

Life Coach: Marriage

Communication, Part 7

Introduction: The golden rules of communication found in Ephesians 4:32 comprise core principles for success in all relationships, especially marriage. Kindness focuses on the outward; tenderheartedness focuses on the inward. The third golden rule, forgiveness, focuses on the “other-ward”—our proper response to the offenses inflicted upon us by others—focusing especially on the marriage relationship.

- I. The Reality of Offense
 - A. As love begins to blossom in the earliest stages of a relationship, young people sometimes view the object of their affection in idealistic terms, not imagining that they will eventually experience conflict with their ideal mate.
 1. Someone famously said, “Love is blind; marriage is the eye-opener.”
 2. Prolonged dating and engagement usually dispel the idealism as the couple learns to navigate conflict prior to marriage.
 - B. Conflict is normal in human relationships.
 1. Luke 17:1—“...It is impossible but that offences will come...” Speaking contextually of offenses in the sense of the world’s opposition to Christianity, Jesus established the principle that offences are normative in human relationships.
 2. Matthew 24:10—“...then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.” During the coming tribulation period, pressure and calamity will be so great as to dismantle previously close relationships.
 3. Mark 14:27—“...All ye shall be offended because of me this night...” Jesus predicted that His imminent trial and subsequent crucifixion would “offend” the disciples, His closest followers.
 4. James 3:2—“For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man...” No matter how spiritually mature, everyone says and does things that bring offence to others.
 5. Offending and being offended, therefore, is an ever-present danger and reality in human relationships. Because the marriage relationship is so close and constant, the opportunities to offend and be offended are greater than any other human relationship.
 6. Note: In marriage, as in all relationships, offence should not come easily. When people are petty or “wear their feelings on their sleeves,” they open themselves up to needless hurts. Sensitive people should learn to “shake off” the multiple minor offences of others. If you make an issue out of everything, you will experience nothing but hurt and conflict. Choose your battles wisely!

II. The “OTHERWARD” Rule: Forgiveness

A. What forgiveness is *not*:

1. Biblically speaking, forgiveness is not overlooking an offence and storing it to use as ammunition in a future conflict.
2. Forgiveness is not eventually “getting over” an offence. Getting over an offence is the world’s method of forgiveness and it assumes the passing of time and healing of wounds as its prerequisite.
3. Forgiveness is not a feeling. Biblical forgiveness does not depend upon the subsiding of emotion or upon the restoration of warm emotion. While genuine may result in the restoration of positive emotions, the positive emotions are NOT the essence of forgiveness.
4. Forgiveness is not probation. Some people agree to “forgive” an offence by placing the offender on mental probation. When another offence occurs, the probation has been broken and the former offence takes center stage, along with the new one.
5. Forgiveness is not conditional upon improved behavior. The world’s philosophy: “I’ll forgive you *this time*; but if you do it again...”
6. Forgiveness is not reconciliation. In marriage, forgiveness must include reconciliation because of the one-flesh nature of the relationship. In life, reconciliation of other relationships is the ideal result of forgiveness, but is not always fully possible or advisable—especially in cases of serious abuse, breach of trust, etc. Forgiveness can, however, exist apart from reconciliation.
7. Forgiveness is not forgetting. It is impossible to forget some things. Forgiveness, however, does not depend upon a bad memory!

B. What Forgiveness *Is*:

1. Fundamentally, forgiveness is releasing another person of a debt. It does not deny the reality of the debt/offense; but it releases him from the debt. His offending actions are canceled as if they never happened.
2. Forgiveness is a decision to never bring up the offense to the offender, to others, to God, or to yourself. Forgiveness destroys the evidence.
3. Forgiveness happens while the sting of the offence is still present—when the pain, disappointment, and hurt still in the heart.
4. Forgiveness has no limits (Mt. 18:21-22). People often repeat their offences. In such cases we must not limit our capacity to forgive—especially when the offender professes repentance (Lk. 17:3-4).
5. Forgiveness remembers its own human weaknesses and faults, extending grace to others as it hopes for grace from others.