

RMMN RESOURCE



MARRIAGE MATTERS



Written by: Jennifer Welch & Mariah Bradford

WHAT MARRIAGE PATTERNS ARE YOU LEAVING BEHIND IN **2024?**



Written by, Jennifer Welch, LPCC

It's a new year. It's a time to reflect on the past year. Looking back at 2024 can be a powerful way to gain insight and set up successful strategies for the upcoming year.

Do you ever apply this principle to your marriage? Do you take the time with your spouse to reflect on the past year?

Consider different aspects of your marriage and how they evolved over the past year.

What did we learn? How did we grow? Are we closer or further apart? Looking forward into the new year, what unhealthy patterns can you let go of and leave behind? These are just a few unhealthy marriage patterns to let go of in order to build a stronger, loving marriage in 2025.

WHAT MARRIAGE PATTERNS ARE YOU LEAVING BEHIND IN **2024?**



KEEPING SCORE

Are you keeping track of who is doing more? Are you mentally tracking who does more of the chores, who is making the most sacrifices, who gets to spend the most money, or who spends the most time with the kids? Keeping score is an unhealthy practice where spouses mentally track who does more while focusing on individual gains rather than the collective well being of the marriage.

Keeping score leads to resentment, selfishness, and division. It hinders communication, distorts our perceptions, and undermines teamwork. Rather than keeping score this year, practice gratitude, focus on collaboration, communicate openly, let go of resentment, and set realistic expectations.





