

Session 4

# **The Power of Forgiveness**

## RECAP



The last session showed me that our different approaches to.....can be complementary.

Underline or circle whatever's relevant to you from the following list.

I need to remember to:

- organise a date
- meet my partner's emotional need for...
- listen better
- express my feelings more
- focus on the issue causing conflict rather than attacking my partner
- make time to pray together
- tell my partner what I appreciate most about them

Talk about what you have each put.

# Session 4 – The Power of Forgiveness

Saying sorry and forgiving each other are vital because we will all hurt our partner.

The hurt must be healed if our marriage is to flourish.

**Unresolved hurt will undermine the trust and openness between us and destroy our intimacy.**

## Reactions to hurt

### Anger

Anger is not bad in itself – it has a God-given purpose and is part of our internal mechanism to signal something is wrong and needs to be sorted out.

But we can use anger wrongly in a number of ways.

#### Two inappropriate ways of managing our anger:

##### like rhinos

- they attack when provoked

##### like hedgehogs

- they withdraw when threatened



## CONVERSATION 1

5 minutes



### RHINOS AND HEDGEHOGS

Identify whether you are more like a rhino or more like a hedgehog when you're hurt. If you're not sure, ask your partner.

Unless anger is managed properly, it leads to a downward spiral.



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*In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.*

– EPHESIANS 4:26

“

**An emotion is never buried dead –  
it is always buried alive.**

SELWYN HUGHES

## **What happens if hurt and anger are buried?**

### **Behavioural symptoms**

- inability to relax
- low sexual desire
- quick temper / intolerance
- escape through drugs, alcohol, pornography, etc
- escape into work / children / religious activities etc

### **Physical symptoms**

- disturbed sleep
- appetite affected
- medical conditions eg: ulcers, high blood pressure, pain

### **Emotional symptoms**

- loss of positive emotions eg: romance, love, joy
- low self-esteem / depression
- shut down
- fear of confrontation

Do you notice any of these symptoms in yourself from burying hurt and anger?



## CONVERSATION 2

15 minutes



### HANDLING ANGER

The purpose of this conversation is to help you recognise how each of you typically responds when you feel hurt and how you display anger.

1. Put a number between 0 and 4 in the box against each statement to indicate how true it is for you. Then add up columns A and B.

0. never | 1. rarely | 2. sometimes | 3. often | 4. always

#### When I'm hurt, I...

	A	B
1. Keep the peace at any price	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Overreact and go on the attack	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Fail to admit I am angry / hurt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Apologise because I must have caused it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Become controlling and bossy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Give my partner the silent treatment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Am quick to blame others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Retaliate by becoming confrontational	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Withdraw or shut down emotionally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Want to run away and hide	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Lose control / become explosive by shouting / slamming doors, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Say things I later regret	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Try to ignore my feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Become cold and clinical or sarcastic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Say things to hurt my partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Withhold physical affection / sex	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. Demand immediate discussion of issue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. Hurl accusations to take the focus off my responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Feel I don't have a right to be angry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Bring up past hurt not related to the issue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Total for each column</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

My score

Partner's score

**Column A = Rhino behaviour**

**Column B = Hedgehog behaviour**

Now look at each other's scores and discuss them, especially your differences.

2. At times of disagreement, what words or phrases are you aware that you use, if any, that hurt your partner?
  
3. What words or phrases does your partner use, if any, that hurt you?  
*(This question is especially important if either or both of you recognise that you react like the rhino.)*
  
4. At times of disagreement, are you and your partner able to express your views and feelings?
  
5. If not, how could you help your partner to do so?  
*(This question is especially important if either or both of you recognise that you react like the hedgehog.)*

# Process for healing hurt

## 1. Talk about the hurt

Whether you have hurt your partner or have been hurt by them, take the initiative to bring it out into the open so things can be healed.

Small hurts, if left unaddressed, can build up like small stones, which eventually block a drain.

