Forgiveness in Resolving Marital Conflict among Korean Immigrant Baby-boomer Couples at Calvary Mission Church in Los Angeles

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FORGIVENESS IN RESOLVING MARITAL CONFLICT AMONG KOREAN IMMIGRANT BABY-BOOMER COUPLES AT CALVARY MISSION CHURCH IN LOS ANGELES

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JIN WOOK CHANG
FEBRUARY 2012
ABSTRACT

Forgiveness in Resolving Marital Conflict among Korean Immigrant Baby-boomer Couples at Calvary Mission Church in Los Angeles

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2012

This ministry focus paper presents the importance of forgiveness, specifically as it relates to troubled Korean immigrant couples of the Baby-boom generation. The paper describes and discusses the marriage counseling program conducted within the Korean immigrant community of Los Angeles by Calvary Mission Church.

The history of this church in Los Angeles and its marriage counseling program, the Counseling Education Institute for Korean Marriage and Family, are presented. The unique historical and cultural characteristics of the local Korean immigrant population are discussed, with special attention to the cultural background of Korean immigrants and the challenge of marriage counseling work. For instance, the background of Confucianism and its traditional teachings about marriage and family create difficulties for Korean immigrant couples attempting to adapt to life in the United States and for marriage counselors to work with them.

The biblical and theological importance of forgiveness is discussed, with special emphasis on the centrality of forgiveness to the ministry of Christ, and its continuing deep significance for all Christians, including troubled Korean immigrant boomer couples. It is argued that forgiveness, along with repentance and reconciliation, is a key biblical solution for resolving marital conflict. A three-step model of forgiveness is also included, incorporating repentance and reconciliation.

Initiating and maintaining changes of thoughts are examined. Identifying and diagnosing marital conflicts and their remedies are provided. Maximizing forgiveness allows spouses to embody sincere forgiveness by using two procedures. The content and practices of a three-day marriage retreat are described in detail, as are follow-up procedures used to enhance and extend the practices of forgiveness in the participants’ daily lives.

Content Reader: Brad Stenberg, PhD

Words: 295
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INTRODUCTION

Whenever people are involved in relationships, there will be conflicts. When husbands and wives fail to take advantage of the proper time and opportunity to resolve their marital conflicts, they are vulnerable to committing sins due to unforgiveness -- the unwillingness to forgive from their hearts. Korean immigrant baby-boomer couples are often hurt by disagreements, explosive anger, and even domestic violence. All of these experiences may negatively affect their spiritual maturity. It is the position of this author that forgiveness, along with repentance, reconciliation, and love, is one of the biblical solutions for resolving marital conflict. For married people sincerely committed to following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, forgiveness is not optional. Christian marriage counseling requires many psychological strategies. However, in this paper, I will focus upon only one of these strategies: forgiveness. I will emphasize the importance of forgiveness from a biblical perspective and will provide implementation and assessment of forgiveness as a tool for conflict resolution among Korean immigrant baby-boomer couples.

For some Korean immigrant baby-boomer couples who experience marital conflicts, this issue of forgiveness proves to be a very difficult challenge. A common

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1 Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr. defines “sin as disobedience to the law of God” in his book Christian Doctrine rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 213. He also explains that we think first of “worldly” or fleshly” sins connected with bodily needs, desires, and pleasures (p. 216). All of us are human beings created in God’s image, but sin distorts, twists, corrupts, and contradicts this truth. In this paper, sin is described primarily in marriage relationships. Its characteristics in this setting is a self-centered life. Sin is displayed in undesirable thoughts, overly demanding expectations of each other, and maintaining “idols in the hearts,” driving one to satisfy one’s desires, demands, or pleasures.

2 This is my observation from my counseling experience in the Counseling Education Institute for Korean Marriage and Family, Los Angeles.
thought pattern is: “As long as we attend church and worship the Lord as we used to, everything is all right.” They think they have fulfilled their religious obligation, but even so, they often have a lifeless, joyless existence. They may be partially sustained by their Christian beliefs. However, it is doubtful that such troubled couples can reconcile with neighbors, as taught in 2 Corinthians 5:18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:13, and genuinely love them as Jesus commanded in such passages as Matthew 19:19 and Mark 12:31, without practicing forgiveness of their own spouses. Unforgiveness causes them to fail to live according to the word of God.

As senior pastor of Calvary Mission Church and president of Counseling Education Institute for Korean Marriage and Family in Los Angeles, I have keenly felt the necessity for a ministry for married couples in conflict. I believe such a ministry is greatly needed in the Korean immigrant community. Forgiveness is essential to the healing of the deeply rooted bitterness that troubled Korean immigrant boomer couples often hide.

Korean immigrant “Baby Boomer” (KIB) couples are the target population for this study. The Boomer generation is defined as those who, as of 2010, are between 46 and 64 years old. They account for a large portion (61.6%) of the Calvary Mission Church. Members of the Korean Baby-boom generation exert a strong impact on the entire community. This age group is also similar in socio-economic background to many who are looking for a church to call home in the Korean community of Los Angeles.
Thus, the people focused upon in this paper have a similar demographic to those targeted by the outreach efforts of many other churches.³

KIB couples experience many stresses, but the goal of this project extends beyond dealing with various specific conflict issues. This project aims to help these couples to understand, from a biblical perspective, the importance of the forgiveness Jesus has offered to all people, to enable them to extend forgiveness to one another, and to provide a strategy for maintaining a resilient marriage. It is hoped that this study will be adapted to many types of churches. This paper will describe a practical strategy, as has been in use at the Calvary Mission Church, for instructing these couples in conflict to reconcile by employing the biblical practice of forgiveness.

The paper will be structured into three major sections. The first part, which contains two chapters, will describe issues of context. Chapter 1 will introduce Calvary Mission Church and the KIB population in Los Angeles. The chapter will also explore the beliefs and values of traditional marriages that have been influenced by Confucianism. It will present two sources of conflict: the change in gender relations in KIB marriages and the change from institutional marriage to individualistic marriage.

Chapter 2 will discuss the three types of conflicts that arise — loyalty, caring, and connection — as KIB couples cope with American customs. In addition to these challenges, the unbalanced interactional dynamics of adaptability and cohesion may pose

³ See pages 16 to 23. Included there are details about who Korean immigrant boomers in Los Angeles are, a definition of Korean immigrant boomers, a description of common motives among Korean immigrant boomers, and a list of common characteristics of Korean immigrant boomers.
further obstructions in resolving conflicts. Sinful and erroneous thoughts also contribute to continual marital struggles by inducing self-victimizing and unforgiving attitudes.

The second part, also consisting of two chapters, presents the theological foundation for understanding forgiveness and the theological implications for a model of forgiveness. Chapter 3 will present biblical support for the deity and humanity of Christ and for the priestly work of Jesus related to atonement for reconciliation between God and human beings. This chapter will also explore both God’s forgiveness and interpersonal forgiveness between husband and wife, and do so with the intent of offering biblically-based advice to assist troubled couples who are trying to resolve marital conflicts.

Chapter 4 will detail two processes that enable and enrich forgiveness: repentance and reconciliation. These two processes lead to a spiritual transformation, which in turn leads to healthy marriage. This chapter will also demonstrate that repentance empowers individuals to forgive willingly. Repentance is brought about by searching into the sinful nature and evil intentions of one’s own heart. Following repentance, reconciliation acts as an interpersonal bridge between the people involved in the injured relationship.

The third part of this paper will present a strategy for implementing forgiveness for the resolution of marital conflicts. Chapter 5 will discuss three ways troubled couples can improve their skills for resolving conflict. This will examine how well the couple can maintain the changes in their thought patterns in their daily lives. This includes instructing them how to repent and reconcile with each other.
Chapter 6 will present the contents of a three-day marriage retreat, consisting of lectures, workshops, and discussion, designed to lead KIB couples in a group setting to forgiveness and to encourage the resolution of marital conflicts. The retreat is an implementation and assessment of forgiveness for helping the participants overcome unforgiveness and renew their previously conflicted relationships. The retreat can be applied to local churches that can train team leaders, instructors, and intercessory prayers.
KIB’s face many severe challenges in managing marital conflicts. Many of these difficulties are due to a failure to shift from the traditional marital lifestyle influenced by Confucianism to the very different beliefs and values about marriage in mainstream American society.

My hope is to address the pain and difficulties of Korean immigrant boomer couples using forgiveness as the major component of my strategy. Toward this end, chapter 1 presents the context of Calvary Mission Church’s ministry in Los Angeles. This includes five points: first, a description of Calvary Mission Church; second, a description of KIB’s; third, the philosophy and ministry of Calvary Mission Church for helping troubled couples; fourth, a description of the beliefs and values of traditional Korean
marriage; and, fifth, a catalogue of the tensions with which Christian couples often struggle.

Calvary Mission Church: An Overview of Its Ministry

This section begins with an overview of the situation. It will include a survey of Calvary Mission Church, examine how its ministry came to be established, what slogans it uses for promoting its marriage and family ministry, and what its motivation is.

Survey of Calvary Mission Church and Its Establishment

The neighborhood surrounding Calvary Mission Church (CMC) is a heavily populated, Korean immigrant district in Los Angeles, California. It lies four miles south-east of Hollywood.\(^1\) A demographic profile of Koreatown (often abbreviated as “K-town”) contributes information needed to help understand this group of middle-aged people. The church is in a neighborhood in the mid-Wilshire district of the city of Los Angeles, and K-town is home to a population of 345,882. The median age is 36, which is higher than that of the general population of Los Angeles County (averaging 32 years of age). People 18 to 64 years of age account for almost half of all the Korean immigrants who live in K-town.\(^2\) The US Census Bureau reports, “The neighborhood is known for its many commercial and residential mid and high towers, Asian high fashion boutiques,


\(^2\) U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, Summary File 2 (SF 2) and Summary File 4 (SF 4), http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/DatasetMainPageServlet (accessed April 19, 2009). This website shows data about Koreans’ general, social, economic, housing characteristics in Koreatown, in the city of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California.
and holding the largest concentration of nightclubs and 24-hour businesses and restaurants in Southern California.\(^3\)

On September 7, 2003, Calvary Mission Church was established at Church Lane in West Los Angeles. At that time, it included only four family members. One year later, it moved to 1543 W. Olympic Boulevard in Koreatown, Los Angeles, with thirteen members. These thirteen members prayed for church growth for forty days. An “Upper Room Meeting” led by the senior pastor, Jin Chang, and two lay leaders was initiated. All of the teams focused on Bible study, evangelism, seeking and training new disciples, and building a community of love in the church.

In January 2005, the core of the spiritual ministry, “The Discipleship Training Program,” started with four groups for adults and one group for college-age people. The senior pastor Jin (then in his late forties) realized that older people (those in their fifties and sixties) were growing in number and were interested in the church’s small-group Bible study. Some of them were divorced people, and some were struggling with marital conflicts. The focus of the Bible study began to shift to allow its members to open up, to share their painful experiences, and to receive counseling for their emotional problems.

