

WHEN WE WOUND EACH OTHER

There are times when we damage our partner unintentionally and there are times when we do damage intentionally. Regardless, we do damage. Are you aware of how you have damaged your partner? Do you know what it cost your spouse to be married to you? Unless we are willing to examine these areas, we will not experience healing in our marriages.

Why should we look at the wounds we have caused our partner? Why should we dwell on the past? Why isn't it enough to say, "I'm sorry" and leave it at that?

Dealing with the damage that we do to each other in our marriages can be messy. Some of the wounds are tragic and strike at the very core of our ability to trust and feel safe. Other wounds can be attitudes and disrespectful habits that over time take their toll. Regardless, the wounds that we cause each other are more than just actions that can be easily dismissed. They carry messages of mistrust, disrespect, disloyalty and often selfishness.

The wounds in our marriage are obstacles that must be worked through if we are to continue our journey of intimacy. We cannot simply walk around them and believe that they are in the past and we can forget about them. Our journey of intimacy requires that we spend the energy to work through the damage of the hurt and disappointments we have caused each other.

We are usually more concerned about how our partner has damaged us, than we are about the hurt that we have caused our partner. It is not easy to look at the ways we have or continue to hurt our partner.

Whose Fault Is It?

Every marriage is made up of two individuals who are sinners. We do not love perfectly. Forgiveness is needed by both partners. Seldom is only one partner totally to blame and the other innocent. There is always a shared responsibility for what happens in our marriages. There is not an innocent partner.

Even though both partners are responsible for wounds in the marriage, it does not mean that they are equally responsible. There are different degrees of failure for each partner. The key to healing the wounds in our marriage is based on both partners being willing to acknowledge their shared responsibility for the damage. Only then will they be able to continue their journey of intimacy and rebuild trust.

This lesson is designed for each partner to examine his or her own part for their responsibility for the wounds that exist in the marriage. It takes courage to look at the damage that we have done to our partner.

A Man Who Had to Look at the Damage

King David was a man who had everything. He had fame; he was a great warrior, a gifted musician and was called a man after God's heart. But there was a dark and sad chapter in David's life that God could not allow to be passed by. God wants us to see the damage that we have done to God himself, to others and ourselves. God pursues David in the midst of hiding in his sin and wants David "to get it."

David saw a beautiful married woman that he desired and lust filled his heart. David sent for Bathsheba and he slept with her and she became pregnant. Instead of facing his sin, David chose to develop a cover-up plan. David's plan was to bring Bathsheba's husband Uriah back from battle so that he would lie with his wife and he would assume that he had conceived the child.

David's plan to get Uriah to return home to his wife did not work as David had hoped. David's cover-up plan turned into plans to murder Uriah. David sent a message to Joab, the commander of the battle that was being waged to put Uriah on the front battle lines and then abandon him, so that he would surely be killed. When news arrived of Uriah's death, David pretended to know nothing about it.

After Bathsheba had time to grieve the death of her husband, David sent for her and brought her to his house and she became his wife and she gave birth to their son. On the surface, things seemed perfectly normal. David now had the wife that he wanted but at great cost.

God was not content to let life go on as normal. David's secret sins of lust, adultery, murder, deceit and hypocritical words held David in bondage. God pursues David by sending the prophet Nathan to stand before the King to show him his sin.

It is interesting how Nathan wisely approaches David to mirror back to him the damage that he has done. Nathan uses a parable to open David's eyes.

Nathan's Parable

The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him." Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him. - II Samuel 12:1-4, NIV

Nathan uses this story to see what David's reaction would be to this injustice.

David's Reaction

David's response was quick and he was angry over the injustice done by someone else. *David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." - II Samuel 12:5-6, NIV*

David 'gets it'.

Nathan then speaks the words that would change David's life. "You are the man!" Nathan goes on to name what David had done and what God's punishment would be.

This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 7 anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms, i gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.' "This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'" - II Samuel 12:7-12, NIV

David faces his sin and confesses to Nathan what he has done

Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die." - II Samuel 12:13-14, NIV

Don't Be too Quick to judge

Don't be too quick to judge David. We have the tendency to see ourselves as relatively good people, we may have not committed murder or been unfaithful, but our failures to love well are just as serious. We usually do not take sin very seriously.