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**If... you suddenly remember a grudge [your partner] has against you... leave immediately, go to [your partner] and make things right.**

MATTHEW 5:23-24, MSG

“

**If [your partner] offends you, go and tell them – work it out between the two of you.**

MATTHEW 18:15, MSG



## 2. Say sorry

Take responsibility – resist the urge to make excuses or to blame your partner

**Making excuses / blaming our partner:** *'I know I criticised you in front of the children yesterday, but I wouldn't have done so if you hadn't made us late.'*

**Proper apology:** *'I hurt you by criticising you in front of the children yesterday; it was unkind of me. I am sorry.'*

**Making excuses / blaming our partner:** *'I know I was grumpy and rude towards you last night, but you don't understand what intense pressure I've been under at work for the last two weeks.'*

**Proper apology:** *'It was selfish and insensitive of me to be rude and grumpy towards you last night. I am sorry to have hurt you.'*

Find out how serious the hurt is for your partner

- use the 'Richter Scale' of hurt.

- ask, 'Is this a one or a two level of hurt for you, or is it a nine or a ten?'

Confessing to God and receiving his forgiveness helps us to see the effect of our actions.

Apologising opens the way for reconciliation and healing.

A true apology doesn't make excuses.

## CONVERSATION 3

30 minutes



### IDENTIFYING UNRESOLVED HURT

This conversation concentrates particularly on identifying the areas of hurt and seeking to understand each other's feelings better. The Continuing Conversation that follows this session focuses on apology and forgiveness.

#### Part 1 – Try to identify your partner's hurt

Think about ways in which you have hurt your partner and affected your marriage that have not been resolved between you. Think back to when you were going out, when you were engaged and early times in your marriage, as well as recent times. (None of us is perfect.) Ask yourself:

- What have I failed to do that I should be doing?
- What have I done (or am I doing) that I should not do?
- Where have I failed to meet my partner's needs?
- What have I said that has been hurtful?
- What have I left unsaid that could have shown love and encouragement?

#### Write a list of the things that come to mind. Be specific.

(For example: *'I have stopped being affectionate and rejected your initiatives to make love; I have fallen asleep in front of the television instead of talking with you; I have been out more consistently with work colleagues or friends than we have together as a couple; I said some very unkind things during that big argument we had two weeks ago about money.'*)

## Part 2 – Identify your own hurt

Identify the ways in which you have been hurt by your partner. The cause of the hurt could be recent or a long time ago. Your partner might or might not have been aware of hurting you and it could have been one incident or repeated many times. Make sure you are specific and that you describe how you felt.

Use 'I' sentences.

(For example: *'I was hurt when you didn't say anything special about my promotion; I haven't got over the fact that you lied to me on the night we first went out together; I feel frustrated because you don't discuss financial decisions with me.'*)

1. When you have both finished, exchange your lists.
2. Read silently the ways you have hurt each other.
3. One of you then 'reflect back' to your partner the reason for their hurt and the feelings it produced in them, without trying to interpret what they have written or to defend yourself. To clarify what they feel, ask questions such as, *'What did you mean by that?'* Or, *'Is there anything else you would like to say?'*
4. Then the other partner should 'reflect back' in the same way. Make sure each of you has an understanding of the feelings that are described.
5. Return the lists to each other. Then add to or revise your list of the ways you have hurt your partner. Spend some time considering every aspect of their hurt. Try to see it through your partner's eyes.
6. Through the coming week, ask God to give you new insights into why your partner feels hurt and your part in causing it.
7. It is important to complete the process of *'getting rid of bitterness, rage and anger'* (Ephesians 4:31) by apologising and forgiving if you haven't already done so. (Use the Continuing Conversation, 'Healing Unresolved Hurt' on pages 73–75 to do this if necessary.)

### 3. Forgive

Forgiveness is essential and one of the greatest forces for healing in a marriage.

