

UNDERSTANDING THE STAGES OF THE APOLOGIZING AND FORGIVING PROCESS

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Apologizing and forgiving is like:

1. Washing plates to prevent salmonella poisoning
2. Letting steam and moisture out of room
3. Replacing a divot after a golf shot

1. REGRET

Regret is mild remorse or a slight feeling of sorrow for doing or saying something wrong. When you experience regret, you may say to yourself, "I wish I could stop calling my spouse a jerk," or "I hope some day to stop belittling my spouse." Regret differs from repentance in that there is only sadness and no desire to make a commitment to cease the behavior. Nonetheless, regret is the initial feeling that leads to repentance.

2. REPENTANCE

Repentance involves three steps: a) identifying what you did or said that was wrong, b) having genuine sorrow for your wrong, and c) changing your behaviors so that with God's help you do not commit the same wrong again. Looking at the first example in the regret section, when truly repentant you understand that: a) it was wrong to call your spouse a jerk, b) you have sorrow in your heart over the verbal action, and c) you make a commitment to never call your spouse a jerk again.

3. APOLOGIZING

An apology can be expressed verbally or through a written note. At this stage, you not only **apologize (part one)** for committing the wrong with a statement like, "**I am sorry for calling you a jerk,**" but you also **seek forgiveness (part two)** by asking, "**Will you please forgive me?**"

4. FORGIVING

Please remember that forgiveness is a gift, a promise and a process, not a feeling. Similar to a pastor pronouncing the absolution, once your spouse has repented and apologized, you announce that they are **forgiven (part three)** with the words, "**I forgive you.**" If declaring these words is particularly difficult, then say, "**With God's help, I will work at forgiving you.**"

5. RECONCILIATION

This completes the process as you work on building a new, healthy marital relationship. After the apologizing and forgiving process, restoration of your marriage can occur as you live in the present and look to a more positive future as you together serve the Lord, others and one another.

REMEMBER THE WHOLE CIRCLE OF FORGIVENESS
REQUIRES ALL THREE PARTS!

RITUALS FOR GOD'S HEALING

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1. PRAYING FOR YOUR SPOUSE

For seven consecutive days affirm your forgiving attitude with a prayer of thanksgiving. On each of these days, either in the morning or evening, pray for your spouse's physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

2. FOLLOW JESUS' EXAMPLE ON THE CROSS

If one hurt was significantly painful to forgive, you may need to do a mental exercise for seven consecutive days. In a private, quiet place, imagine yourself at the foot of the cross and visualize Christ paying the price for the sins of the world and for your sins. Then, visualize your spouse apologizing for the wrong and seeking forgiveness for that wrong. Say aloud a minimum of five times, "I forgive you."

3. CUT UP THE PAPERS OR BURN THE FORGIVEN HURTS

Do not keep the "Identifying Hurts" sheets of paper. Forgiveness allows you to let go of the past. Either cut the sheets in very tiny pieces or burn the papers and bury the ashes around some flowers.

4. RENEWING YOUR VOWS

To bring closure to the process and affirm the marriage healing, either in the morning or the evening for seven consecutive days, say to each other:

"(Name), I am committed to you and our marriage. With God's help, I will continue to apologize when I hurt you intentionally or unintentionally and forgive you when you apologize to me. I care about you and value you as a person. You are worthwhile to me and I will daily care for you through my words and actions."

5. PERFORM A RITUAL TOGETHER

Plan an activity to symbolize the marriage healing. Perhaps **buy a wedding cake** or **plant a tree** or **give a small gift to each other**.

6. METAPHOR

Utilize a metaphor to symbolize the releasing action of forgiveness toward your spouse. One example, mentally fill a garbage can with the forgiven hurts and watch it float out of sight. Another example, imagine a white light shining down on all the hurts until **all hurts are gone** and nothing is left but the light.