

*Motivating Couples to Release
Their Anger Through
“Heartfelt Forgiveness”*

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THE GOAL

**To help couples resolve anger
and hostility issues
in their marital relationships.**

THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

The marriage is a God ordained institution in which a husband and wife bonds together in a committed relationship for life. "Their commitment to each other is an act of the heart. Therefore, conflict prevention and resolution procedures must also become an act of the heart" (Cloke, 2015).

ANGER & HOSTILITY

Couples struggle with releasing anger and hostility when a partner:

- ❑ Violates trust and/or is deemed dishonest.
- ❑ Is verbally, psychologically and/or physically abusive
- ❑ Avoids genuine communication to resolve conflicts.

THE HEART IN HEARTFELT FORGIVENESS

Heartfelt forgiveness is not a casual, 'forgive me' uttered to the offended partner. Such an appeal may be perceived as an inaccurate assessment of the severity of the offense and may further delay forgiveness and the reconciliation process.

THE ESSENCE OF HEARTFELT FORGIVENESS

"So also My Heavenly Father will deal with every one of you if you do not freely forgive your brother from your heart, his offenses" (Matthew 18:35, AMP).

McMinn (2011) states, "When we remove the religious context and think of forgiveness only as a clinical technique, we risk losing the essence of forgiveness."

THE HEART OF HEARTFELT FORGIVENESS

The essence of heartfelt forgiveness embodies a willingness to:

- ❑ Make an honest assessment of one's offense
- ❑ Accept responsibility for an offense
- ❑ Let go of justifications to hold onto un-forgiveness
- ❑ If possible, take appropriate steps toward restoring the damaged relationship.

FORGIVENESS IS A CHOICE

Heartfelt forgiveness is extending grace to someone that may not be deserving of it. It is an attribute that God demonstrates towards those who break His commandments.

The process of forgiveness can be difficult and does not happen automatically.

Heartfelt forgiveness is altruistic; it is an act of love.

ALL OFFENSES CAN BE FORGIVEN

All offenses can be forgiven because heartfelt forgiveness is a deliberate and intentional choice (Legaree, Turner, & Lollis, 2007).

The choice to forgive is independent of the kind or type of offense committed. (Luke 23:34, NKJV)

JUSTIFICATIONS AND REASONS

Heartfelt forgiveness is foundational for the healing and restoration of a damaged relationship (Sheldon, Gilchrist-Petty, & Lessley, 2014).

Hill (2001) posits that, "forgiving is an essential element in human relationships regardless of the circumstances and it is considered as one of the most critical processes of restoring relationships and emotional well-being."

FORGIVENESS IN THERAPY

“It may be that some clinicians are uncomfortable with incorporating forgiveness in therapy because they associate it with the realm of religion and spirituality rather than recognizing it as a central aspect of healing for many clients. Forgiveness is a human phenomenon that is relevant for religious and non-religious clients alike” (Legaree et al., 2007; Weeks et al., 2003).

THE RELEASE MODEL

The RELEASE model is a guide to help couples navigate the process of forgiveness and marital restoration.

The acronym RELEASE is:

Remember, Examine, Listen, Express
Action, Support, & Expect

REMEMBER

"R" is for "Remember." The therapist encourage the couple to remember their *commitment* to love one another in sickness and health, wealth and poverty, in good times and bad times.

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife..." Ephesians 5:31, NKJV

EXAMINE

"E" is for "Examine." The counselors assist each partner with examining motives, negative self-talk, and any justifications regarding an unwillingness to extend heartfelt forgiveness.

"Let us search and examine our ways..." Lamentations 3:40, NKJV

LISTEN

"L" is for "Listen." Usually, when a partner is wrong and won't admit it, his/her 'pride' can make it difficult to listen to the truth. The counselor might teach the couple assertiveness, validation and conflict resolution skills.

"When pride comes, then comes shame..." Proverbs 11:2, NKJV

EXPRESS

"E" is for "Express." Express empathy. Expressing empathy towards a partner can be difficult to do if there's been deep emotional wounding.

"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you from his heart does not forgive his brother his trespasses." Matthew 18:35, NKJV

ACTION

"A" is for "Action." The counselor assist the couple with establishing a *plan of action* to resolve their conflict. Both partners should give input when establishing the plan as this helps to solidify their commitment to work together through the conflict.

"A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps."
Proverbs 16:9, NKJV

SUPPORT

"S" is for "Support." The couple is encouraged to support each other through the process of restoration and reconciliation.

"A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare." Proverbs 15:1, NLT

EXPECT

The last "E" is for "Expect." Heartfelt forgiveness brings an expectation of a revitalized marriage and the hope of a strengthened marital relationship.

"Love prosper when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends." Proverbs 17:9, NLT

Putting It All Together!

The Marriage Commitment
Offenses
Releasing Anger and Hostility
Restoration and Reconciliation
"Heartfelt Forgiveness"

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