**Forgiveness is, first and foremost, a choice, not a feeling:**

- forgiveness always costs us something
- the question is not, *'Do we feel like forgiving?'* but, *'Will we forgive? Will we let go of our self-pity / demand for justice / desire to retaliate?'*

**Forgiveness IS NOT:**

- pretending that the hurt doesn't matter and trying to forget about it
- denying the hurt (and just hoping it will go away)
- thinking, *'Our love for each other will somehow magically resolve any ways we hurt each other, so it doesn't matter'*

**Forgiveness IS:**

- facing the wrong done to us
- recognising the emotions inside
- choosing not to hold it against our partner

Forgiveness is a process – we often need to keep forgiving for the same hurt, sometimes on a daily basis.

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**Forgiveness goes beyond human fairness: it is pardoning those things that can't readily be pardoned at all.**

– C.S. LEWIS

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*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger... Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

– EPHESIANS 4:31–32

Think of a time when you have been forgiven or when you have forgiven someone. How did it make you feel?



What do you find hardest about forgiving?

### **Start again together**

Begin each day with a fresh start.

Don't expect healing to be instant – apology and forgiveness remove the distance between us but the hurt leaves a bruising that needs time to heal.

Rebuild trust by setting aside some quality time together and being gentle and kind towards each other.

### **CONVERSATION 4**

5 minutes



#### **COMFORTING EACH OTHER**

Ask your partner what you can do to help them with this process of healing. Then, if you feel comfortable, pray for each other – aloud or silently. Otherwise express comfort for your partner in some other way.

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**Love keeps no record of wrongs.**

– 1 CORINTHIANS 13:5

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*Confess your faults to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed.*

– JAMES 5:16

## Plan a date together



Morning



Afternoon



Evening

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun

My turn / your turn to organise what we do.

This week, we could.....

This week I really appreciated it when you...



What is the most helpful response from your partner when you tell them that you are feeling hurt?



Do you find it easier to say sorry or to forgive? Why is that?



## Healing unresolved hurt



It is important to complete the process of healing any hurt between you that you identified in Session 4 on pages 66 and 67, if you haven't already done so. (Keep using the conversation below whenever you identify hurt between you in the future.)

My partner's deepest hurt happened when I.....

My partner felt ridiculed / humiliated / unaffirmed / put down / criticised / rejected / unloved / undervalued / .....

From now on, I intend to.....

I intend not to.....

If appropriate, write a prayer expressing to God your regret, asking for his forgiveness and praying for his help not to repeat the behaviour that hurt your partner.

For example: *Lord, thank you that you help those who call out to you. I am so sorry for hurting my partner by.....I ask you to forgive me and to help me to change so that I do not cause them further hurt. Please heal our relationship and show me how to express love to my partner.*

*Please turn over*

**Say sorry to your partner**

*'I am so sorry for...  
I know it hurts you and makes you feel...  
From now on I intend to...  
Please forgive me.'*

**When you feel ready, express forgiveness to your partner for what they have expressed.**

Say, 'I forgive you for .....

If you are finding this hard, ask God for his help. It may help to write down your prayer.

*For example: Dear Lord, thank you that you know all about me and love me. Thank you for being ready to forgive me for the ways I have hurt others. You know how hurt and angry I felt when my partner criticised me when I'd done my best. I choose to let go of my anger and resentment. I want to put my desire to retaliate into your hands, and ask you to help my partner to change. I choose to forgive him / her as you have forgiven me. Please heal the hurt with your love.*



**Comfort each other**

This is important when you have made yourselves vulnerable to each other and helps to bring healing to the hurt.

If you're comfortable praying, pray that your partner will know freedom from guilt and shame.

Then think of something you both enjoy that you could do together for a date this week to replace the negative emotions with positive ones.

**Conversation starter on your next date:**

Do you think that your wider family is made up of more rhinos or more hedgehogs?

How did this play out / does this play out in your wider family relationships?

