

# Couple Forgiveness

By Jim Merhaut



Giving and receiving forgiveness in a marriage is a real need, not a luxury. Try the method in this activity to unlock the graces of forgiveness and reconciliation.

## For

Adult/Couple

## Season

Summer

## Needed

Copy of this activity for each person.

30 minutes devoted to meaningful conversation

## Activity Plan

*Note:* It is not recommended that you engage in this activity if your marriage is in crisis. Seek counseling or marriage coaching first to set the right tone in your marriage for exploring and celebrating forgiveness and reconciliation.

1. Before you meet together, take time to read through this activity individually, including the following introductory paragraphs:

Forgiving is a core Christian practice, and it is much more than saying "I'm sorry." Forgiveness is one of the reasons Jesus came to earth—to forgive our sins and to reconcile us with God and with each other. Jesus forgave and reconciled through his words and his actions.

While forgiveness can be offered unconditionally, reconciliation doesn't always follow. For example, if a wife is unfaithful, her husband may forgive her. If she persists in a pattern of unfaithfulness, her husband may persist in forgiveness, but her ongoing unfaithful behavior may block the possibility of reconciliation, and they will likely separate. Likewise, if a husband physically abuses his wife, she may forgive him. If he continues to abuse her, she may continue to offer forgiveness, but his ongoing abusive behavior may block the possibility of reconciliation, and they will likely separate. Forgiveness is possible even without reconciliation, but ideally we want both forgiveness and reconciliation. Forgiveness only depends upon the open heart of one partner; reconciliation requires the open heart of both partners and the determination and skill to change behaviors.

Prepare for this activity by searching your soul for an openness to name your sin and the courage to address it with specific action steps.

2. Sit together and say this prayer aloud to begin:

*God, forgive us our sins as we forgive each other, and give us courage to be penitent and to reconcile with each other and with you. Amen.*

3. Read the following paragraphs aloud:

We do things consciously and unconsciously that hurt our spouses. It happens on a regular basis, but it is possible to reduce the frequency of hurtful behavior, as well as the impact, when we intentionally work on forgiveness and reconciliation.



Our spouse knows and experiences the pain of our sin more clearly than we know it. We are often blind to our sin and surprised when our spouse is upset by something we say or do. Spouses need to help each other name and address transgressions in marriage. We usually do this automatically for each other, and it's not always pretty. Having and implementing an ongoing forgiveness practice will make this part of our marriage much more enjoyable. We can practice giving and receiving forgiveness and experiencing the blessing of reconciliation.

4. Try this method:

- Have one person begin. Ask your spouse to help you name one of your sins.
  - Don't assume that you know what you did or said that hurt your spouse.
  - Give your spouse the freedom to tell you what you did or said that was hurtful.
  - Be prepared to be surprised and be open to the opportunity to learn and grow.
- Ask questions to clarify the details of what exactly hurt your spouse.
  - It is often difficult for your spouse to tell you what hurts.
  - It is important for you to take responsibility to dig for detail. Do this in a way that expresses a genuine desire for self-knowledge, believing that this knowledge will help set you free from your sin. The tone of your inquiry should send a clear message that your spouse is doing a service for you by telling you exactly what you did or said that was painful.
- Apologize.
  - Be specific in your apology so that your spouse knows that you understand completely what you did or said that was hurtful. Say, "I'm sorry for saying \_\_\_\_\_" or "I'm sorry for doing \_\_\_\_\_."
- Ask for guidance that will lead to reconciliation.
  - Ask your spouse how you can change your behavior so that this doesn't happen again. What does your spouse need you to do differently?
  - Determine how your spouse can hold you accountable for your new behavior.
  - Assure your spouse that you understand what is necessary for reconciliation by saying out loud what you intend to do differently.
- When one of you has completed these steps, switch roles so that both of you have asked for and received forgiveness. This should always be a two-part process.

5. Celebrate your movement to reconciliation with an expression of affection.