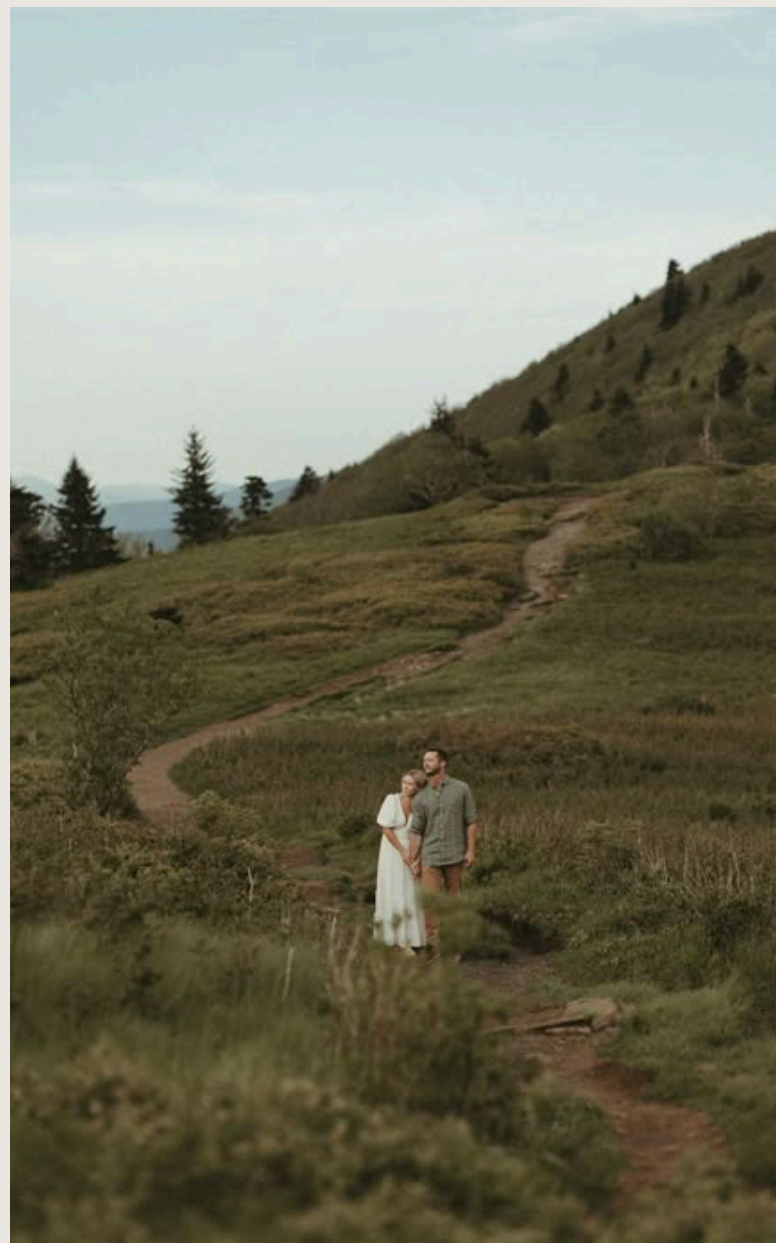
WHAT MARRIAGE PATTERNS ARE YOU LEAVING BEHIND IN **2024?**

ASSUMING THE WORST

“Before you assume, learn. Before you judge, understand. Before you hurt, feel. Before you say, think.” ~Unknown.

What is your perception of your spouse? Sometimes, when your spouse disappoints, breaks trust, makes a bad choice, disrespects, or speaks negatively, we tend to form a false opinion. Assuming the worst in your spouse can be incredibly damaging to a marriage. It erodes trust, fosters resentment, and creates a negative cycle of miscommunication.

These assumptions are rooted in past experiences and unmet expectations rather than actual evidence of wrongdoing. Before assuming, ask yourself, “Do I have clear evidence for this assumption or is it based on fear or past experiences?” Look for positive intent and give your spouse the benefit of the doubt and focus on the truth.



WHAT
MARRIAGE
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UNFORGIVENESS



Unforgiveness in a marriage is like a slow poison. It creates distance, resentment, and erodes emotional intimacy. When one or both partners hold on to past hurts, it prevents true healing and growth in the relationship. Over time, unforgiveness leads to bitterness, passive aggressiveness, or even outright hostility. Holding onto past wrongs can make it difficult to connect emotionally. Small issues can become major arguments because past pain is still influencing present interactions.

When one partner refuses to forgive, the other may feel unworthy or unsafe in the relationship. The resulting distance and disconnection hinders physical and emotional intimacy. Both are left suffering alone. Couples can break the cycle of unforgiveness by acknowledging the hurt, communicating openly, trying to understand forgiveness, practicing empathy, and seeking professional help. Forgiveness doesn't mean tolerating ongoing harm, but in a healthy marriage, it's a necessary step toward peace and connection.

WHAT MARRIAGE PATTERNS ARE YOU LEAVING BEHIND IN **2024?**

Surface-level conversations in a marriage often involve routine, logistical, or casual topics that don't deepen emotional connections. When a marriage only consists of these conversations and lacks deep connection and intimacy, the couple is more like roommates than soulmates. While these conversations are necessary, a marriage that stays in this zone too often can feel disconnected. Deeper conversations strengthen intimacy. Take time to connect face to face, caring about your spouse's feelings, and listening to their heart while seeking to understand their feelings.

