

## TRUST, FORGIVENESS, AND RECONCILIATION IN MARRIAGE

For a married relationship to work, **there must be mutual, self-giving love.** Jesus said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-13). If one spouse attempts to be fully open, vulnerable, and giving to the other, but the other spouse is closed and selfish, there will be no real intimacy. The spouse who is giving will be left feeling used and alone. Therefore, giving of one’s self to another means taking some risks. It requires a huge measure of trust. The grace and strength God gives us to be united with one another according to his plan will help us trust enough to give ourselves as gift.

Because none of us ever perfectly achieves the image of the Trinity or of Christ and the Church, there will be times when we act in self-centered, rather than self-giving ways. Marriage is a *process* of being formed in God’s image as husband and wife. Every relationship will have some hurts along the way. Some will be small enough to overlook. Others can do more serious damage to the relationship.



### Steps Toward Reconciliation

For a relationship to continue to grow after there has been some hurt, some forgiveness and reconciliation is necessary. It’s not always as simple as “forgive and forget” – true reconciliation is a process.

When seeking reconciliation in a situation in which you have been hurtful, it’s important to think through the details of the situation and consider what the other person may have been thinking and feeling. Seeking reconciliation means making yourself vulnerable,

admitting you were wrong, even if you feel the other person did not handle the situation appropriately either. When you seek forgiveness, express your understanding of the other person’s feelings. Make a commitment to avoid being hurtful in the future, and make a decision to be trustworthy. You may want to put this in the form of a letter, or if the person who was hurt is ready to do so, have a face-to-face conversation about it.

Understand that while forgiveness is a choice, trust often is not. To really trust someone, you must feel confident that they will not hurt you, and that confidence is built over time as you show sensitivity and as God’s grace is allowed to work in your life and the life of your spouse. Be patient with this process.

### When You Are Hurt

It is especially painful to be hurt by someone you love. Depending on the nature of the pain, you may feel shocked, disappointed, confused, and/or determined never to let yourself be hurt again. It’s important to let yourself feel and express these feelings. If a truly hurtful incident is ignored or swept under the rug, feelings of resentment can re-emerge later and poison a relationship. Recalling and expressing the hurt is the first step towards reconciliation.

The next step is making a decision to work towards reconciliation. This begins by trying to imagine yourself in the other person’s shoes. What was he or she thinking when he/she did that? How does he/she feel about it now? Knowing why someone did what they did – understanding their perspective – often helps us be more willing to forgive.

When you decide to forgive, it’s a good idea to express this forgiveness to your spouse, either verbally in the form of a letter. A commitment to forgive isn’t an automatic restoration of trust. Trust comes with time, and with continued sensitivity to one another. However, offering forgiveness means expressing a *willingness* to work towards trust again.

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