In May 2005, the church changed the “Discipleship Training Program” to the “Marriage and Family Training Program” for KIB couples. The pastor and lay leaders passionately began to search for ways to help the members with their marriage problems. The church had invested a large portion of its finances in attracting boomers by using Korean news media: AM 1650Khz “Radio Seoul” radio broadcasting and JSTV (Jesus

\(^3\) “Koreatown, Los Angeles, California.”
Satellite Television Broadcasting). Because of this publicity, many Korean immigrants, primarily first-generation immigrants in the Los Angeles area, learned about the CMC and began to attend.

Two Slogans for Promoting Marriage and Family Ministry

CMC has two slogans, which reflect the church’s philosophy regarding marriage ministry. The first slogan is, “If the married life of a couple changes, the church will be changed!” The second slogan is, “Lord, let me create my marriage to be holy!” On September 4, 2005, CMC celebrated its third anniversary and published these two slogans to signify its emphasis on the recovery of marriage and family life.

The staff members and I discovered that, during a period of church growth, we needed to change the negative thoughts within many KIB couples. They particularly needed to overcome the belief that they could not do anything positive, and replace it with the belief that they can do everything through Jesus Christ (Phil 4:13). This was one of principle ideas for promoting church growth. However, we discovered that the couples’ negative thoughts were caused by their conflictive married lives. We determined that the marital life of each of the members affected the atmosphere of the church as a whole. This insight motivated the creation of the first slogan, “If the married life of a couple changes, the church will be changed!”

In considering the second slogan, “Lord, let me create my marriage to be holy,” I discerned that God’s purpose for Christian marriage is not pursuing happiness, but transforming us to be holy in our marriages. The goal is that all the couples in the church change their concern for a happy marriage to concern for a holy marriage. If the purpose
of marriage is simply to enjoy an infatuation and make two people happy, then they would have to get a new marriage every two or three years. By thinking of one’s spouse as a pilgrim who is going to heaven, each person needs to find the providence of God for daily strength, even in the midst of a crippled marital life.

The Motivation of CMC to Equip Couples in Conflict

In the small group meetings led by church staff members, there were many questions, which were asked repeatedly. These questions brought the groups to a turning point, showing that the group meetings needed to change from an exclusive focus on Bible study towards discussion focused on marriage and family issues.

There were many serious confessions and questions raised by husbands and wives in conflict. Consider this example:

Pastor, I feel a limitation on my ability to be patient with my wife who was obedient to my words in Korea but is now talking back to me in America. She hurts my feelings, and I feel inclined to go back to Korea, if only I had a chance.

Couples who had unforgiveness in their hearts often confided secrets to me, saying things such as, “Surely, I know about forgiveness, but it is not easy to forgive my partner’s wrong behavior.” Some individuals asked me, “Why does God command me to just forgive and love my partner? Why must I do this?” Some express doubt, saying, “I cannot forget my bad feelings in relating to my husband/wife; how I can forget past, painful reproaches?” In other cases, spouses often asked, “How long will my patience last? My husband or wife explodes easily and is not willing to reconcile. This anger often destroys our marital relationship.” During the discussions, some deacons confessed, “When we come to church on Sunday, we are indeed often feeling deeply guilty and
sometimes have not felt reconciled for a long time, even though we seemed to repent for our sinful thoughts or matrimonial quarrels.” During counseling sessions, troubled husbands and wives often asked me such questions as, “Pastor, tell me how I can live in peace, without a wall of separation between us? I would like to live with my spouse in understanding, acceptance, and intimacy.”

There is another reason Calvary Mission Church offers couples a strategy for resolving conflicts. KIB couples are concerned with keeping their marriages healthy, and some look for local churches that can provide an effective and biblical program that can potentially help improve their marriages. Amy Hanson notes the importance of church ministry for Baby Boomers struggling at a time late in life, “Imagine the yet-to-be-discovered ministries that would reach out to people who are hurting. We need to be leaders that raise the expectation of how older adults are to spend their later years.”

CMC seeks to cater to the KIBs’ needs, interests, and burdens. As KIBs search for meaning and purpose in their married lives, CMC can give them a chance to return to the church by recognizing and working with their present issues and desires. David Gallagher reports that the boomers, many of whom avoided church attendance during their twenties, are coming back in their forties and fifties, bringing with them their needs to talk and share both their good and bad feelings and experiences in life.

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4 Amy Hanson, *Baby Boomers and Beyond: Tapping the Ministry Talents and Passion of Adults over Fifty* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 18. She points out on page 48 a critical problem in the leadership of today’s churches, “‘Passive leadership’ sits back and waits for the unchurched to come to the church or for problems to go away.” In the other sense, CMC needs to be innovative enough to plan ministries that meet the day-to-day needs of both the membership and the unchurched KIBs.

churches in Los Angeles, CMC is designed to move KIBs from the pursuit of self-centered self-fulfillment to the biblical understanding of God-centered self-fulfillment.

Considering all these inquiries and needs, it is necessary for KIB couples at CMC to understand how to practice specific biblical teachings at home, particularly forgiveness. They need to find a program to show them how to resolve marital conflicts and promote more a healthy and happy mid-life marriage. This is why CMC feels compelled to contribute a forgiveness model for troubled couples in their marriages.

**Korean Immigrant Baby Boomers in Los Angeles**

Considering that Korean immigrant Boomer couples and divorced singles who have the potential to remarry account for a large portion (61.6%) of the CMC congregation, it is essential to understand who the KIB’s are, as well as their role and influence within the church.

**Defining Korean Immigrant Baby Boomers**

Generational groupings are commonly defined by some major event or attribute they have in common, even though their exact birth dates and age ranges may differ. Richard Peace explains that each generation has a time span: approximately eighteen to twenty-four years, depending on the relationships and communication within it.⁶

According to the US Census Bureau in 2006, the population born between 1946 and 1964 is commonly grouped together and referred to as “the Baby-boom generation.” This

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⁶ Peace adds that Generation X was born between 1965 and 1983. In 2008, they were 25 to 43 years old. The Millennial Generation was born between 1984 and 2002. In 2008, they were 24 years old and younger. Richard Peace, “Reinventing Evangelism” (class lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, October 23, 2008).
generation is distinguished by the dramatic increase in birth rates following World War II. Boomers comprise what is seen as one of the largest generations in U.S. history. Their population in 2006 totaled an estimated 78.0 million and comprised 26.1 percent of the total US population. Robert Wuthnow also adds, “Baby Boomers are often defined as people born between 1946 to 1964 because there was a noticeable bulge in the annual birth rate during these years.” As of 2010, Boomers were between 46 and 64 years old.

In the case of KIB’s, their age range may be slightly different from that of American boomers. Soon after World War II, on June 25, 1950, the Korean War began. This required Koreans to face another war, this time between South and North Korea. Most families were extremely frustrated and scattered. Much of the population faced incredible pain and agony. Because of this, the boomer generation of Koreans is generally calculated to include those born between 1950 and 1968, including a larger portion of younger people—those between forty-two and sixty years old as of 2010.

Motives for Korean Boomers’ Immigration

Korean Boomers’ desire to leave their country is largely the result of a careful assessment of circumstances and conditions in both Korea and the United States. From my observations in Los Angeles, four considerations are the most important. These include: politics, concern with the security of their families, economic factors, and


educational opportunities for their children and themselves. To some, one particular issue is paramount, while others are motivated by a combination of reasons.

The first set of factors motivating Koreans (the parents of the boomers) to leave Korea and immigrate to the United States were political repression, instability in the government, and a dislike of the military-dominated, authoritarian regime of Park Chung Hee during the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, there was also their concern for security and peace. South Korea was continually threatened by Communist North Korea. Many immigrants stated that the United States symbolized stability, security, peace, and political calm, which offered psychological comfort, especially for those with growing children.

Family invitation for the boomers was another factor in their decision to immigrate to America. “This process of family reunion through invitation began with the liberalization of the U.S. immigration law in 1965.”10 Some immigrants came to America simply to be reunited with their relatives. A woman in Los Angeles who runs a small business explains her reasons for coming to America: “I am fifty-one years old and was divorced in Korea a few years ago. I have my parents and two sisters who live in Los Angeles. I became so lonely in Korea; now I am just happy with my family.”

To those people who seek economic advancement, according to In-Jin Yoon’s report, “…the appeal of economic opportunities in the United States was the dominant

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Since the opportunities for female professionals were restricted in the traditional, gender-segregated society of Korea, during the past ten to thirty years, women living in Korea were likely to suffer from gender inequality and discrimination in practically every institution. Such women are eager to find a place where the gender barrier in the workplace, and in society in general, is less pronounced. The United States presents an attractive choice for them.

The fourth most frequently mentioned reason for immigrating is education. Many Korean professionals—medical doctors, engineers, researchers, college professors, nurses, and others—came to America with the intention of studying in American universities and then returning to Korea. However, many of them remained in the United States. The results of immigrants’ efforts and sacrifices on behalf of their children’s education are widely regarded as a measure of success in the Korean community.

**Characteristics of Korean Immigrant Boomers**

KIB’s, now in their fifties, have distinctive identities and features. While persons born before 1939 (older adults) are focused on group or institutional goals, their families, and the pursuit of success in their careers, persons born between 1946-1964 (Boomers) are focused on individual goals and the pursuit of success—career and goals modified by inner fulfillment. Many of the boomers discovered that their music, most notably rock and roll, was another expression of their generational identity. Transistor radios allowed teenagers to listen to the Beatles and Korean folk songs. However, Boomers are also

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generally characterized as having economic power, being goal-oriented, in addition to also frequently being lonely, sad, and bored with life.

KIB’s are notable as strong social leaders (e.g., presidents of political and social organizations in Korean society), as those who take economic initiative (small business owners) in the Korean community, and even as leaders in their Korean local churches (elders). This so-called “boomer power” is why marketing companies, political parties, and educational institutions are seeking to understand the power and peculiarities of this now middle-aged group.

Another feature of KIB’s is goal orientation. Many of these people are reaching their goals of owning property, a central feature of the American dream. Lauren Lee confirms the reports of Korean boomer generations’ diligence in labor, saying: “Korean immigrant labor helped build this nation’s wealth. From the turn of the century to today, from sugar plantations to Silicon Valley, Americans of Korean descent have worked for others and for themselves.”\(^\text{13}\) According to Documents for Small Business and Professionals, “They (referring to Korean boomer generations) have a vision in life that they need to follow. That is why when KIB’s reaches retirement age, they are already

\(^{12}\) Win Arn and Charles Arn, Catch the Age Wave: A Handbook for Effective Ministry with Senior Adults (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1993), 33. Though the researchers were American, the same characteristics are seen in Koreans who live in Korean and those who have immigrated to America.

\(^{13}\) Lauren Lee, Cultures of America: Korean Americans (North Bellmore, NY: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 1995), 66.
career satisfied and gratified with what they have in life.”