SURFACE-LEVEL CONVERSATIONS



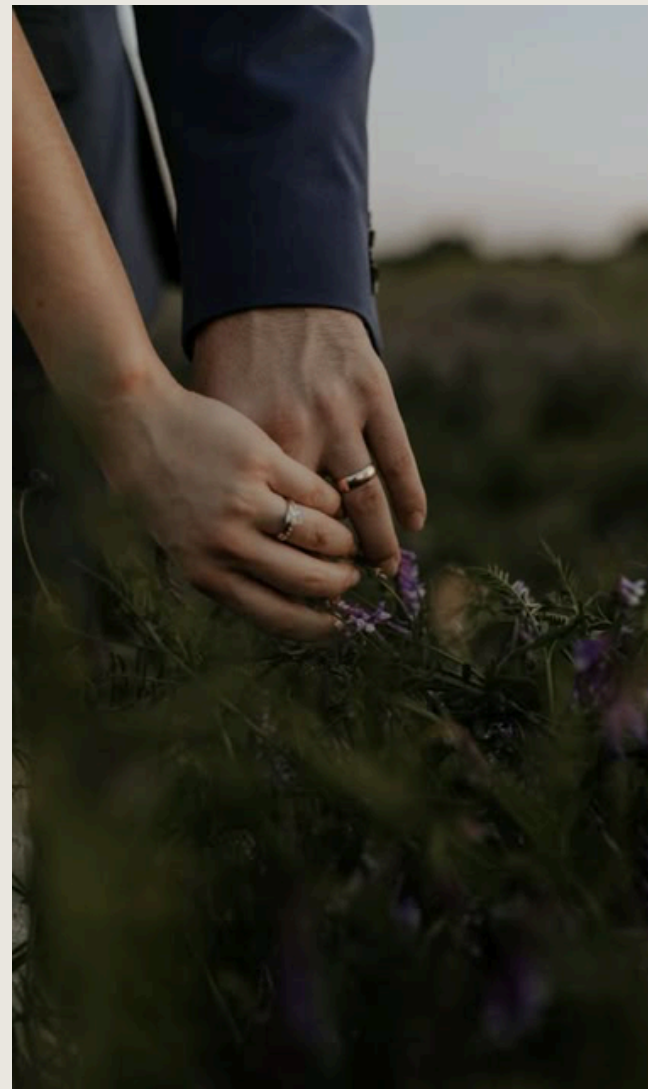
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DEPRIORITIZING INTIMACY

Prioritizing intimacy in a marriage is essential for maintaining emotional connection, trust, and long-term satisfaction. Types of intimacy include: emotional intimacy, physical intimacy, and spiritual and intellectual intimacy.

To nurture emotional intimacy, communicate openly and share your thoughts, feelings, and experiences without fear and judgement. Show genuine interest in your partner's emotion and concerns. Appreciate and regularly acknowledge and thank your partner for the little things. Make time for each other. Schedule uninterrupted quality time together. Prioritize affections such as small gestures like hugs, kisses, and holding hands to build connection.

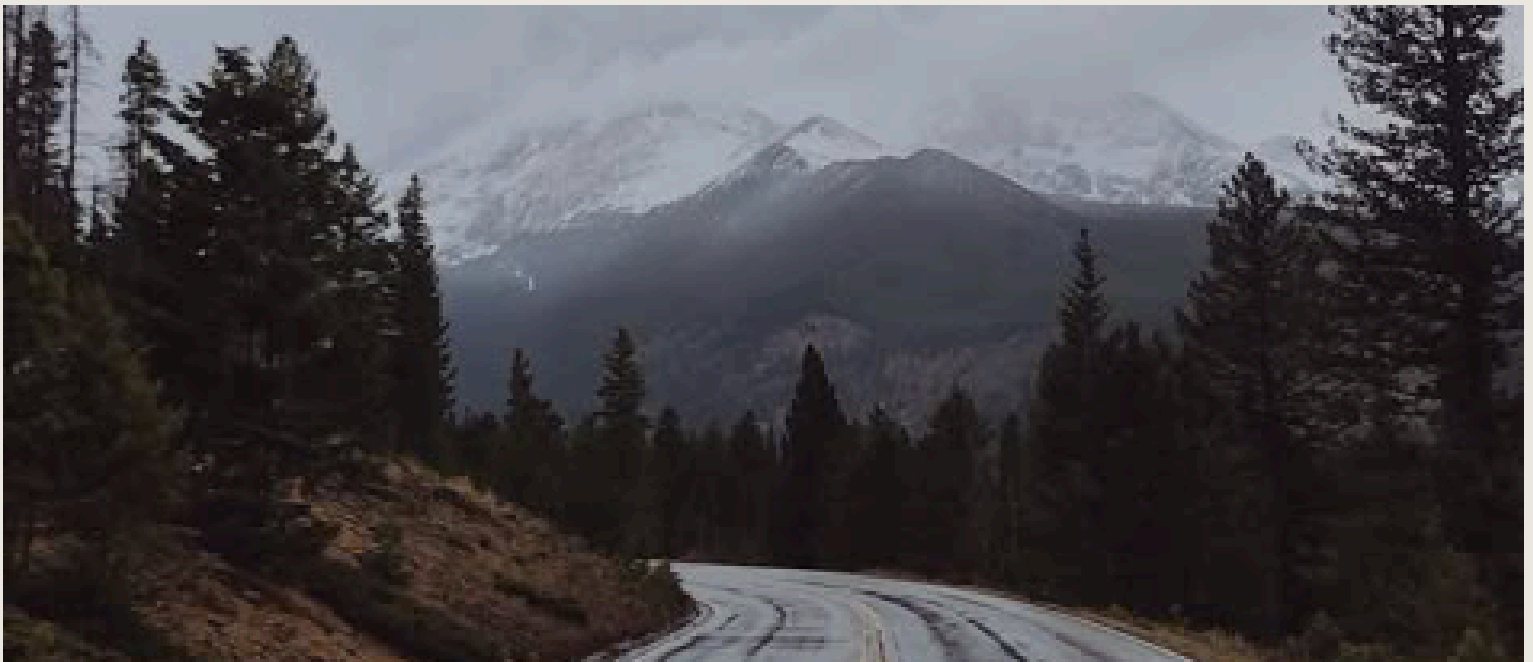
Marriage can be fun and fulfilling. Learn to laugh, travel, date, flirt, and be spontaneous.



