

THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS

by Karen Holford



“A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers!”

Sarah sat on her bed, hugged a quilt around her shoulders, and cried. Her sobs were loud and painful, and her tears were hot. Some tears were angry and some were sad, and she hurt so much she didn't know what to do. Today was their wedding anniversary, and she'd taken the day off work. They were going to hike around a mountain lake and stop for dinner in their favorite restaurant.

Then Luke received a call from Jason. “Hey, Pastor Luke! My truck's broken down, and I need help getting to a roofing job. I promised to finish it by this afternoon. I'm already late! I'll lose my contracts if I can't complete this one in time!”

“Don't worry, Jason! I'll bring my truck over right away and I'll stay and give you a hand so you get it done on time!”

Sarah stared at Luke, silenced by his complete lack of consideration. “Well, of course I have to help him! He's struggling to get his business going! It's much more important than having a nice day off. Just call the restaurant and cancel the table, and I'll see you later.”

Sarah wiped her tears with the edge of the quilt. This wasn't the first time Luke had let her down badly. How was she ever going to forgive him?

THE VIEW FROM HERE

One of the obstacles to working through our hurt and forgiveness is that we often limit our view of the situation to our own perspective. If we've hurt someone, we can become self-defensive. And if we've been hurt, we can be absorbed in our own pain.

THE FOUR PLACES

There are four places we need to go and reflect before we can thoughtfully ask for forgiveness—or offer it to others:

Forgiveness place #1: The heart of God

Before we can understand how to respond to a painful situation we need to spend time alone with God. We need to be still and listen to His love for us and our spouse.

If you're the “hurter” you need to remember how much God loves you and is willing to forgive you. You also need to understand that God hurts because your spouse hurts, and you caused that hurt. This is a vital part of the process because it helps you to understand the spiritual significance of your actions. Jesus died so that you could be forgiven for the hurt you caused your loved one. Don't rush

through this place on the forgiveness journey. It's the most important one because this is where you face the truth about your actions.

If you've been hurt, you need to remember how much God loves you, and how sad He is that you're hurting. You also need to see that God loves your spouse too, and He wants to use this experience to help you both understand more about His love and forgiveness.

Forgiveness place #2: The other person's shoes

It's important for each of you to understand what the other person is experiencing.

If you're the "hurter" you need to understand how much your actions have hurt and affected your spouse so you can fathom the depth of the forgiveness you need. This will help you to avoid repeating the same mistake.

If you've been hurt, it's helpful to wonder why your spouse made the mistake so you can pray for them in a focused way. Does Luke need help exploring his priorities? Does he help others because he needs to feel valued? Does he need to understand that he may be hiding in his work to avoid closeness in his marriage?

Forgiveness place #3: The relationship

Each of you needs to ask yourself what your relationship most needs from you to help it heal. If you're not sure what to do or say, pray for wisdom and ask, "Will this help our relationship, or will it cause more pain?"

Forgiveness place #4: The future

This is often a place we forget to explore when we're working out how to help our hurting relationship. Think about your hopes for your marriage and the commitment you've made to cherish each other. What do you both need to do now to protect your relationship from future hurts? What plans can you make to help your marriage grow stronger and closer?



If you're the "hurter," what decisions can you make to ensure you don't hurt your loved one in the same way again?

If you're the hurt person, how can you respond to your spouse in a way that will help you to grow closer and not damage your future relationship?

CARE-FUL CONVERSATIONS

Care-ful conversations are calm, kind, clear, and hopeful.

After spending prayerful time in the four places of forgiveness, Sarah could say, "When you chose to help Jason rather than spend our anniversary with me, I was very sad and hurt because it felt as if I wasn't very important to you. I felt lonely, abandoned, and disappointed. I need to know you value our relationship. Next time please could you stop and ask me first before making choices that affect me? I am also wondering how we can take care of our own relationship by making it more of a special priority in our lives."

Luke could say, "I am so sorry Sarah. I realize that I hurt you and God very much when I chose to help Jason rather than spend the day with you. I need to understand just how much my ministry choices hurt you at times. I was wrong. Please forgive me. What can I do differently in the future to show you how special you are to me?"

Some things are very hard to forgive, such as adultery, domestic violence, abuse, continuous neglect, betrayal, or being seriously shamed, bullied, or ridiculed. When we cause such deep wounds, we can expect healing to take a long time. If someone tripped you and broke your leg, you might forgive the person immediately, but the fracture would still need six weeks to mend.

Forgiveness is also like a journey. It may take a while to arrive at the destination, but as long as we're on the forgiveness road we're moving in the right direction. It's not kind or respectful to expect immediate forgiveness for a serious offense.

Hurts, resentments, and grudges fracture the oneness that God wants us to experience in marriage. Forgiveness binds the relationship together again, like a plaster cast, so that our hurting hearts can be healed and become stronger than ever before.



KAREN HOLFORD lives in Scotland where her husband, Bernie, is the mission president and pastor of the Crieff SDA Church. Even after 28 years of marriage they are still learning about the profound mystery of forgiveness.