We can say, in a positive sense, that KIB’s are regarded as achievers. KIB’s are also often somewhat lonesome. Some are preparing for their children to leave home. Others have already seen their children leave as a result of marriage or pursuing a college education. Judith and Jack Balswick add that Boomers may be relieved that they are no longer responsible for their adult children, but they are also likely to be conflicted and saddened by the separation. This lonesomeness applies to KIB’s as well as to Americans. Young Lee Hertig says, “Once they (Korean immigrants baby-boomers) achieve the American dream, they find themselves with empty-nest syndrome or too much physical deterioration to enjoy what they have achieved.”

Even though KIB couples may have become small business owners, consultants, executives, managers, or well-known leaders, their mental or emotional pains caused by tiredness of marital relationship may persist, making this the worst time of their lives.

Some KIB’s report being bored or tired of life. In my observation from eighteen years of local church ministry in Los Angeles, some are still busy, but others who do not have specific professional jobs or positions feel bored. In Los Angeles, there are, of

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15 Judith Balswick and Jack Balswick, Families in Pain: Working through the Hurts (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1997), 104. This is a symptom of the empty nest syndrome, according to Judith and Jack Balswick. Our children leave home—whether it is with anger and disappointment over our inability to let them go, whether they leave with ecstatic joy, or whether they go with sadness and fear, it is their developmental destiny to leave. They also advise that children leaving home force their parents (that is, Boomers) to make drastic changes in their behavior, their lifestyle, and in the ways they relate to one another, 118.

course, many good restaurants and shopping malls. However, due to the language barrier, cultural differences, lack of information, and a life spent in long hours of hard work, some Boomers do not know where to go or how to enjoy the rest of their time. One fifty-nine-year-old man, a member of Calvary Mission Church, said with a sigh, “I have nothing to do and I do not have any idea where to go after work; so sometimes I go gambling or go out to have a drink.”

Accordingly, many KIB’s express a desire to use their remaining time to work toward a meaningful marriage. This is why Calvary Mission Church is concerned with assisting the boomers take care of their marriages. Arn and Arn emphasize the necessity of caring for the boomer generation in the church: “A church that has a strong Bible-teaching ministry will be well attended … particularly as the baby-boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) join their ranks.”17 This applies to KIB’s as well as American Boomers.

Beliefs and Values of Traditional Korean Marriage Informed by Confucianism

This next section discusses traditional Korean marriage and the effect of Confucianism upon it. KIB couples are caught in a struggle between traditional Korean marriage informed by Confucianism and the dominant culture of contemporary America. Such couples are in the middle of cultural transition, and this often results in misunderstandings and emotional pain.

17 Arn and Arn, Catch the Age Wave, 22.
To understand the beliefs and values of traditional Korean marriage, it is necessary to consider briefly the history of Korean Confucianism and the influence of its customs upon the marriages of KIB’s. Lauren Lee, speaking of the Confucian marriage tradition that influences older Koreans in America, says this:

Korean Americans, especially in the first generation, feel loyal to their heritage and to their families…. Michael Yoon has authority because he is the eldest son. His wife obeys him, his brother obeys him, and his wife must also obey his mother, because of the traditional Confucian system.18

The following section describes the beliefs and values of traditional Korean marriage informed by Confucianism, which influences this traditional family structure.

Description of Korean Confucianism

Confucianism is an ancient Chinese way of thought that has spread throughout much of East Asia—Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. One of the most substantial influences on Korean life was the introduction of Confucian thought as from China. Korean Confucianism is the form of Confucianism specifically developed in Korea.

When the Joseon Dynasty was established in Korea in the year 1392 A.D., Confucianism was introduced, and began to exert a powerful influence upon the Korean people. Confucianism was the primary system of belief about social duty and obedience amongst the scholarly yangban classes and generals.19 Confucian ideology is centered upon the concept of hierarchy as the basis for both family structure and government policy:

19 Ibid., 40.
…the Yi regime resorted to Chu His’s philosophy--a concept of political authenticity and a set of moral principles useful in the education of the people—because it promoted ascriptive values, such as loyalty to one’s ruler and filial piety to one’s parents and hierarchical distinctions between husband and wife, elder and younger brother, friend and friend.  

However, it was not until the sixteenth century that the Confucianism of Chu His came to prevail as the state ideology and started to define the relationships and roles among people, as well as society’s moral regulation. This occurred under the guidance of the country’s two most prominent Confucian scholars—Yi Hwang (1501-1570) and Yi I (1536-1584).

According to the APC (Asian-Pacific Connections), Confucianism provides a simple guide for ordering the family and society:

…The five moral disciplines to govern the five human relationships were the following: Justice and righteousness should mark the relations between sovereign and subject; There should be proper rapport between father and son; Separation of function between husband and wife; the younger should give precedence to the elder; and Faith and trust should reign over relationships between friends.

Confucius believed that social order, peace, and harmony could be achieved if every person knew his or her proper place in society and upheld the responsibilities of that place. The obligation of the ruling person is to show respect and honor to the person he or she directs. A harmonious society is the goal under such set rules and roles. In all familial relations, the husband/father, as a patriarch, is supreme within the family.

20 Eui-young Yu and Earl H. Philips, eds., Religions in Korea: Beliefs and Cultural Values (Los Angeles, CA: Center for Korean-American and Korean Studies, California State University, 1982), 100. In the book, one of editors, Chai-Sik Chung, argues that Confucianism formed the basis for a rational political system of the new dynasty—Yi Song-gye in 1392. The Yi regime adopted the ideal of the governmental structure of the Chou in China (Chou li).

Confucius taught that age brings wisdom, so therefore, the older a person is, the more honored is his or her place in ancestor worship. Confucius preached that people should *always* look to the past and the ways of their ancestors as the example for solving current problems.

As a basis for government and administration, Confucian teachings have, over time, become less rigidly followed. However, after so many centuries of indoctrination in these tenets, Koreans can hardly be said to have discarded the customs, habits, and thought patterns derived from the system:

Today, the legacy of Confucianism remains a fundamental part of Korean society, shaping the moral system, the way of life, social relations between old and young, husbands and wives, high culture, and is the basis for much of the legal system.22

Beliefs Involved in the Traditional Korean Marriage

Traditional Korean marriage culture is heavily influenced by Confucianism. From the perspective of Confucian philosophy, one of the purposes of marriage is the cultivation of virtue, which is largely defined by fulfilling one’s proper role in society. As an expression of how deeply ingrained this way of thinking is within traditional Asian culture, consider: “The Chinese character for ‘woman’ shows a female figure sitting at home; the Chinese character for ‘man’ is a combination of ‘field’ and ‘labor.’”23 As a woman’s role is defined as her sitting at home, she *must* obey the orders of her husband.

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23 http://ieas.berkeley.edu/cks/ (accessed June 2010). This resource excerpts from: “The Legacy Lingers On: Korean Confucianism and the Erosion of Women’s Rights” (Berkeley, CA: Center for Korean Studies, University of California, Berkley, n.d.). Korea bordered on China for thousands of years, and so Koreans have used the Chinese characters for some specific words. Most KIB’s learned Chinese characters in their middle and high school.
Likewise, the man’s role is defined as working outside, with him making money and directing his family. Husbands and wives must keep these moral practices to show they value each other as human beings. To do otherwise is extremely disrespectful.

The position of women within Confucianism can be viewed at three levels, known as the “Honor of the Three Submissions.” In the husband-wife relationship, the wife was always in a submissive position, and absolute obedience was regarded as one of the important female virtues. “A wife was expected to submit to her father before marriage, to her husband after marriage, and to her son after the husband’s death.” Women during the Chosun Dynasty were confined to the home. Nevertheless, the position of women, at least those with children, was not one completely devoid of power and respect. For just as women occupied a subordinate position in relation to men, children were subordinate to their parents and were required to revere their mothers as well as their fathers.

In addition, there were the so-called “Seven Commandments of Married Women.” These commandments were: first, be obedient to the husband’s family, especially to the elders; second, do not be jealous--do not fight with the husband’s family; third, bear the husband sons; fourth, do not commit obscene acts; fifth, do not chatter or gossip; sixth, do not catch malignant diseases; and seventh. and do not steal from others. If a wife violated any of these injunctions, she could be divorced as a punishment.

25 Ibid., 45-46.
Korean society considered divorce and remarriage deviant and problematic family events. Divorce was a severe condemnation and brought unbearable disgrace, not only to the woman but also to her family. Traditionally, the power differential between men and women was so drastic that:

…only the husband had the right to divorce his wife; if he did so, she had to be expelled from her family-in-law according to the traditional marital code that held the husband's authority and absolute power to govern his wife.  

Values of Traditional Korean Marriage

Traditional Korean marriage is the basic component of social life, and its perpetuation has been of paramount importance under patriarchal Confucianism. Values and attitudes of traditional Korean marriage are perhaps best illustrated by contrasting them with those of the dominant US culture.

First of all, in a traditional Korean marriage, which takes family very seriously and embraces Confucianism, married couples regard themselves as members of the husband’s larger extended family group. The marriage as an entity takes precedence over its individual members, and the family group is inseparably identified with the clan. A marital relationship is not solely or primarily a relationship between spouses, but involves the extended family as well. The most important function of family members is to maintain and preserve the household within the traditional Confucian structure.

Secondly, another value of Korean marriage is obedience to elders, in contrast to the autonomy which is assumed and valued within the marriages of mainstream

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American culture. Since age is respected in traditional Korean culture, growing old has privileges for both women and men. Respect for elders, particularly parents and grandparents, is a fundamental basis of traditional Korean marriage values.

Thirdly, the Korean husband’s family is ranked in a hierarchy, while all relatives are equal in American’s marriage. Especially, “…the eldest son, as the family leader, generally inherited the family estates. The other sons are expected to live in separate residences after their marriages.”27 These relationships are characterized by benevolence, authority, and obedience. Based on Confucian values, families observe strict gender differentiation in married life. A wife would sacrifice herself completely to serve her husband and family in an exemplary manner.

In addition, the value of love in traditional Korean marriage also differs from that of Americans. According to the reports of the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, Asians marry first, then love. Their marriage is the beginning of a love affair. Love is an indissoluble bond, and their love is mute. In contrast, Americans love first, then they marry. Their marriage is happy and full of a romance. Love is a contract; and their love is vocal.28

Don Locke, speaking of KIB marriage, explains that there is a strong cultural emphasis on suppression of intense feelings, obedience to family authority, and

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27 “Traditional Korean Families.”

28 “Asian and Pacific Islanders,” National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/marriage-and-culture/asian-and-pacific-islanders1 (accessed July 2010). According to API’s overview of marriage in the Asian American Culture, Asian immigrants’ adaptation to the United States has affected the family system. Especially, it is a fact that the increased economic role of Asian wives and the associated decline in their husbands’ economic power and social status have contributed to marital conflicts.
subjugation of individuality to the benefit of the marriage. Korean couples are less extroverted than Caucasians. Korean immigrant couples appear less autonomous, more dependent, less ready to express impulses, more law-abiding, less assertive, and more reserved. The mainstream culture of the United States emphasizes the importance of the individual first. However, Korean traditional couples emphasize family, tradition, and the dignity of each.