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. - James 2:8-11, NIV

We are all lawbreakers. Because of Adam and Eve we are all sinners. Sin is our refusal to trust God and be dependent on Him. When we demand that our needs be met without depending on God, we sin. We tend to see sin as a specific action. But our thoughts, attitudes, and motives can also be sinful as we relate in our marriages.

We need to examine our own hearts as to how we do not love our partner well and the damage that we have done. We are admonished in I Corinthians 10:12.

Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. -1 Corinthians 10:12, NIV

We all need to deal with the wounds in our marriages.

Why We Tend to Not See the Damage We Do

Why is it that we often do not see the ways we sin against our partner until it has caused great damage? We either minimize or justify the things we do and the attitudes we harbor.

Minimizing Our Sin

We minimize our behavior and attitudes by saying:

- ☐ It's no big deal.
- ☐ I am not perfect.
- ☐ I am not really hurting anyone.
- ☐ We all slip up.
- ☐ I am not that bad.
- ☐ I do not do things like other spouses.

Justifying Our Sin

We justify our behavior and attitudes by saying:

- ☐ I am doing the best that I can.
- ☐ The reason I did what I did is because...
- ☐ When you start to do what you are supposed to, then I will do what I should.
- ☐ I know I am not handling things right, but if you were in my shoes you would do the same.

We justify our anger and demandingness because we feel slighted, unfulfilled, not appreciated, unloved, lonely, unwanted or abandoned by our spouse.

How We Wound Each Other

Before we can seek forgiveness from our spouse, we need to know how we have wounded them. One year after David sinned, Nathan came to David and shared how he had not trusted God to provide what he wanted and told David specifically what he had done. David could have said, "These things are in the past, don't bring them up." David was willing to listen to what he had done. How have we damaged our partner by our actions or attitudes in the past?

The following are some of the ways that we can wound our partner:

Our Protective Layers

How do your protective layers wound your partner? In lesson 3, Why We Hide The Way We Do, we looked at how we are committed to protecting ourselves so as not to experience rejection and abandonment. We usually try to manipulate our partner to come through for us or else we withdraw and hide so as not to take the risk of being disappointed and vulnerable.

Go back to lesson 3 and review the list of ways that we manipulate and hide. Circle the ones that have an affect on your partner.

What does it cost your spouse to experience your protective layers? How do your protective layers hurt your partner?

How have your protective layers affected your marriage? Go back to lesson 3 and review the list of ways that we manipulate and hide. Circle the ones that have an affect on your partner.

How have both of your protective layers robbed your marriage of intimacy?

Living Out of Our Ditches

God designed men and women to very specific roles as to their masculinity and femininity. As we saw in lesson 5, Avoiding The Ditches In Our Marriage, the curse has affected how we relate as to our masculinity and femininity.

HUSBANDS

God designed the husband as the vassal king, to accept the primary role of taking the leadership and initiative in the relationship. He offers strength and tenderness in the midst of uncertainty. Because of the curse on Adam, men struggle with competence and perseverance.

Look at the chart, The Redemptive Highway of Maleness. Where do you see yourself as to living in the ditches of avoidance and overcompensating? List the ways that move you into the ditch. How does living in the ditch hurt your wife and hinder your marriage?

WIVES

God designed the wife as the Life Saver, to come alongside her husband to meet his relational need. She reflects God's heart for relationship and is the warrior for the relationship. Because of the curse on Eve, women experience pain in their relationships.

Look at the chart, The Redemptive Highway of Femaleness. Where do you see yourself as to living in the ditches of avoidance and overcompensating? List the ways that you move into the ditch. How does living in the ditch hurt your husband and hinder your marriage?

Relating From Our Own Wounds

Because we live in a fallen world, each one of us has not been loved well and we carry the wounds from an imperfect home environment, abuse, neglect and unmet needs. As we discussed in lesson 2, the way that our spouse triggers our buttons often has a lot to do with our wounds from our past.

The stories of our wounds and that of our partner cause us to believe lies about ourselves and make vows to stop the pain we feel inside. Review lesson 3 and look at the lies that you believe about yourself and the vows that you have made.

How do the lies you believed and the vows you have made impacted your partner?

How do your vows hinder you from loving your partner?

What has it cost your marriage to hold on to these vows?

Ways We Damage our Partner

What damage have you done to your partner by your actions and attitudes? Look over the following list; do you identify with any of these? You might want to add some of your own. You could ask your partner to look at the list and add some of their own. Remember, the goal here is to understand how we have wounded our partner. You don't want to minimize how your partner sees what you have done.

