

# How to Forgive & Forget

By Dave Currie®

*Forgive and forget. It's a well-worn cliché - one that is easier to say than to practice.*

If you're married, you've been there. Your spouse has said or done something that has wounded you. It may be something small, or it may be a major betrayal. Either way, your pride screams at you to take revenge. If you don't strike back immediately, you at least want to keep this "guilt card" in your pocket, to be pulled out at a later date - "Oh yeah, well what about the time when you...."

When we've been offended, the last thing we want to do is to let it go. And yet, if our desire is to have a healthy, lasting marriage, that is exactly what we've got to do. Here are seven suggestions to keep in mind when your spouse lets you down:

## 1. Don't Start Without Your Spouse

If you need to talk to your spouse about something, don't just corner them and launch in unexpectedly. That is a recipe for hostility. Instead, agree together on a time to discuss the issue. That gives each of you a chance to think about it in advance, which will result in a more productive discussion than if one partner simply lambastes the unsuspecting "offender".

## 2. Handle Negative Emotions Responsibly

When we react emotionally, we often say and do things that we later regret. In many cases, it is best to delay the discussion until you've settled down, gained a proper perspective, and prayed about your attitude. This will allow you to go into it looking for a solution, rather than just being consumed with your own hurt.

As partners, you need to respect each other's need to "take five". If your spouse needs to wait a few minutes, or even a day or two, to cool down, don't press the issue. This should not be used as an excuse to avoid the discussion entirely, but it is better to take some time to clear your head than to allow your emotions to take you somewhere that you don't want to go.

## 3. Deal With One Issue at a Time

Remember that "guilt card" we mentioned earlier? Once you're into the discussion, you will be tempted to pull it out. Soon, your conversation has deteriorated into a long list of offenses, as you try to outdo one another with everything that the other person has ever done wrong. This only intensifies the conflict and deepens the divide between you. It can also be overwhelming to be presented with a massive list of things that need to change. Instead of being motivating, it's discouraging.

Instead, be content to solve one problem at a time. It is much better to make serious headway in one area of your relationship than to simply rehearse everything that needs fixing.

#### **4. Be Clear About Your Perspective**

Give each other some uninterrupted time to share your concerns. If you are just trading barbs back and forth, neither of you will really be hearing the other - you'll be too busy thinking about your next comeback.

When it is your time to talk, try to help your mate understand your hurt or frustration. Help them to see why their actions and words had the impact that they did. Likewise, the offending spouse should have the opportunity to explain their words or behaviour. It could be that you have misinterpreted their motives, and when this is cleared up it goes along way towards solving the problem.

#### **5. Hold Your Relationship More Dear Than This Issue**

Sometimes we get so wrapped up in our feelings or our "rights" that we lose sight of the bigger picture. People joke about marriages breaking up over toothpaste and toilet paper disputes, but it really happens! Remember that your relationship is the primary concern. You may have some issues to sort out, but you still love one another - and loving one another often means letting the other person be right.

#### **6. Walk in an Attitude of Forgiveness**

If you are going to live with this person for the next 20...30...50 years, you are going to have to forgive one another many times. You cannot afford to not forgive. Unforgiveness does not only hurt your spouse, it hurts you! As Corrie Ten Boom said, "Forgiveness is setting the prisoner free, only to find out that the prisoner was me."

This brings us back to the issue of forgiving and forgetting. In truth, there are some hurts that you will never be able to forget. What is more important is that we choose to let it go. A Jewish proverb says, "He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends." Forgiveness entails giving up your right to punish your spouse - whether through direct retaliation or just letting bitterness fester.

Over the past year, I have discovered the value of "pre-forgiveness". I make a conscious decision that, the next time my wife Donalyn offends me - I am going to forgive her. Then, when it happens, I remember that I have already decided to forgive her, so there is no point in making a big deal out of it now. This really helps to take my critical edge off.