These influences of Confucianism cling tenaciously to the marriages of Korean boomer immigrants. Having brought the beliefs and values of traditional Korean marriage to Los Angeles, KIB couples, especially first generation boomers, face innumerable challenges to their married lives as they cling stubbornly to Korean traditions, which are inconsistent with current American egalitarian values. Some KIB couples that I have met in my past experience in Los Angeles often confront severe challenges and tensions.

**Tensions in Korean Immigrant Marriages When Challenged by American Marriage Customs**

Korean married couples of the boomer generation who have inherited values from Confucianism cannot remain members of the traditional community and simultaneously follow the new values of American individualism, freedom, and egalitarianism. Therefore, Korean married couples need to understand how marriage in America is changing and realize that this consideration can help them make a proper adjustment in their own lives.

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Changing Gender Relations in Marriage

There are two primary issues that cause tensions in KIB marriage in Los Angeles. The first is the economic power of Korean wives. Tension in KIB couples rises with the gradual acquisition of economic power by wives. The second issue is the wives’ challenge to the decision-making power of the husband within their marriage. Change in the decision-making power in KIB couples can lead to more tension between KIB couples.

Economic Power of Korean Wives

Most Korean immigrant women have joined the workforce in America. About 80 percent of the full-time working wives have dependent children in their households. Paul Amato reports that a large portion of American women are in the workforce and that the percentage of wives earning 51 percent or more of the family income rose from 4 percent in 1980 to 12 percent in 2000—a threefold increase. The American public now views women’s economic contributions to family life as being not only acceptable, but also desirable. The rise in the employment rate of Korean immigrant wives and the

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30 Jo, *Korean Immigrants and The Challenge of Adjustment*, 128. He explains that “Wives’ acquired economic power and their assuming some of the traditional male responsibility can become a major source of friction, especially when the husbands feel they are losing their authority, power, and respect in their family.”

31 Jo, *Korean Immigrants and The Challenge of Adjustment*, 127. Moon Jo says, “The immigrant husbands are largely unprepared to recognize their wives’ earning power, but then their wives begin to demand a voice in the family decision-making process, ordinarily reserved for husbands, they are stunned.” These are challenging issues that KIB couples are struggling with.


increase in their income has presumably benefited their marriages by lowering the risk of economic hardship.

On the other hand, Amato argues, “The increase in wives’ labor-force participation, however, also may have had negative consequences for marriage.”34 Due to the economic independence of Korean immigrant wives in America, there is often tension within marriages. Some wives still expect their husbands to behave as the same strong, powerful patriarchs they were expected to be in traditional Korean culture. However, such economically-independent wives are no longer willing to play the submissive, subservient, obedient role of the traditional Korean wife. Maintaining these two mutually-contradictory values simultaneously is a great challenge for both husbands and wives.

Gender roles as defined by Confucian tradition are challenged by the wife’s earning power and financial independence. The wife’s elevation in power transforms the couple’s marital dynamic, and this adds to the stress of acculturation. Further exacerbating the problem, despite external lifestyle pressures, the beliefs and values regarding marriage held by KIB’s do not change easily. Within the changing gender role of power dynamics, the old patriarchal values of many couples co-mingle unpredictably with the new. Therefore, the dual income structure affects the power dynamic and causes gender relations within the couples to change. No longer does the husband have a monopoly.

Challenge to the Husband’s Decision-making Power within Marriage

Economic resources are a basis for marital power, and KIB wives often expect to have more decision-making power when they make substantial financial contributions to the marriage. As an example, the following KIB couple’s story depicts the difficulty of a husband whose wife’s earning power exceeds his own. Mr. K returned home one day and found a new grand piano in his living room. He was very surprised and asked his wife what had happened. She answered, “I bought that piano for our daughter.” The wife had never consulted with her husband before making the purchase. She replied, “I decided to buy Elise a piano because she needed one.” Mr. K had to no choice but to live with the presence of the grand piano. He had to see it every day, experiencing it as a reminder of his own lack of power within his own home. A deep sense of powerlessness struck him in a very emotional and negative way. His wife’s elevation in power had transformed the marital dynamic of the couple.

According to the teachings of Korean Confucianism, a husband is supposed to make decisions in an exemplary manner. Traditionally, a wife would completely obey her husband as well as his family. This is obviously in stark contrast to the egalitarianism of the American marriage culture. Egalitarianism is an essential foundation for emotional closeness between American spouses. According to this perspective, in the long run, negotiation (and disagreement) between equal spouses tends to increase marital satisfaction and cohesion by allowing spouses to reach mutually acceptable (rather than one-sided) solutions. John M. Gottman, describing American couples, claims, “Asymmetric power—when husbands have more influence than wives—is more common
among dissatisfied than satisfied couples.” Of course, even in the biblical view, Colossians 3:10-11 says that there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, and freeman.

Nevertheless, there are women who have embraced nontraditional views more quickly than men—a discrepancy likely to create conflicting expectations between husbands and wives. Some Korean immigrant wives who have adopted less traditional (and more egalitarian) gender attitudes have become less satisfied with their marriages. It is difficult to say whether the growing acceptance of nontraditional, egalitarian gender attitudes has improved or reduced the mean level of marital quality among KIB couples in America.

Changing from Institutional to Individualistic Marriage

There is tension between the values of Korean immigrant marriages informed by the Confucian marriage system and the values of contemporary American marriages. The emphasis in the older Korean tradition was on commitment to marriage as an institution. Married Korean boomers feel they should stay married for life because marriage is a sacred institution. They believe in loyalty to the family rather than to the individual. This contrasts with contemporary American marriage, which has changed commitment to the marriage into a contract for self-fulfillment, the rights of individuals, and personal happiness.  

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36 Jack O. Balswick and Judith K. Balswick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 85. Balswick and Balswick assert, “Since they believed that they had a right to personal happiness, this value took precedence over
In the past, once married, Korean spouses were expected not only to conform to traditional standards of behavior, but also to sacrifice their personal lives, if necessary, for the sake of the marriage. Through the Korean marriage, men and women participated in an institution that was larger than themselves. For these reasons, divorce was frowned upon and was allowed only if one partner had seriously violated the marriage contract.

However, the form of today’s marriages of KIB’s is changing, becoming based primarily on emotional bonds between the two partners, as is the case in American marriages. Paul Amato, quoting an argument from Burgess, posits that American marriage is in a process of transition from a social institution to a relationship based on companionship. The industrialization and urbanization of the United States weakens the institutional basis of marriage. In the modern marriages in America, Balswick and Balswick say that “…continued commitment is contingent on self-fulfillment. Indeed, one of the main criteria which sociologists now use to measure marital success is happiness.”

Korean immigrant couples in America have also begun to emphasize love as a personal right within marriage. The rise in the importance of love (and the decline in the importance of strictly institutional qualities) reflects a movement away from traditional

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37 Amato quotes Burgess’ terminology, “institutional marriage—a fundamental unit of social organization, which is a formal status regulated by social norms, public opinion, law, and religion.” Amato, et al., Alone Together, 12. Amato agrees with Burgess’ argument that marriage is in a process of transition from a social institution to a relationship based on companionship.

38 Balswick and Balswick, The Family, 86.
social roles and toward a more companionate relationship. Amato, describing marriage in contemporary America, supports this conclusion, saying that, “In 1939, of 18 characteristics (of marriage), women ranked love in fifth place. But by the 1970s (and continuing through the 1990s) women ranked love as the most important characteristic.”

No longer comprising a set of norms and social obligations that are widely enforced, American marriage today is a voluntary relationship that individuals can make and break at will. In an individualistic marriage, love is, of course, necessary to form a union, but these unions are successful only to the extent that they meet each partner’s innermost psychological and self-centered needs.

The difference between the vaguely defined value of love and individual fulfillment in Korean traditional marriage, in contrast to the centrality of these values in American marriage, gives rise to considerable problems in KIB marriages as well as American marriages. If partners’ own needs are not met, then spouses will dispose of the union and seek happiness elsewhere. Many individuals will probably be tempted to resist what may (to them) seem like turning back the clock and surrendering the individual liberties that contemporary marriages provide, for in modern times, almost all spouses expect marriage to provide a high level of personal/self-fulfillment. Nonetheless, the concept of a covenant marriage in the Bible represents an effort in this direction—“So

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39 Amato, et al., *Alone Together*, 15. Amato argues that evidence for the continuing shift from institutional to companionate marriage comes from attitude surveys of university students. One study, based on data from 1939 to the 1990s, has found changes in college students’ rankings of the most important characteristics of a future spouse.
they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Mt 19:6).40

In a situation guaranteed to include conflict, particularly between the institutional and individual concerns, it is essential to develop the ability to forgive. Therefore, given this situation, forgiveness is essential to resolve conflict between the two dimensions of marriage—the institutional and the individual. Without forgiveness, various marital conflicts will continue to underlie much of the tension found in current Korean immigrant boomer marriage relationships. KIB spouses will confront the basic dilemma of pursuing self-centered happiness versus mutual forgiveness, bestowing thoughtful consideration for each other.

In this chapter, Calvary Mission Church, its ministry, and a description of the marriages of KIB’s have been introduced as a cultural context. This chapter has explained the motives of the Calvary Mission Church establishment and why this church has made marriage ministry its main focus. Centered in Los Angeles, CMC has been able to observe the characteristics of KIB’s immigrant and marriage lives. In their transition to the American culture, KIB's struggle to maintain the marital customs of their traditional cultural background, founded in Confucian values. The immigrant marriage life of KIB couples can be understood by further examining the two tensions of changing gender relations and shifting from institutional to individualistic values KIB's face when challenged by American marriage customs. The following chapter will present

40 All Scripture quotations in this paper will be taken from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.
challenging issues that Korean immigrant couples face and describe the conflicts they often experience in their married life in Los Angeles.
CHAPTER 2

CHALLENGES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION AMONG KOREAN IMMIGRANT BOOMER COUPLES IN LOS ANGELES

Most Korean immigrant boomer couples optimistically embark upon a lifelong commitment to each other. At some point in their married life, conflict invariably arises to cloud their sunny prospects. Initially, their conflicts are fairly minor, and they easily forgive each other by drawing on the reservoir of good will that God seems to give most newlyweds.¹ Years later, however, when the reservoir has dried up, their conflicts become more intense, and their painful wounds become much more difficult to resolve.

In this chapter, four challenging subjects will be discussed. Firstly, the three most important conflict issues among KIB couples will be presented. Secondly, the chapter will discuss the importance of having couples rethink the interactional dynamics operating within their marriage. This method offers a way to discover why they are in conflict, especially as this relates to the roles of each spouse, and their styles of adaptation and cohesion. Thirdly, destructive thought patterns will be discussed, which invariably serve as hidden factors to challenge KIB couples in conflicts. Lastly, it is necessary for them who will not forgive their “unforgivable” partner to rediscover the

willingness to do so. Only then will they come to understand why forgiveness is so crucial in resolving marital conflicts.

