brew and sulking over our real or imaginary hurt. But God doesn’t view an unforgiving attitude as a virtue.

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Sometimes you may think that you're always the one who has to apologize—your spouse never apologizes. That may be true, but isn't it worth it to you to be the peacemaker? Remember: "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9 NASB). If you do your part by sincerely apologizing and even going the extra mile in trying to restore peace to your home, that's all you can do. Ask God to do the rest.

We all want security: financial security, job security, and security in marriage. Gary Smalley has written many volumes containing wise marriage counseling. In his book *I Promise: How 5 Commitments Determine the Destiny of Your Marriage*, he points to security as the most important ingredient in a couple's relationship.

So which comes first: security or forgiveness? There will be no security if there is no forgiveness. Part of being secure is the assurance that you can ask for forgiveness when you fail and know that God and your partner will forgive you. Even in a couple's dating and engagement days there are times when asking for forgiveness is necessary.

When you find something very annoying about your spouse, take a look at yourself. It is most likely you have a corresponding problem with your own behavior and attitude. "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's [husband's or wife's] eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?" (Matt. 7:3-4 NASB). Watch that judgmental attitude!

Basically we are all self-centered and self-righteous. We make excuses for our own failings (if we even admit we have any) and we accuse our partner. It's so easy to see someone else's faults and be blind to our own. Correcting others' faults is not our responsibility. Correcting our own faults and becoming more Christlike is what God requires of us.

Most often if we change our own offensive behavior it will lead to a corresponding change in our spouse. Paul admonishes us to "get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior" (Eph. 4:31 NLT). We need

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to delete these attitudes just as we delete any undesirable material that appears on our computer screen.

But it isn't enough just to get rid of the undesirable aspects of our lives. We also need to emphasize the positive virtues. In the words of an old popular song, "You've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative; and latch on to the affirmative; don't mess with Mr. In-between." Paul puts it this way: "Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32 NLT).



The book *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale has had a big influence on my life. There is power in positive thinking—power to change attitudes and relationships as we make the choice to think the best about people. Positive thinking leads to positive living.

The power of positive living is demonstrated in kindness. Kindness changes people. It changes relationships and attitudes. Kindness between a husband and wife speaks louder than outward displays of affection. Kindness speaks even louder than the words, "I love you."

The power of forgiveness is even stronger than our good thoughts and actions are. Forgiveness can pick up the broken pieces of life when we fail to think and live as we know we should. Forgiveness can rebuild homes, hearts, and dreams.

It's obvious that major issues need to be forgiven and forgotten, but sometimes a minor incident that should have been resolved the day it happened lasts a lifetime. We heard of one well-meaning new husband who brought home a bouquet of carnations for his wife. Instead of accepting them graciously, she said, "Thank you, but I like roses better."

Her husband was hurt and angry and said, "I'll never bring you flowers again."

That was some twenty years ago, and he has never presented her another bouquet.

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When kindness becomes the casualty of anger, we need the power of forgiveness. When your spouse hurts your feelings, count to ten, breathe a prayer, and remember that “a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1 NASB).

When we forgive and we sense we are forgiven, the sun is brighter, the sky is bluer, and the grass is greener. God puts a song in our hearts. Extending and receiving forgiveness lightens our steps and boosts our spirits. Being forgiven and receiving forgiveness lifts a weight (like losing a hundred pounds) and gives us new energy for life.



Many people waste too much time and energy lamenting over what they have or haven't done. They blame themselves for investments they've made or failed to make. Sometimes they go so far as to bemoan, for example, that “great-grandfather sold his property at Hollywood and Vine.” They are convinced they would be rich if he only had used better judgment.

Those people are like the football player who berates himself for years because he missed a field goal that would have given his team a victory. Whether a professional athlete, a child playing Little League baseball, or a senior citizen on the golf course, we shouldn't let our successes or failures determine how we feel about ourselves. We usually learn more from our failures than from our successes anyway.

Michael Jordan, considered one of the greatest basketball players of all time, lost three hundred games and missed twenty-six times when he was given the ball to make the game-winning shot. Jordan attributes his success to how he used his failures as motivation to succeed.

In any avenue of life we are bound to make blunders. Our mistakes can have a devastating effect on our life or our failures can become stepping-stones to success. What should we do when we are depressed over our failures? Sometimes we need to ask God to forgive us. We may need to seek forgiveness from another person.

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However, it is also important for us to learn to forgive ourselves. Failure to forgive ourselves is in reality a denial of the completeness of the forgiveness we have asked God to grant.

We've all read about or seen on TV stories of teenagers, or even adults, who have done something foolish and in their shame have seen no way out but suicide. How tragic that they didn't know that the way forward was to receive God's forgiveness as the reason to forgive themselves.

The apostle Paul could have spent his life regretting his atrocities against the followers of Christ when he was the early church's chief persecutor, but he found a way to overcome: "Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God is calling us up to Heaven because of what Christ Jesus did for us" (Phil. 3:13 TLB).

God has forgiven me and I've forgiven myself, but I must remember that I'm a work in progress. I will fail again, but God isn't finished with me yet. With God's help, I choose—for my own well-being and happiness, and for the well-being of those around me—to accept Christ's forgiveness, forgive myself, forget the past, and move forward.

A few years ago I was reminded of the need to forgive myself. It was our son and daughter-in-law's twentieth wedding anniversary and we were entrusted with the care of our dear granddaughter they adopted from Uganda.

Reluctant to leave their daughter for a short trip, the conscientious new parents prepared in detail for her every need and desire. Each morning at breakfast, Sarah would find a love note from her parents with clues for a treasure hunt. She searched the house until she was rewarded with a special treat or toy.