Ways That A Wife Can Damage Her Husband

- Having a demanding/critical spirit
- Using anger or silence to not allow her husband to be close Being unresponsive emotionally and physically
- Failure to be open with her husband/to share her feelings Withholding her soul from her husband
- Giving superficial involvement
- Holding on to fear of intimacy
- Placing the home or children before her husband Dwelling on his past failures
- Having to always be in control

Ways that a Husband can Damage his Wife

- By not pursuing his wife emotionally
- By being passive
- Avoiding conflict with his wife
- By putting his work, sports, hobby, ministry before his wife
- Being negative and critical
- Comparing his wife to other women
- By shifting blame and not taking responsibility for failures
- By being harsh and demanding
- Using anger to control
- By not taking responsibility and leaving it up to his wife to handle things
- Giving the silent treatment
- Makes light of his wife's fears, feelings, or struggles

Understanding the Impact of our Offenses

When we realize that we have hurt our partner, we usually want to say, "I'm sorry" and to distance ourselves as quickly as possible from the damage. We hope that we can focus on the future and forget the past. At this point we have two options in dealing with the damage we have done.

I'm Sorry

The word conveys a feeling of regret. We usually mean it in the context of, "Get off my back, I know I hurt you and never bring the issue up again." When we send this message to our spouse, we are really saying, "I do not want to look at the damage I have done to you. I am more concerned about myself." Usually we do not want to face the consequences of what we have done. We often feel helpless and want to escape the whole situation.

The problem with saying, "I'm sorry," is that it does not address the real problem and therefore does not open the door for healing and restoration.

I Get It

Scripture instructs us to 'confess' when we have sinned.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. -1 John 1:9-10, NIV

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. - James 5:16, NIV

The word, 'confess' means to say the same thing about what has happened. . According to Webster's Dictionary: to confess is "...literally to speak the same thing, agree with, to confess by way of admitting oneself guilty of what one is accused, the result of inward conviction."

It has the idea of being fully impacted by what I have done to my spouse. Seeing and feeling it from their point of view, not my point of view. It is putting myself in their shoes. It is to feel my partner's pain as if it were my own.

The reason that God sent Nathan to David to tell him the story of the lamb being taken from the poor man was so that David would put himself in that poor man's shoes. God felt that it was important that David see the damage that he had done. When David saw the injustice to the poor man, he "burned with anger against the man." When Nathan said, "You are the man." David got it.

Enter Your Partner's Pain

Invite your partner to share their pain and hurt with you. *How can you enter their pain if you are not willing to listen to their story? Entering their pain is not just about asking forgiveness: rather it is embracing their hurt and allowing them to share how they really feel.*

A true repentant attitude comes as we "feel" our offenses through the eyes and emotions of our partner. If we truly want forgiveness from our spouse, we must communicate through our spirit that we understand how deeply we have hurt them.

Our partner may find it difficult to fully forgive us until they see that we understand how deeply we have hurt them. They want to see that we really "get it" by seeing a change in our attitude and actions.

Write a Letter

Consider writing a letter to your spouse sharing how you understand the damage that you have caused them. Share how your fears, anger, protective layers, living out of your ditches and specific actions have wounded them.

Depending on the condition of your marriage relationship, you may want to seek advice concerning the wisdom of giving them the letter. Even if this is not the best time to give it to them, this is still a good exercise to do so that you can understand their pain.

Pursuing Forgiveness

Once we understand the damage that we have done to our partner and what our actions have cost them, we need to confess our sin and seek their forgiveness. When we wrong our spouse, we become indebted to them because we owe them love, not harm.

When we confess and seek forgiveness, we are asking that the debt we owe them be cancelled. We need to be released from the debt.

Let no debt remain outstanding, except to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. - Romans 13:8, NIV

Asking For Forgiveness

Asking for forgiveness is more than saying the right words. Right wording will grow out of right motives and right attitudes as the result of "getting it." If your attitude is one of blame or personal irritation, your efforts will surely fail. Your focus should be on your part of the offense.

Right wording should draw attention only to your offenses, not your partner's offense.

Do not expect or demand forgiveness. Have a spirit of pleading for mercy. Be willing to give your spouse time and space to get to a place where they are willing to offer forgiveness.