**Three Conflict Issues Which Challenge Korean Baby Boomers Marriages**

Perpetual disagreements and conflicts are a reality for some KIB couples, and such conflicts are a source of ongoing agony. Researching American couples, Gottman and Silver say, “Almost 70 percent of marital conflicts are perpetual. The majority of marital problems fall into these three categories—69 percent, to be exact. Couples are still arguing about precisely the same issue.”\(^2\) According to this, only three out of ten marital disagreements will have a tidy solution. Some couples confess that the marriage itself is an annoyance, and that they believe their marital conflicts will be a part of their lives forever.

Reflecting on my observation in the counseling ministry, the marital conflicts of KIB couples often fall into three categories: loyalty, caring, and connection issues. Scott Stanley says about marital conflict: “It (marital conflict) is the presence of certain negative patterns that can destroy a relationship.”\(^3\) Thus, once a couple can eliminate these three key negative patterns, or at least diminish them, the positive aspects of the marriage relationship can grow.

**The Loyalty Issue**

Loyalty is what is being asked for in questions such as: “Whose side you are on, anyway?” Some older couples of KIB hesitate to express loyalty to one another, even


though they know that their partner is seeking it. This negative pattern is influenced by Confucianism, which has historically emphasized the importance of the husband’s family, has ignored the wife’s rights, and has clashed with egalitarianism.

Conflicts involving the wife and the mother-in-law are commonly assumed to be an inherent characteristic of Korean households. Korean immigrants, especially those of the first generation (mothers-in-law) feel loyal to their heritage and to their families. Lauren Lee says that in the traditional Confucian system, wives must obey their husbands’ mother. In modern America, (and to some degree in modern Korea), some of these traditional values have fallen out of favor in the mainstream culture, but men are still favored and daughters-in-law serve their mothers-in-law without question.  

In-law arguments are not about couples’ parents, but about the loyalty issue. A wife may actually love her mother-in-law, but may still resent the priority the mother-in-law seems to have in their marriage. The husband may frequently interpret such resentment as meaning his wife does not like his mother. He may grumble at his wife and insist, “My mother is likable, and my wife ought to like her.” Such arguments will go nowhere because the disagreement was never really about his mother.

The conflict is not about whether the husband’s mother should be welcomed, but whether she should come first. KIB women who especially value loyalty are sometimes vulnerable to doubts and suspicious thoughts: “Does my husband forsake all others to put me in my rightful and first place?” She may challenge her husband as to whose side he is

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4 Lee, Cultures of America, 28.
on. Tim and Joy Downs advise, “For a loyal marriage relationship to be formed, there must be a cutting of ties and a shifting of priorities.”

I believe an attitude shift is needed in KIB’s marriages – away from traditional male-domination towards the more egalitarian marriage of contemporary America. Reflecting upon Genesis 2:24, the *New American Standard Bible* says, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” God’s design for Christian marriage is that it be a covenant of spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical unity in which the souls and hearts of both partners are joined before the Lord and with him, without any interference between husband and wife.

The Caring Issue

It is a great source of encouragement when KIB couples are willing to care for each other. Conversely, when they are not willing to do so, it may be a common source of conflict. Downs and Downs say, “Caring means feeling and exhibiting concern and empathy for others.” KIB women expect the American style of love expression, while KIB men are often very reluctant to display it. Since concerns about a lack of caring are expressed far more often by women than by men, the expectation of KIB women challenges the traditional attitude of KIB husbands, which presumes expressing the emotions of love is not proper.

In Korean immigrant marriage, the longer the marriage lasts, the wider the gap in perspectives on caring often grows. The more emotionally-oriented partner may carry the

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6 Ibid., 88.
majority of the emotional life of the family, while the other partner approaches life in a more cognitive way. While, comparatively, KIB husbands are shy about expressing their emotions, their wives not only see this as the husbands’ problem, but are emotionally distressed by it. Wives often perceive the awkwardness and isolation that shyness brings, and they worry that their husbands’ shyness is a possible indicator of even more serious problems.

There seem to be more complaints from KIB women than from KIB men. Women say their husbands are not aware and do not initiate communication. This is the root of the caring conflict. Downs and Downs say, “Awareness to the mate is mental and emotional alertness, an attitude of attentiveness to the mate’s feelings and concerns. Initiative---the willingness to engage is what flows naturally from awareness.” Initiative is the willingness to engage their mate about problems. In my counseling ministry, I hear many women say that true caring leads to action, while husbands believe that caring simply involves concern.

KIB Husbands are concerned about the problems. However, caring is not just a form of awareness, but also needs to be followed by initiative. Downs and Downs spell out the difference between caring and conflict: “There are two mathematical principles that underlie most caring conflicts: Awareness + Initiative = Caring, and Awareness – Initiative = Conflict.”

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7 Downs and Downs, *The Seven Conflicts*, 89. The Downs explain, by analogy with *Proverbs* 27:23—“know well the condition of your flocks,” that flock-watching is the primary activity of a caring mate. They remind us that the partners should notice little things, like when the other is discouraged, or frustrated, or has had both legs amputated below the knee—and the spouse in pain does not want to have to tell the other.

8 Downs and Downs, *The Seven Conflicts*, 94. The Downs say that, in a healthy marriage, both husband and wife are motivated by a desire to please each other. Couples just want their efforts to be recognized and want to be appreciated.
The Connection Issue

Connection problems among KIB couples may be the most serious of their conflicts, and may underlie the others. A connection conflict makes it difficult to hear what the mate is saying. KIB couples often experience difficulty in finding a way to connect. Connection problems cause frustration and a desire to quit, even though they love each other. When this happens, their emotional pain and connection problems often cause them to withdraw from each other.

Problems arise when KIB couples have four different communication styles and four types of decision-making. The communication style can be a greater source of conflict than the exact words they use. Four types of decision-making often create conflicts for KIB couples because people will make choices that are unexpected and misunderstood by their partner.

Four Communication Styles

KIB partners often misunderstand what their partners say, and frequently argue. Such matters are further complicated by conflicting styles of communication. In such situations, when KIB spouses share a large amount of information, which includes news about immigration policies, education for their children, loans for house or business, information about the purchase of a house or car, and the like. When one mate is not concerned with these family issues, the other tends to be greatly involved with these matters. They need to understand four different communication styles in their conflictive marriage.

First, this section will examine the differences between the “interactive” versus “didactic” styles of communication. Conflict can occur when one person wants to speak,
and the other wants to interact. Many people are didactic communicators. Such people think of dialogue as a series of presentations—first you can talk, then I will talk. For didactic communicators, conversations are assumed to operate according to democratic principles of justice and fair play. In contrast, interactive communicators recognize no such rules. When dealing with an interactive communicator, the didactic partner will experience the partner as being rude and impatient. However, the other is not trying to be rude. From his or her perspective, such an interactive style is evidence of genuine interest and enthusiasm. Unfortunately, most KIB spouses have difficulty understanding a mate who uses a communication style different from their own.

KIB couples who experience problems with communication need to use clear messages, while simultaneously making efforts to understand their mate’s style. When they describe their own feelings, they can make themselves understood by accurately identifying the emotion. Some people express themselves in an aggressive manner that could be described as “attacking with their feelings,” essentially using emotions as a weapon. Mathew McKay, Patrick Fanning, and Kim Paleg say, “Clear messages separate observations, opinions, feelings, and needs. Contaminated messages mix or mislabel these components to create hurt and confusion.”9 Miscommunication leads to alienation.

There is also a distinction between “linear” versus “circular” communicators. Disagreements and tensions arise between “linear” communicators and those using what can be called a “circular style” of communication. Linear communicators like to take the shortest path to the goal. They want just the facts. In contrast, circular communicators take many detours, indirect routes, and travel down many redundant or alternative

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9 McKay, Fanning, and Paleg, Couple Skills, 60.
pathways in order to reach an eventual conclusion, often exploring all facets of a situation in detail during the process.

Some KIB couples who argue because of poor communication are not accustomed to using direct questions and answers. This often seems to be because they have been trained to think a direct and linear communication style signifies a lack of courtesy—a deeply-embedded persistence of Confucian attitudes. Others, more strongly influenced by mainstream American society, have learned a linear style of communication—stating the conclusion first, and stating the explanatory facts afterwards. Because of these differences, KIB couples often fall into conflict. Hence, the couples in conflicts must first clarify what they actually want to say within their own minds, and learn to use their own communication styles as effectively as possible.

A partner using a linear communication style cannot endure the seemingly pointless wandering of his or her circular partners, nor can the linear communicator accept what (to him or her) seems like the illogical and wasteful conversation patterns of the other. That is why the circular partners are so often interrupted by the linear communicators, frequently causing the circular communicators to respond with anger. Circular communicators criticize their linear spouses for seeming to be impatient, uncaring, and rude. As a result, the linear spouses blame their circular spouses. The Downs disclose the reason for conflicts in marriage, noting that “linear and circular communicators approach a discussion with different goals in mind: one wants conversation, but the other only wants information.”

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10 Downs and Downs, *The Seven Conflicts*, 136.
Four Types of Decision-Making

KIB couples can make various decisions and choices together each day. At such times, frustration can result when they make decisions in very different ways. Some mates tend to avoid making decisions together and live with disagreements, disappointments, and, worst of all, suppressed anger. KIB couples need to understand their mate’s decision-making types.

Firstly, there are two different approaches to making decisions: “intuitive” and “evidential” styles. Conflicts are generally caused when one (or both) spouses adopt an attitude of “my decision is obviously right and better than yours.” To one partner, who uses an evidential approach, a major decision is made by reading, researching, and gathering data. It does not matter to him or her that the partner’s certainty comes from an inner feeling. The evidential decision-maker believes that an objective evaluation of all the available evidence will provide the greatest possible chance of making a good decision. The intuitive decision maker will insist the mate’s evidential approach is unproductive because data can be manipulated and statistical data may be endless and exhausting. One partner will not listen to reason, while the other will not trust the mate’s intuitive inclination.

KIB spouses who feel that failure and vulnerability are weaknesses also strongly defend their positions and behavior. They feel threatened by a mate who disagrees with their point of view. They will be quick to assert their mate is wrong and to deny any mistakes on their own part. Of such people, Sherwood Lingenfelter and Marvin Mayers say, “It is essential for people to be right about an issue and to assert that others are wrong. Anything new or unusual is immediately suspect because it is not part of their
experience and opens them to uncertainty.” The couples are inclined to conceal their vulnerability and refuse to entertain alternative views or accept criticism.

Another relevant type of decision-making concerns what are referred to as the “decisive” and the “tentative” types. One Korean immigrant KIB woman, Mrs. H, complains, “Why does my husband always maintain an uncertain attitude and give hesitant answers?” Such a person will consider all options but hesitate to choose one, avoiding a final commitment and responsibility. Such behavior may cause many conflicts.

A decisive decision maker tends to concentrate on the decision itself. There is a sense of completion that comes with a final decision, as if to say, “Let us just decide, even if it means sacrificing money or quality.” In KIB marriages, the spouse who earns more money tends to have the decisive role. KIB wives, who previously had limited access to public life in Korea, have increased socioeconomic power in America. The dual-income structure affects a couple’s decision-making strategy, and therefore the marital dynamic changes. In the arena of decision making, sharply drawn gender roles based on Confucian tradition are challenged by the wife’s earning power and financial independence. Young Lee Hertig says, “Typically it requires more adjustment on the part of the husband than the wife. Various reactions and resistance to this change result.”