4 WAYS THE CHURCH CAN HELP SUPPORT A HEALTHY MARRIAGE

Written by, Jennifer
Welch, LPCC

Healthy marriages are vital to a healthy church! One thing churches can do to build and grow a healthy congregation is to invest in its marriages. Did you know, according to research, “Divorce ranks as one of life’s most stressful events, coming second only to the death of a spouse.” (Cohen, Murphy, & Prather, 1). God created marriage to be a covenant relationship intended to resemble the relationship between God and His church (Ephesians 5: 21-33). So why would the enemy spend his time trying to destroy marriages? Because God’s marriage is one of His greatest and most glorious gifts (Paul & Smalley, 5). God loves marriage. His heart is to create strong family legacies that will continue generation after generation (Paul & Smalley, 5). Family legacies, both positive and negative, are followed throughout the Bible. Churches have the responsibility to measure the health of marriages in the church and provide ways to help support healthy, Godly marriages. Through normalizing common marital struggles, offering premarital counseling, and providing opportunities for marriages to connect all while offering resources to build healthier marriages, churches can rebuild and strengthen marriages, the core of the church.



4 WAYS THE CHURCH CAN HELP SUPPORT A HEALTHY MARRIAGE



What if pastors and leaders normalized marriage struggles and were vulnerable about their own struggles? Anyone who has been married for any length of time knows that sooner or later, challenges, struggles, and pain are going to be a part of your marriage. Even the Godliest and most “perfect” marriages have challenges. Normalizing marriage struggles can alleviate the misconception that our marriage is the only one struggling; therefore, we must be broken. This can cause intense feelings of shame and inadequacy.

When couples are feeling alone and isolated in their struggles, they will retreat and oftentimes feel too embarrassed to ask for help. Pastors who are vulnerable and openly acknowledge their own limitations, struggles, and imperfections while sharing personal experiences with the church create a deeper connection with their congregation. Simply offering a Q and A panel of married couples of all ages who are willing to testify how God saved and healed their marriages can provide an opportunity for struggling marriages to connect to couples who have overcome life’s challenges.