One day Sarah bubbled with excitement because she was going to go swimming at her day camp. We hurried to finish breakfast and help Sarah with her treasure map. In no time she found a little chest described in her note. She lifted the lid and took out a ring with a big jewel that looked like a real diamond. With a squeal of delight and a big smile, she put it on her finger and danced around the house.

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We grabbed her backpack and jumped in the car, hoping to arrive at church in time for her to catch the bus for her ride to day camp.

That afternoon when she got off the bus, Sarah wasn't quite her exuberant self. She explained that when she was swimming, her ring had fallen off her finger and sunk to the bottom of the lake. She said she and her friend kept diving to find it, but it was lost in the mud.

We tried to comfort her and told her it wasn't her fault. We assured her that her mom and dad could buy her another ring. I thought if I knew where I could find a dollar store, I would replace it myself.

That night I had a frightful thought that maybe, just maybe, the ring Sarah found in the jewelry box wasn't a fake diamond. Maybe it was the beautiful solitaire engagement ring our son had given his bride-to-be some twenty years ago. I tried to put the ridiculous thought out of my mind.

When our son and daughter-in-law returned from their anniversary trip, they were greeted by their healthy, happy girl who was delighted to see them and by her tired, but proud, grandparents who felt they had done an admirable job of babysitting.

With trepidation I broached the story of the ring. To my horror I found that indeed I had not known the difference between a little girl's toy ring and an expensive diamond made priceless by its sentimental value. I had let my granddaughter swim with her mother's diamond on her finger.

Our children never spoke to me of their disappointment over my ignorance. They never showed any anger or shed any tears over the loss of the ring. Their concern was to comfort and encourage me. They forgave me immediately. It took a little longer for me to forgive myself.

My children taught me a lesson on forgiveness. Now I understand that even a cherished and valuable diamond engagement ring is, after all, only a trinket in time.

Whether you're lamenting over a lost trinket or even a lost treasure, forgive yourself and move forward. You'll be miserable

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and you will make those around you miserable if you don't forgive yourself. It isn't pleasant to live with someone who continues to be tortured by past mistakes.



In today's world it seems impossible to write about marriage without referring to the subject of divorce. The Bible discourages divorce and in some cases prohibits it. However, God meets us where we are and offers forgiveness and new life.

There are countless famous people whose stories of infidelity have been emblazoned across the TV screen. We are saddened when we hear that those whom we have admired are involved in scandalous affairs. We are sorry for the embarrassment and hurt they've caused their families. We are also concerned about the degrading influence their behavior and public disgrace have on society.

We've all known friends or family members whose seemingly happy homes have been blindsided by an unfaithful spouse. Not only is the couple's life shattered, but there are also serious consequences in their children's lives for years to come.

Many of the offenses that culminate in divorce seem outside the possibility of forgiveness. In cases of unfaithfulness to the marriage vows, there is so much hurt, anger, and distrust that the partner who is wronged feels it is impossible to forgive. God doesn't wink at infidelity, but He does forgive the truly repentant sinner.

David, who was a man after God's own heart, committed the sin of adultery and tried to hide it with the sin of murder. He knew that all sin is sin against God. When the prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin, he repented and confessed his sin to God. When David experienced God's forgiveness, he wrote: "Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!" (Ps. 32:1-2 NLT).

Regardless of the magnitude of the moral infraction of unfaithfulness, no situation is ever made better by withholding forgiveness. The hurt spouse doesn't deny the other's wrongdoing by forgiving.

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In addition to spurring personal healing, forgiveness must be offered for the children's sake. Many times children end up taking the adult's place and being the arbitrators and peacemakers between their parents. It isn't fair for children to be caught in the middle of visitation and custody battles.

If you are the injured party in a bitter divorce and are disillusioned with your mate, or if you are overwhelmed with your own guilt over the breakup of your marriage, take your hurt to God. Ask for His forgiveness and pray sincerely that He will help you to forgive your estranged spouse or forgive yourself. Then, as difficult as it may be, offer forgiveness and/or let him or her know that you hope forgiveness will be offered to you. When you accept God's forgiveness, and forgive yourself, you've done all you can do. It's a brand-new day and you have a new life to live.

Many divorces are the result of insignificant disagreements that are allowed to fester and grow from the proverbial molehill into a mountain that becomes insurmountable. Couples need to settle their disputes promptly with a sincere apology and forgiveness. Forgiveness is the key to a lasting marriage.



Our fifty-fourth wedding anniversary was the most turbulent day of our long and happy marriage. We're glad to report that the disturbance wasn't between us, but with the Pacific Ocean's angry winds and waves.

We were celebrating on a four-day cruise from San Diego to Vancouver when a fierce storm whipped the waves into billowing whitecaps. The groom enjoyed a lavish anniversary dinner while his bride languished in their cabin with seasickness. When the storm passed, the sunrise seemed more brilliant and the sea more placid than ever before.

This is true in a storm on the ocean or a storm in a marriage. When the tempest has passed and calm takes the place of turmoil, we have a new appreciation for the blessings of life. What does it mean to be married fifty-four years? Certainly it means we're old.

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We also like to think it means we've experienced a lot of life and hopefully learned a little from life's lessons along the way. We've had a full and happy life. It isn't because we've done everything right—far from it.

We believe our marriage has been happy because we both received God's forgiveness through Christ in our youth and we've learned to forgive each other. Life has been and continues to be all about forgiveness.

Your Turn

1. How do my spouse and I usually handle situations where we ought to apologize?
2. What are some tangible things I can do to help restore trust and harmony in my marriage?
3. Am I willing to forgive past grievances and trust God to help me forget them?