Unbalanced Interactional Dynamics of Marriage: Adaptability and Cohesion

Marital conflicts between KIB husbands and wives may have their source not only within individuals, but also in interactional dynamics. Jack and Judith Balswick’s

12 Downs and Downs, The Seven Conflicts, 140.
13 Hertig, Cultural Tug of War, 34.
perspective of family-system theory “views family life not merely as the sum total of the actions of all the individual members, but rather as the interactions of all family members operating as a unit of interrelated parts.” Family-system theory considers the interactional dynamics between family members. These dynamics can influence each member’s lifestyle, as well as the interpersonal dynamics within the family.

KIB couples face difficulties in their marriages because of the dysfunctional family systems within which they were raised. For effective conflict management, both partners must reconsider and acknowledge the family system that each has grown up within, and must try to find the balance between following the patterns of their family of origin and creating new patterns for their current family.

Understanding Adaptability and Cohesion

This section examines two additional dynamics related to marital conflicts: adaptability and cohesion. Marriages range from those with extremely low cohesion to those with extremely high cohesion. Some marriages display extremely low adaptability, while other show extremely high adaptability. Marriages at either extreme on either of these two dimensions tend to have many problems.

Considering both adaptability and cohesion in the family system can help delineate how each spouse has lived and grown up within his or her own family of origin. I find it helpful for conflicted KIB couples to understand the issues of adaptability and cohesion, to realize what part each plays in their lives, and how these dynamics should be understood in their current marriage.

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Defining Adaptability and Cohesion within Marriages

Adaptability is described as including leadership, discipline, negotiation, roles, and rules. Cohesion in the family system consists of emotional bonding, family involvement, and the marital relationship. In the Circumplex Model (figure 2.1), there are four levels of marriage cohesion. These range from extremely low to extremely high: (1) disengaged, (2) separated, (3) connected, and (4) enmeshed. The two moderate or balanced levels of cohesion have been labeled “connected” and “separated.”

There are also four levels of marriage adaptability, ranging from extremely low to extremely high: (1) rigid, (2) structured, (3) flexible, and (4) chaotic. The two moderate or balanced levels of adaptability have been labeled “structured” and “flexible.”

Figure 2.1. Adaptability and Cohesion within Marriages.

The two balanced levels for each dimension are hypothesized to be most viable for marriages, while the extreme areas are generally seen as more problematic. Sixteen distinct types of marital systems are identified by combining the four levels of the cohesion and four levels of the adaptability dimensions. The four corners represent four types of unbalanced marriages: combinations of disconnectedness or over-connectedness, with either inflexibility or over-flexibility. Four types in the mid-areas represent moderate marriages.

A central hypothesis derived from this model is that balanced marriages will function more adequately than extreme ones. This hypothesis is built on the assumption that marriages that are extreme on both dimensions will tend to have more difficulties coping with situational and developmental stress. A curvilinear relationship exists on the dimensions of cohesion and adaptability. That is, too little or too much cohesion or adaptability is dysfunctional. In marriages that are able to balance between these two extremes, couples seem to cope better.

Considering Adjustment in Family System

KIB couples can find a balance between adaptability and cohesion in their families. With regards to adaptability, leadership involves control exercised among family members. Strong leadership and highly controlling each other will lead to a rigid family, while unsuccessful control and erratic leadership will characterize the chaotic family. Discipline in the rigid family is strict with rigid consequences, while discipline in the chaotic family is lenient and ineffective. The balanced system has discipline that is democratic with negotiated consequences. Efforts for negotiation within the chaotic family are endless, and often include impulsive decisions. The rigid family has limited
negotiations, with all decisions determined by the couples. The role of each member is strictly defined in the rigid system, in contrast with the many role reversals and lack of role clarity in the chaotic system. Family regulations conducted by KIB couples are strictly enforced and unchanging in the rigid family, while inconsistently enforced and ever changing in the chaotic family.

With regards to cohesion, emotional bonding refers to the degree that family members experience closeness and loyalty. Jack and Judith Balswick say that in healthy families: “there is a feeling that ‘I am an individual and you are an individual; we are separate persons in this system. Though clearly distinct, we are still members of the same family.’”

In disengaged families, the members are individuated, but each one possesses an unhealthy degree of separateness from the others. The disengaged family will experience very little bonding and family loyalty while the enmeshed family will demand family loyalty. Enmeshed families may look close from the outside, but actually experience a false sense of intimacy. In KIB’s marital relationships, cohesion varies from extreme emotional separateness in the disengaged system to extreme emotional reactivity in the enmeshed system. Two challenging problems can occur: Excessive cohesion and insufficient cohesion.

**Excessive Cohesion**

Due to excessive cohesion between KIB’s, the spouses may have emotional hurts and chronic arguments. Excessive cohesion leads to marital misunderstandings and conflicts. Charles Kraft says the possibility of those unhealed, causative memories coming to the surface frightens people. Yet, in spite of attempts to suppress them, these

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15 Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 47.
memories alter a person’s present life, possibly engendering lack of control of one’s emotional reactions to certain events or people.\textsuperscript{16} Looking honestly into their hurtful marital relationship, the spouses can be described as being enmeshed and overly cohesive. Since each is partner is overly dependent upon the other, such spouses need to develop a sense of separate identities and individuality. In enmeshed KIB’s families, the whole family typically can be devastated and emotionally traumatized by problems of one member. In the case of the husband or wife who grew up within such an enmeshed family, he or she may try to take too much responsibility for his or her problems. Such people frequently feel the problems are their fault, and feel guilt and shame over this.

When KIB’s were young and being raised within a traditional Confucian Korean family, if one of their brothers or sisters did something wrong, the parents punished \textit{all} the siblings in the family, placing upon them the same collective responsibility. Kraft says: “In family-oriented societies, the making of major decisions is family-based. In an extended family, any major decision can involve quite a large number of people.”\textsuperscript{17} A person who has grown up within this type of family system is likely to lose his or her own perspective and sense of independence. KIB couples who were raised in such an enmeshed family system tend to unconsciously fall into making overly cohesive mistakes toward the partner.

\textsuperscript{16} Charles H. Kraft, \textit{Deep Wounds Deep Healing: Discovering the Vital Link between Spiritual Warfare and Inner Healing} (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1993), 72. Kraft stresses that a person who has damaged emotions and hurts from the past usually turns against himself or herself, resulting in self-rejection, self-hate, a sense of unworthiness and inadequacy. Such a person discovers hindrances to forgiveness (the person often experiences an inability to forgive themselves), recurring guilt, and an inability to accept forgiveness.

**Insufficient Cohesion**

The opposite extreme is a very low level of cohesion: disengagement. In disengaged KIB families, there is a lack of involvement, and family members will often hurt each other and will not contribute to, help, nor cooperate with each other. In times of personal crisis in a disengaged marriage, each spouse is likely to be indifferent, inattentive, and uninvolved. Charles Kraft emphasizes the importance of dealing with the past: “Ignoring or bypassing things allows them to fester and creates a point of attack for the Enemy. Being honest with oneself and with God is the only way to get through all of the emotional garbage that has piled up over the years.”

Motivated by an ineffective attempt to obtain a small amount of privacy or individuality, KIB couples may fall easily into this opposite extreme of insufficient cohesion in their married lives.

If a person grew up in such an inadequately cohesive family before marriage, then marries a mate who continuously and unconsciously uses the disengagement style and/or ignores his or her own emotions toward the mate, this is likely to lead to emotional trauma for both partners. Peter Scazzero says: “Ignoring our emotions is turning our back on reality…emotions are the language of the soul…in neglecting our intense emotions, we are false to ourselves.” People who experience disengagement and a low level of cohesion often have great difficulty resolving marital conflicts.

Therefore, the interactional dynamics of marriage—adaptability and cohesion—are essential and challenging issues for KIB couples. Working with these dynamics can

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19 Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ* (Nashville, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2006), 74. Scazzero argues that, if we ignore emotions, we will lose a wonderful opportunity to know people and even God. He also asserts, “Once those ‘buried alive’ emotions rose from the dead, I knew I could never go back to a spirituality that did not embrace emotional health.” Ibid., 74.
help them rethink the family system of their past, and better understand how they are responding to their present spouses. By understanding and facing up to the challenges, their marriage system will become more flexible and discerning about the source of present disagreements and conflicts.

**Destructive Thoughts of KIB Couples**

It is also necessary for KIB couples in conflicts to consider another factor—destructive thoughts—that complicate the process of conflict resolution. They can realize how these destructive thoughts can be obstacles to resolving conflicts. Archibald Hart points out, “Many unhappy people complain about their miserable feelings without realizing that they can change those feelings through healthier thinking.” Good thoughts result from a disciplined and deliberate effort, which is a habit of the heart and mind that one can learn.

Destructive thought patterns may be classified into two major categories: sinful thoughts and erroneous thoughts. Sinful thoughts have two features: self-centered desires and unmet demands toward the mate. Erroneous thoughts also have two aspects: an erroneous belief: “If only…” and a mistaken idea: “I am a victim.”

**Sinful Thoughts**

Some troubled KIB couples are envious and hostile. They cannot satisfy their lusts, and they fight and quarrel. Couples who live in the flesh cannot please God (Rom 8:8). In Matthew 15:19, Jesus teaches where sinful thoughts come from, saying they come out of the heart. James gives a specific application of this fundamental principle,

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“What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members” (Jas 4:1)? The focus of their hearts is very self centered, not God centered. Evil thoughts—hardness of the heart (Mt 19:8)—also come from people’s self-centered desires. Thus, the root cause of their conflict is ultimately the unfulfilled desires in their thoughts. These desires start to control each partner within the couple. If their spouse fails to meet their demands and satisfy their desires, then they condemn their mate out of their own sinful thoughts.

**Self-centered Desires**

Desire itself is not inherently sinful. There is nothing wrong in desiring a loving spouse, a happy marriage, healthy children, professional success, or a growing spirituality. Such desires are not a problem. However, overly selfish desires such as lust and greed, with self-centered pleasure and satisfaction, are destructive, wrong, and sinful.

The effect of a couple’s thoughts and desires on their spiritual lives is vitally important. Habits of the mind ultimately determine the success or failure of the marriage. Archibald Hart stresses the relationship and integration of a person’s thoughts with spirituality: “God’s call to spirituality and holy living is not a demand to deny our psyches. It is a call to integrate who we are in our minds with what we are in our spirits.”

Thus, one’s spirituality depends on what that person thinks. A person is no more spiritual or righteous than one is in his or her thinking: “For as he thinks within himself, so he is” (Prv 23:7).