4 WAYS THE CHURCH CAN HELP SUPPORT A HEALTHY MARRIAGE



Does your church offer and promote the importance of premarital counseling? How many of us have said, “If only I knew then what I know now?” According to the article, *Happily Ever After Starts Here: The Benefits of Premarital Counseling in Preventing Divorce*, couples who participated in Pre-Marriage Counseling experienced a 30% increase in the quality of their marital relations compared to those who skipped counseling. This evidence reinforces the proactive value of such a step in fortifying the foundation of a marriage (LeFevour, 1).

Premarital counseling can act as a preventative measure to uncover potential issues and effective ways to handle conflict. Offering biblical premarital counseling equips young couples for great marriages built on a foundation of biblical truths. Some benefits of marriage counseling include creating healthy communication skills, learning how to resolve conflict, revealing expectations, starting a financial plan, and developing emotional intimacy.



4 WAYS THE CHURCH CAN HELP SUPPORT A HEALTHY MARRIAGE



Does your church offer opportunities for couples to connect with other couples? Offering marriage small groups and hosting or promoting marriage conferences provide resources and teach skills to build healthy relationships. Small groups can help couples make friends and bond with others who are going through similar experiences and struggles. Couples learn from the wisdom and experience of others in the context of a group which is a safe space to learn about the Bible and its principles. Couples can feel less isolated and more encouraged by being with others who are making similar choices during similar stages of life. Couples can find hope and motivation to continue working on their relationship.

Similarly, marriage conferences allow couples to get away to focus on their marriage, socialize and interact with other couples, build unity, reflect, and grow. Focus on the Family is an incredible Godly resource for marriage. If you would like to find small group marriage resources or host your own marriage conference, check out this website. <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/hostresistthedrift/>



4 WAYS THE CHURCH CAN HELP SUPPORT A HEALTHY MARRIAGE

When couples reach out for help, are you prepared? Offering your expertise, experiences, and wisdom to couples is so important. Pastors are often the first resource Godly couples seek. However, if their concerns go beyond your scope of capabilities, please refer the couple to a therapist and provide resources. Do you have a handful of great Christian counselors in your area that you can point people to? Are there one or two books that you could identify as your “go-to” books on marriage? Is there a marriage expert that you really respect? Could you bring that person in for a weekend marriage retreat, workshop, or conference? Or, could you send couples to a marriage conference? Or more importantly, are you prepared to repair and strengthen the foundation of a healthy church?

For more resources or support on how your church can support healthy marriages in your church, reach out to the district office.



3 PRACTICAL WAYS TO SHOW EMPATHY WITHIN YOUR MARRIAGE.

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. This means you process first from your understanding and then engage your heart in a willingness to put yourself in someone else's shoes and feel with them from their perspective

Many people can try to empathize using logic and understanding but this can feel very superficial especially within marriage. In relationships we all are looking to feel heard, validated and understood so both the head and heart need to be engaged so that true empathy can be felt.



Written by, Mariah Bradford, Counselor with Ranch of hope.

For some, this can feel daunting as this can feel costly in our emotions and energy. Remember marriage is worth it, not everyone gets to be in your heart so this is a special, intimate place.

The following are some quick simple techniques on how to empathize better with your spouse.