You must change your focus from how the actions of your spouse have hurt you, to taking responsibility for how your actions and attitudes have hurt your spouse.

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." - Matthew 7:3-5, NIV

Your words should be brief, precise and deeply sincere.

Example: "God has convicted me of how I have wronged you by..." (Specifically identify what you have done.) "I do not deserve your forgiveness, but would you be able to forgive me for what I have done against you?" (If the answer is not yet, graciously wait.)

Asking for forgiveness is more than saying the right words. Our message to our spouse comes from our ability to listen to our partner's pain with our ears, eyes and heart. When we "get it" we are communicating through our words, tone of voice and non-verbally (attitude, motives and body language) that we "got it."

How we communicate

Actual Words 7%. - Non Verbal 55%. - Tone of Voice 38%

The Purpose of Seeking Forgiveness

The primary purpose in asking forgiveness is not to restore your marriage, but rather to restore a right relationship with God and make your ways pleasing to Him.

Asking forgiveness does not automatically restore your broken relationship with your partner. Asking forgiveness simply clears away the hindrances of the past so that a new relationship can be built.

True Confession Leads to Change

If we really "get it" and understand the damage that we have done to our partner, we will not want to continue to keep hurting them. The result will be a commitment to change our actions and attitudes.

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this Godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. - II Corinthians 7: 8-11, NIV

The scripture says that it is godly sorrow that leads to repentance. Repentance means that one was going one direction, but is now going the opposite direction.

Godly sorrow is produced when our focus is on the wounds of our spouse, which results in our genuine longing for their healing. Godly sorrow motivates us to change our sinful behavior toward our spouse to that which honors God and our spouse.

Godly sorrow comes when we examine our thoughts, attitudes, and actions from God's view point. How does God view what I have done that has contributed to my spouse's pain?

Ask your spouse what changes you can make that will rebuild trust and healing.

What changes do you need to make that will show your commitment to your partner that you "get it" and you do not want to continue to harm them? List the things that you will commit to change with God's help to bring healing.

There can be no healing nor can trust be rebuilt, without a commitment to change in your attitudes, actions, and habits.

Rebuilding Trust

Do not be surprised if your partner is not able or ready to forgive you. During this time fulfill all of your responsibilities toward your partner or former partner.

A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city. - Proverbs 18:19, NIV

Just because we have asked our spouse for forgiveness does not mean our spouse will not struggle with trusting us. Our spouse has been deeply hurt, which has caused them to build up a wall so as to not be hurt. This wall usually does not come down all at once. The wall comes down brick by brick to the degree they feel safe.

For some partners, it may be very difficult to rebuild trust because of past relationships. Perhaps during their early years, they had parents who continually disappointed them or parents they could not count on. They did not have a safe environment where they could develop healthy trust.

For trust to be rebuilt, the wounded partner must be allowed to be angry for the hurt that they have experienced, how can they forgive you if they have not been allowed to face their pain.

Trust cannot be rebuilt if both partners are not 100% honest with each other. This is the time for both partners to be real and share how they really feel and what is going on inside of them.

Considerations in Pursuing for Forgiveness

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. - Ephesians 4:32, NIV

- Ask God to open your eyes, ears and heart to the way that you have wounded your partner.

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. - Psalm 139:23-24, NIV

- Ask your partner how you have wounded them by your attitudes and actions.

- Make sure that you have the right attitude and motives in pursuing for forgiveness, A good way to know if your motive is right, is to see how you respond if they are not willing to forgive you.
- Ask God to forgive you.
- Pursue forgiveness from your partner.
- Emphasize that you are not pursuing forgiveness just to restore the marriage [though you would like it restored], but to obey God and to be the person that God wants you to be, regardless of what happens in the marriage. As you pursue forgiveness, demonstrate humility and sensitivity. Do not justify yourself, and avoid any hint of blaming your partner. Explain how deeply your offenses must have hurt your partner.
- Pursue forgiveness from your parents-in-law.
- Any offense by you toward your partner will be felt deeply by his or her parents. Usually, they take up sides against you, thereby hindering a possible restoration of the marriage.
- Pursue forgiveness from your children.

Not only do we hurt our spouse, but we also hurt our children when we wound each other. Be willing to humble yourself and acknowledge pride, wrong priorities, insensitivity, impatience, anger, lack of spiritual leadership, and failure to meet their real needs.