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Furthermore, our enemy, Satan, wants believers to be more interested in what they do than in who they are. When troubled couples live according to their own self-centered thoughts, they argue and fight with each other. They often hold attitudes of, “What have you done for me? How can I get some benefits out of you in the midst of this unlucky marriage?” No one can fulfill all of his or her mate’s needs and desires. Accordingly, people who expect their mates to fulfill all their expectations, without realizing it, fall victim to Satan’s strategy for creating disturbance within the couple’s spiritual lives.

What if one partner continuously fails to satisfy the other's desires? When one spouse consistently disappoints the other, the second spouse will generally keep fighting to achieve his or her desires. They will often dwell upon their own dissatisfaction, and allow these desires to control the marriage. This self-centered desire results in bitterness toward the spouse, who is seen as standing in the way of their satisfaction.

**Unmet Selfish Demands**

Self-centered desires also can produce unmet selfish demands. At the Counseling Education Institute for Korean Marriage and Family, the counselors often encounter female KIB counselees who say things such as, “I wish I could have such-and-such”; “He is my husband, so he should have taken care of me more faithfully,” or “Why won’t my husband treat me as the most loving person?”

When troubled spouses find something that contributes to their fulfillment and well-being, it is often rapidly transformed from a desire to a demand. When spouses want to satisfy strong desires they believe they deserve to have satisfied, trouble arises if these seemingly legitimate demands are not met. At this point, such spouses can find
themselves responding viciously. Whenever conflict and tension arise, spouses are advised to also observe in each instance what it is they are demanding. The more they think they are allowed something, the more convinced they may become that they cannot be happy and secure without it. Many destructive thoughts have deep roots in unmet demands.

In addition, according to a biblical perspective, these kinds of sinful thoughts, such as self-centered desires and unmet selfish demands, will also become idols. Even if the initial desires were not inherently wrong, in many couples, such demands have been allowed to grow so strong that they have begun to cause the counselees to worship these idols. Ken Sande and Tom Raabe point out that “an idol is anything apart from God that we depend on to be happy, fulfilled, or secure.”22 Once people love and pursue something more than God, their hearts become full of a kind of self-love23 and self-satisfaction that can become idols. Whatever someone gives their hearts and entrusts themselves to, that thing is really their god. James Houston, citing the works of John Owen, strongly warns:

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22 Ken Sande and Tom Raabe, Peacemaking for Families: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in Your Home (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2002), 18. Sande and Raabe teach that idols are something other than God that people set their hearts upon (1 Cor10:19), that motivate them (1 Cor4:5), that master and rule them (Eph5:5), or that we trust, fear, or serve (Is 42:17; Mt 6:24).

23 Jay E. Adams, The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, Self-Image (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1986), 34. Adams rebukes Maslow’s and Adler’s need theories. These two secular psychologists insist that, when physical needs are met, one becomes concerned about safety and security needs; and then only when these are met does he interest himself in love and needs for belonging. On the other hand, Adams claims that “God or man is loved in order to satisfy the needs of the one doing the loving. One wonders how that kind of love can be equated with agape love—love in which a person reaches out to another with no thought of himself.” Therefore, I believe that the self-love movement that was begun by humanistic psychologists has already had a significant impact on today’s church. We must think opposite to the hierarchy of needs that both Adler and Maslow assert. Jesus turns everything around and stands Maslow’s pyramid on its summit: “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you” (Mt 7: 33). Once troubled couples love God and his kingdom first, their problems and needs will be managed by the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit.
Our enemy is not only upon us, as it was with Samson, but it is also in us…. So if we would not dishonor God and His gospel…if we would not avoid our own conscience and endanger our own soul, if we would not grieve the Holy Spirit, then we must stay alert to our own danger.24

In Galatians 5:17, Paul admonishes, “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.” Therefore, KIB spouses should realize that a constant enemy of the soul abides within them. The indwelling sin of couples has great power, for it constantly inclines the soul towards evil. Even sincere believers struggle with idolatry. Many of them may believe in God and say they want to serve him only. But even so, at times they allow other influences to rule them. In this sense, Korean immigrant boomer couples are no different from the ancient Israelites: “So while these nations feared the Lord, they also served their idols…” (2 Kgs 17:41).

Erroneous Thoughts

Sinful thoughts also forge erroneous thoughts. Some troubled spouses have undisciplined minds, containing the erroneous belief—“if only”—and a mistaken idea—“I am a victim.” These two erroneous thoughts create a constant stream of conflicts.

An Erroneous Idea—“If Only…”

We all live with regrets about decisions made or not made, actions committed or not committed. KIB couples express regrets. In their married life, they regret that “If only I had married somebody else, my whole life would have been wonderfully changed, and

now I would be so happy.” Whenever they face difficulties in finding jobs or making enough money, they fight each other by clinging to past matters, complaining and blaming their problems on their present marriage and their lives as immigrants.

This erroneous thinking is one key reason that KIB spouses cannot easily resolve their conflicts. This same pattern can also cause problems with finding happiness in the here and now. Even apart from diminishing their chances for a happy future, they may be ruining their present happiness by dwelling on what did nor did not happen in the past.

Their tendency to indulge in regrets is due the erroneous belief that a person should never make mistakes. Unfortunately, this is a belief KIB couples have. KIB couples who are dissatisfied with their present lives may fear that other people will think less of them if they are not perfect, or may believe that making mistakes is a sign of weakness. Whenever couples in conflict wallow in their past mistakes, stresses will creep up on them, and the temptation to think “If only I….” will occupy their ungodly thoughts and intentions. Archibald Hart warns against this erroneous thinking: “Such a belief is a major obstacle to happiness because it creates unnecessary anxiety in situations where we fear failure or feel neurotic guilt over our lack of perfection.”

Couples plagued by this pattern of negative thinking need to refuse to dwell on past failures in their work or mistakes made by their spouses.

Another Mistaken Idea—“I Am a Victim”

Ideas centered upon the theme, “I am a victim” are another type of erroneous thought in troubled KIB couples’ minds, which I have found to be inordinately common

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within such couples. Some husbands and wives know only too well what it is like to be rejected. When this happens, the rejected spouse often feels like a victim. They feel they have been wronged, “dumped on,” and that the other partner has taken advantage of them. Such spouses may start feeling that love is dangerous and potentially hurtful. They can even end up in the depths of sadness—feeling miserable, angry, depressed, and afraid to love. These feelings are based on the mistaken idea that “My marriage seems so very unfair and unhappy; I am not even sure I want to go on living in it.”

Counselors at the Counseling Education Institute for Korean Marriage and Family have often heard husbands and wives say, “I am in a victim role,” or “I have felt that things are always going wrong in our marriage.” This mistaken idea would have them believe that they are victims of their relationships. This is because, at the deepest, core level of their being, they do not feel deserving of love. In fact, it is their own thoughts that are condemning them. Their own unloving thoughts about themselves hurt both the rejected spouse and the spouse who is doing the rejecting. The person who thinks this way is putting himself or herself in the victim role. When one is stuck in the victim role, he or she often feels, “What did I do to deserve this?” The person goes through life feeling trapped, often not realizing that it is only one’s own mistaken thoughts that imprison one in these ways.

KIB couples in conflicts can carefully reconsider what they think toward their mate. They can choose good habits of thinking toward the mate. The Lord implores them not think of more highly than they ought, in the faith God has given to each of them (Rom 12:3). Archibald Hart adds, “Healthy thinking involves habits of choice. And each
of us has to discover these habits for ourselves, generation after generation.»

Whenever they are in conflict, they can check if there are destructive thoughts or not, and fix their thoughts on what is true, good, and right (Phil 4:8).

Chapter 2 discussed the three major issues in conflicts disrupting KIB relationships. In analyzing the imbalance of adaptability and cohesion of marriage, KIB couples come to realize why they have marital conflicts. In addition to the external challenges of conflict resolution, another factor hindering conflict resolution is the personal minds, hearts, and destructive thoughts of the spouses. Part II will explain how understanding the theological foundation of forgiveness and its implications can be one of the guiding ways in which KIB couples can resolve their marital conflicts.

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26 Hart, Habits of the Mind, 3.
PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF FORGIVENESS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR A MODEL OF FORGIVENESS

CHAPTER 3
THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF FORGIVENESS

Introduction

Forgiveness is one of the most powerful biblical ways to resolve marital conflicts. The previously discussed techniques for overcoming the three conflict issues—balancing of adaptability, cohesion, and correcting destructive thoughts—are valuable and necessary. However, the power of forgiveness goes beyond them all. Forgiveness articulates the core of the ministry of Jesus—who he is, why he came to the earth, and what he has done. His forgiveness also shows KIB couples how to resolve conflicts today. Understanding the biblically based, theological foundations of forgiveness can help troubled KIB couples appreciate the importance of forgiveness through right belief and correct understanding of the context within which God calls them to live.
Unless the unforgiveness each member of KIB couples holds in his or her heart toward the other is dealt with, both will continue to suffer from an absence of intimacy and relational difficulties. Eventually, regardless of any temporary efforts or superficial attempts, if forgiveness is excluded from the process of managing their marital problems, the intimacy in their marriage will drastically diminish. It is only with Christ’s atonement that God transforms the character of troubled couples and corrects their conduct.

This paper assumes the primacy of understanding Jesus’ atonement and forgiveness in marital conflict resolution. The atonement is rooted in the love and justice of God; with God’s love, KIB couples in trouble are forgiven and justice is achieved through Jesus’ sacrifice to satisfy God’s law. KIB couples can use His sacrifice and forgiveness for their sins as a model to follow in the midst of their troubled lives, so that they themselves may let go of their negative thoughts from minds hardened not to forgive. The cross is the best, most gracious, and final example of overcoming the unforgiveness that lies at the heart of unresolved marital conflicts. Christ’s model reflects deeply on the humanity and deity of Jesus in order to assure that ministry practice aligns with both his beings.

To develop a theological foundation of forgiveness, three elements will be discussed: understanding the two natures of Jesus Christ, the Atonement of Jesus, and how Jesus’ atonement became the foundation for Christian forgiveness.

Understanding the Two Natures of Jesus Christ

This section will discuss the theological foundations of forgiveness, and will examine the two natures of Jesus: the humanity of Christ as the Son of Man (Mt 4:1-2;
Rom 15:21; Heb 5:7-8) and the deity of Christ as the Son of God (Is 9:6; Mi 5:2; Jn 1:1-4; Rom 9:5), both of which are important qualities couples need to understand. These two natures of theological reflection may enable unwilling KIB husbands and wives to help exchange or share forgiveness with each other. By understating Jesus’ dual nature, KIB couples will realize that Jesus exists as Immanuel—“God with us” (Mt 1:23), and will be empowered to open their minds to forgive. In realizing that Christ, the Son of Man, had experienced the pains and the joys of the flesh, and further understanding that Jesus exists with them today, KIB couples are able to overcome their struggles and accept God’s purpose of forgiveness. Henri Nouwen notes, “Theological reflection is reflecting on the painful and joyful realities of every day with the mind of Jesus, and thereby raising human consciousness to the knowledge of God’s gentle guidance.”