3 PRACTICAL WAYS TO SHOW EMPATHY WITHIN YOUR MARRIAGE.

- 1) Make sure you have proper inventory of your heart with the Lord. Self care with Holy Spirit is the first place of connection, once you are connected well within your relationship with your creator you have more ability to sort your own emotions and thoughts out and therefore can extend your thoughts and emotions toward your spouse easier without needing the empathy yourself.
- 2) Make sure to give your spouse your eye contact and body language. A great idea is to turn toward your spouse, lock eyes with your posture open and ready to receive, giving them not just your eyes but whole body in posture toward them. Trying to sit down facing each other can also be a benefit because it says I am engaged and sitting allows us to relax. This is not just a quick moment but one that deserves attention.
- 3) When your spouse starts to share make sure you acknowledge and care about what they are saying. Use active listening as the first place to start. Don't get defensive or try to fix, just listen and repeat what is said by your spouse.. Often in counseling at the Ranch of Hope we use a script such as.- Wow, I heard you, what you said was..... that's big. Then sit looking at your spouse for 10 seconds without adding more words. Let me explain what this does. First the word "Wow" denotes that you caught your spouse's attention and that what you said has been received. Repeating back your spouse's words says that you were listening, try to use the words as they said them, don't soften them or change them. Lastly, the 10 sec of just eye contact without words is a moment to allow the Holy Spirit into the moment with you, not just responding out of a fleshly response but opening the heart to hear the rhythm that Holy Spirit and your spouse is in. Sitting in the moment also allows the words an opportunity to go from the head to the heart and genuine feelings to be heart and expressed.

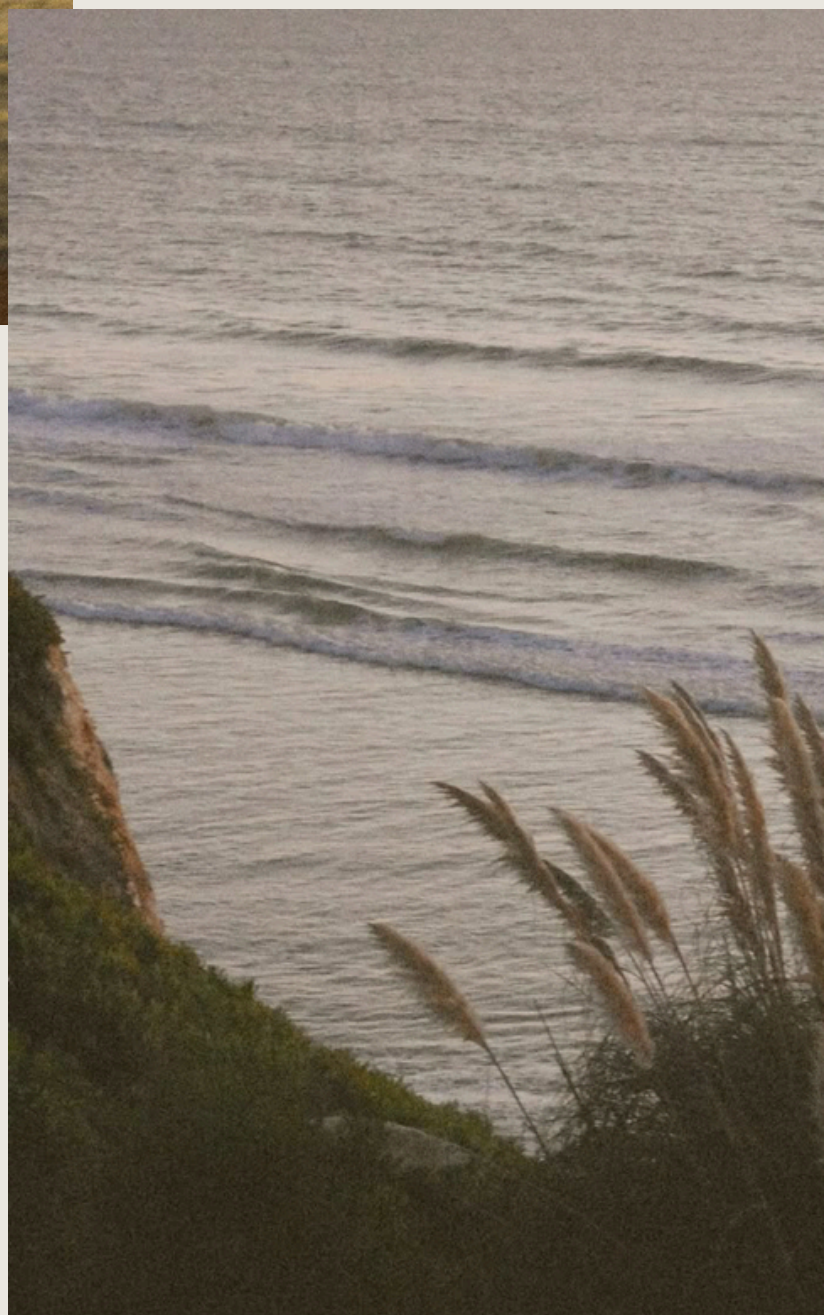


3 PRACTICAL WAYS TO SHOW EMPATHY WITHIN YOUR MARRIAGE.

EMPATHY IS A MUST

Healthy relationships such as marriage is a series of moments that we talk together, feel cared for, and build trust together. So often in marriage we become defensive, or quick to want to fix or change the feelings of our spouse without the willingness to be in it with them. This is a careful balance of being in tune with each other but also intentionally in tune with Holy Spirit and what he is doing with you personally and in your spouse.

Two becoming one means we have to be willing personally to get into the understanding and the heart of our spouse to best love and care for them, as well as be vulnerable to do the same. Empathy in marriage is a must if we want to experience the strength of what two hearts can be together.



MARRIAGE FORGIVENESS

Written by, Mariah Bradford,
Counselor with Ranch of Hope.

Forgiveness in marriage often needs to start with a healthy repentance. Time and time again “I’m Sorry” is simply used for deep wounds on the heart and without the words of repentance spoken these hurts don’t completely heal and continue to be a sore place in marriage. Forgiveness in marriage should be done with intentionality. If I step on a stranger's foot in a grocery store then “im sorry” is appropriate, but within a marriage the consequence is hurting the one i love deeply so repentance, confession, or asking for forgiveness is what God calls us to do. In teaching this concept in marriage at the Ranch of Hope we use a simple acronym model to remember the components Christs asks for within a healthy repentance. Let's use the word C-O-N-F-E-S-S as a reminder.



MARRIAGE FORGIVENESS

C- Confess specifically what you did wrong, not using general terms but going right to the moment or words used that caused pain.

O- Own exactly what you did wrong, often using the words I sinned, so that your spouse knows you recognize the depth of your wrongdoing.

N- Never use the words if, but or maybe. These words try to shift blame using justification or rationalizing the hurt instead of just owning it.

F- Focus on your spouse's heart, put yourself in their shoes, empathize with them.

E- Express your remorse, often this includes an "I'm sorry". Face to face, tender communication and body posture is important as you are trying to get to your spouse's heart.

S- Step away from the sin. This is one of the most important steps many marriages forget to implement. Assure your spouse not just that you're sorry but how you are going to change from this moment forward to protect yourself and them from the hurt that was caused. When Christ says "go and sin no more". Or "turn from your wicked ways" what is the commitment in your heart to be different. This is a step in your spouse feeling safe again to trust you.

S- Sincerely ask for forgiveness. Once you have walked completely through these steps your spouse's heart is open and more willing to be able to step into the next part of forgiveness.



MARRIAGE FORGIVENESS

Written by, Mariah Bradford,
Counselor with Ranch of Hope.

Remember Forgiveness is not a feeling it's a command. Our flesh would love to hold on to hurts trying to protect yourself using the wounds and hurts almost like a wall around our heart. True forgiveness means I recognize the hurt and I make a choice to not let it stand between the relationship God has built within us. We as Christians are working towards being like Christ so we must forgive as Christ forgives. He takes it as far as the east is from the west, and remembers it no more, Love keeps no record of wrongs. In this we must make a conscious choice to put hurts, sins and pain under the blood of Jesus. His blood is sufficient to cover a multitude of sins. So in a marriage the posture now shifts from a confession to now forgiveness. This is easily remembered through an acronym of UNDER, thus reminding us as Christians this is now going to be under the blood of Jesus.



MARRIAGE FORGIVENESS



U- Understanding is expressed over what is being confessed and all the ways it has affected the marriage.

N- Never choosing to bring this account back and throw in your spouse face or continue to use this as a wall to protect or separate your hearts within the marriage.

D- Dwelling on new thoughts, most often when hurt sin or hurt enter into a marriage the enemy throws lies and confusion into the mix. This step states that your ready to start thinking healthy new thoughts of our spouse and no longer dwelling on the hurt.

E- Extend your heart to your spouse again. This is a commitment to not let the hurts stand between you or hinder the relationship that has been built. A commitment to open your heart to try to find places to earn trust back together again.

R- Resist the flesh that will want to bring this account up and use it against each other. I use a visual of putting the sin or hurt under the blood of Jesus, in order to keep bringing it back up you must wash the blood of Jesus off of it to talk about it. Do you ever want to look Jesus in the face and say I need to wash your blood off? Do I have the right to bring this back up and talk about it? This is the miracle of forgiveness that goes against all of our flesh, that wants to keep account, self protect and use things against each other, but Jesus's blood allows us to move forward away from the offense and have freedom in marriage from the hurts.

MARRIAGE FORGIVENESS

When we fall short in marriage, instead of holding grudges or harboring bitterness, we are called to extend grace. By forgiving one another, couples demonstrate their commitment to their covenant and the example of Christ's love for the Church. We must have permission to acknowledge the hurt but choose to move forward in love, working together to restore the relationship. Forgiveness in marriage is an act of obedience to God's command. It reflects the heart of God, who forgives us despite our flaws and sins, and empowers us to do the same for our spouses. Through forgiveness, couples can strengthen their bond and continue to grow together in love and faith



WRITERS

Writer of:

What Marriage Patterns are you leaving behind in 2024? & 4 ways the Church can help support a healthy marriage.



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<https://member.psychologytoday.com/us/profile>

Jennifer is a dedicated, Christian counselor who integrates biblical principles with evidence-based counseling practices to help individuals and couples find healing and restoration. She helps couples build stronger, more connected relationships. As a former educator and school counselor for over 15 years, she is compassionate and experienced in guiding couples and individuals toward growth, self reflection, and healing. As a wife of 26 years and mom of 3, she brings both professional expertise and personal insight into the joys and challenges of marriage and parenthood. She offers both in person and virtual options.

WRITERS

Writer of:
3 Practical ways to show
empathy within your
marriage & Marriage
Forgiveness.



Mariah Bradford, Ranch of Hope Counseling
Westcliffe, Colorado
www.ranchofhope.org

Mariah Bradford currently is the primary female christian counselor at the Ranch of Hope Counseling in Westcliffe Colorado. Mariah works with individuals, marriages and families using an intensive model pioneered at the Ranch of Hope Counseling in a beautiful mountain setting. She helps to bring healing and wholeness to clients using the power of the Holy spirit. Mariah is a licensed AG Minister and has worked on staff serving various pastoral roles. Mariah also spent 12 years serving as an Early childhood specialist while in Texas. She has been married for just over 20 years to Brandon and they are raising 3 boys together.



CITED WORK

- Cohen S., Murphy M., Prather A. (2019). Ten Surprising Facts About Stressful Life Events and Disease Risk. *Annu Rev Psychol.*; N70:577-597.
- LeFevour A., Happily Ever After Starts Here: The Benefits of Premarital Counseling in Preventing Divorce. 16 Jan 2024.
- New International Version (2011). NIV Online.
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%205%3A21-33&version=NIV>
- Paul. R. & Smalley, G. (2020) 9 Lies that Will Destroy Your Marriage and the Truths That Will Save It and Set it Free. Tyndale House Publishers.

A photograph of a wooden chair and a round wooden table. On the table is a white ceramic cup with a handle. The scene is set against a plain white wall and a light-colored tiled floor. The lighting is soft and natural, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere.

MARRIAGE MATTERS

RMMN RESOURCE