The Son of Man

Jesus Christ, as the son of Joseph, was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born to a virgin in Nazareth (Jn 1:45) in the likeness of a human being. Jesus was neither a heavenly, ideal man nor a human being in some abstract sense of the word; his humanity was real and literal. While he lived in the physical realm, he was completely human in all aspects of life, experiencing every human need and limitation.

As a Jew, he was one of the many who endured ridicule, humiliation, persecution, and abuse. Not only was Jesus subjected to the same emotions and fears that everyone, including KIB couples, experiences. He was also under the same temptations and

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1 See Henri Nouwen, In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 69. Nouwen warns that it is very important to listen to the voice of God since God’s presence is often a hidden presence.
pressures of the sinful world. What couples need to realize about Christ’s perfect humanity\(^2\) is that he allowed himself to feel worldly pains and temptations in order to sympathize with humans and forgive them. At his crucifixion, Jesus felt loneliness, bitterness, agony, and betrayal as crowds of people insulted him, spat in his face, and tortured him (Mt 27: 27-31). Yet, at the cross, Jesus asked God for forgiveness for all those who were doing him wrong (Lk 23: 34). As sinners themselves, KIB spouses are not to blame each other but instead look past each other’s faults and mistakes. They are to be patient with the wrongs their partners commit against them, as Jesus did the same even as a sinless being.

Being of the same flesh as humans, Jesus was bound by the same limitations as they were in his earthly form. When he was in despair, he cried out to the Lord for guidance and deliverance. He himself confessed that he did not know everything and had to trust the Father, “But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Mk 13:32). He acknowledged God as the source of all knowledge and solutions. When he was faced with anger and fear, He turned to God and surrendered to his will because controlling the future surpassed his abilities.

When KIB couples struggle in their marriages with their limited insight of situations and thoughts that are not their own, they need to understand that Jesus was bound by the same limitations. KIB couples also surrender to God, letting down their

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\(^2\) Louis Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Printing Company, 1989), 94. Berkhof says, “In fact, the only divinity many still ascribe to Him is that of His perfect humanity.” As proofs for the humanity of Jesus, Berkhof presents examples that Jesus speaks of himself as man (John 8:40); he was subject to the ordinary laws of human development (Luke 2:40, 52) and to human wants and sufferings (Matt. 4:2; John 4:6).
stubbornness and selfish desires. Though their hearts may harbor feelings of hatred and lack the willingness to accept their marital problems and forgive, God will move them, and, through his grace, he will provide forgiveness and healing in couples’ relationships.

The Son of God

It is necessary to review biblical claims for the deity of the Son of God. Though Christ has a human nature, he is not merely a human person but a being in whom two natures are united.\(^3\) As described in the New Testament, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (Jn 1:1, 14). Through his incarnation\(^4\) as the Son of God, Jesus became the living word on earth. Donald McKim upholds the divinity of Jesus, saying, “Jesus Christ was truly God and thus divine.”\(^5\)

When examining the deity of Jesus, he is omnipotent. Everett F. Harrison says that Jesus was “…acting in terms of delegated authority, that he was forgiving sins on earth (and so was not in competition with the Father in heaven).” Jesus himself testifies

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\(^3\) Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 95. Berkhof says about unity of person in Jesus, “…He[Jesus] is the God-man, possessing all the essential qualities of both the human and the divine nature.” Referring to John 17:5--“And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” George R. Beasley-Murray, in his book *John*, vol. 36 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1987), 297, represents, “…the Evangelist’s representation of the glory of Jesus in his ministry undermines the reality of the incarnation, and made of Jesus a ‘god walking about the earth’.” So, we understand that the Son in relation to the Father in no way cancels out the fundamental statement of John 1:14, “The Word became flesh.”

\(^4\) Collins, *The Biblical Basis of Christian Counseling Counseling for People Helpers: Relating the Basic Teachings of Scripture to People’s Problems* (Colorado Springs, CO: 2001), 115. He explains, “…the incarnation (the word literally means ‘in-flesh-ment’) to describe the remarkable event by which God took on flesh and became a human being without giving up His divine nature.” We understand that the Word was not only with God, but was God.

that he has the powers of God, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Mt 25:18). Thus, nothing can overpower Jesus; he can achieve anything he desires. He is entrusted with all judgment and the power to raise the dead and give life to whom he wishes to give it (Jn 5:21-22).

With his divine authority, Jesus is almighty. He knows all our needs and answers our prayers. He has no limits to his powers and knowledge. Bound by the limits of the human knowledge, KIB couples cannot see beyond their problems; they feel as though Jesus is not guiding them toward a healthy marriage. Consequently, they feel limited in their abilities as a result of the limitations they see in Jesus’ power. In some cases, they stop praying and lose hope, give up, and consider divorce. However, they should not lose sight of Christ’s omnipotence-- that he has the power and will to revive and renew all relationships, even those which couples feel are broken.

Jesus is also omnipresent, existing in the mind, heart, and soul of those who pray in his name (Mt 18:20). Not only is he present in prayer, but in all ways in daily life. He promises that he is with us always and forever, for his presence remains the same in the past, present, and future (Heb 13:8). In this manner, he will guide believers from their destructive past, through their conflictive present, and into a fruitful future. Jesus is aware of all KIBs’ marital problems. When they are in conflict, they have no regard for the issues of the past in their efforts in dealing with their present struggles. However, because Jesus’ presence is consistent throughout the past, present, and future, he requires the repentance of past sins in order to provide a solution for the present.
Jesus came to earth as both the Son of man and the Son of God. Gary Collins states, “He could be both God and man, but that was part of God’s plan. Jesus Christ was uniquely suited for the task of delivering all of us from sin and evil.” Jesus came not to judge or punish, but by his deity, he came to forgive. Having taken on all physical characteristics, burdens, and temptations, he understands the trials of KIB couples and sympathizes with their sorrows and disparity, and even the joys of their marriages. Jesus sacrificed himself to grant forgiveness to KIB couples so that they may also humble themselves and sympathize with each other. This forgiveness comes from the atonement of Jesus.

The Atonement of Jesus

Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, upon which believers can deeply reflect, can allow believers to more readily forgive each other. Understanding the atonement of Jesus encourages them to let go of the past sins and wrongdoings of their partners against them. Believers can show transformations in their lives once they come to fully understand and appreciate the atonement of Jesus-- the sacrifice of blood and obedience, the transfer of sin and death, and the union with the Father. In this section, two issues will be presented: understanding the atonement and how this atonement relates to KIB couples.

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Understanding the Atonement

The concept of atonement can be described as “…the resolution of estrangement between two parties whose relationship has been broken by sin of other infraction.” The term itself refers to a reconciled state of AT-ONE-NESS. The atonement is the saving work of Jesus Christ in his life and death, by which we earn our salvation, thus enabling Christians to be at-one with God.

The Bible teaches that God is a righteous and holy God, one who hates sin and wickedness. Under him, “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 7:23). Blood was necessary in the Old Testament observances for worshiping the holy God because the Old Testament sacrifices were specifically prescribed by God and received their meaning from the Lord’s covenant relationship with Israel. Sins were to be forgiven according to the covenant, and the Israelites were to be reconciled with the Lord and perfectly saved “because the life of every creature is its blood” (Lv 17:14). Each offering is a gift expressing love between the worshipper and Yahweh, as Berkhof explains, “The atonement is rooted in the love and justice of God: love offered sinners a way of escape, and justice demanded that the requirements of the law should be met.” Only Jesus’ perfect sacrifice serves to render the ultimate satisfaction to God—his offering is “presented as a covenant sacrifice, a

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Passover sacrifice, the sin offering, the offering of first fruits, the sacrifice offered on the Day of the Atonement, and an offering reminiscent of Abraham’s presentation of Isaac”

Historically in the Old Testament, the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, was designated as a national day of judgment in Israel (Lv 16:1-34). It was a day of wrath and a day of judgment because God is holy and “angry with the wicked every day” (Ps 7:11). An angry God needed propitiation and accepted the sacrifice of an innocent victim in lieu of the blood of the guilty party. Yom Kippur definitely dealt with the idea that God would not let the sins of the Israelites go unpunished. However, the central idea of the event was that God had allowed a relatively easy way for those sins to be forgiven. For this reason, the central theme of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, was not judgment, but forgiveness.

In the New Testament, the reality of the atonement reveals more fully what Jesus, the atoning sacrifice, accomplished on the cross (1 Jn 2:2). At the Last Supper, Jesus proclaims to his disciples: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28). Simon Peter also confesses that “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pt 2:24). Through Christ’s atonement, God’s requirements for a sacrificial offering were fully met and Christ has become the eternal high priest. The New Testament also presents Jesus entering heaven.

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10 According to the Bible, on this day, the High Priest would select one of two goats to serve as a sacrifice. This goat would then be sacrificed, with the priest sprinkling its blood on the judgment seat for the sins of the people. After this, “he is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat” (Lev. 16:8; Isa. 43:25). The implication of this scapegoat is that the goat died laden, not with its own individual guilt, but with the curse of a nation’s sins.
itself by means of his own blood. As the High Priest, Jesus made the one sacrifice of himself, which won eternal salvation for all who believe in him (Heb 10:10-14). This sacrifice allows all those who are already forgiven though Christ to be reconciled with God.

As decreed by God’s law, no one can enter God’s presence tainted with sin. However, what is so precious about the atonement is the fact that God provided a sacrifice of his own to take the destined death and suffering in humans’ place. Through Jesus’ sacrifice, all barriers are taken away; Beilby et al. speak of the sacrifice in terms of exchange and representation, “sin and death transferred to the sacrificial victim, its purity and life to those who receive the benefits of the sacrifice.”¹¹ Christ’s atonement granted believers purity so that they may rightfully stand in God’s holy presence.

How the Atonement Relates to KIB Couples

Through Jesus’ model of sacrifice and obedience, the sins of KIB couples have been pardoned¹² and the couples have been made holy. Jesus’ atonement has set the basis enabling KIB couples to live out God’s decree, “I am the Lord, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.” To fulfill God’s satisfaction in KIB couples and live out his expectations of a holy life, they must fix their

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¹¹ Beilby et al., *The Nature of the Atonement*, 177.

¹² Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 171. Hoekema quotes “The Westminster Confession of Faith”: “God effectually calleth he also freely justifieth… by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous… by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them.” He adds that justification is understood as meaning, not the infusion of righteousness, but the imputation of Christ’s obedience to believers.
thoughts upon the essence of the atonement. Romans 2:15\(^\text{13}\) shows that God’s standards of right and wrong are written on the human heart to guide their conscience to be on terms with the laws of God.

However, their natural conscience is not “pure and unadulterated,” having been “distorted by the Fall.” In marriage life, conflicts between spouses arise partly as a result of the judgments passed that are based on their differing standards. These conflicts do not get resolved because the spouses relentlessly hold on to their preconceived thoughts. Gary Collins argues, “We can’t always let our conscience be our guide, because the conscience is often shaped by values and experiences that directly violate God’s standards.”

However, Romans 12:2\(^\text{14}\) offers hope in the cleansing and renewing of the conscience by the work of Jesus Christ. The eternal atonement covered them with the essential purity to enter the heavenly presence of our Father. Once KIB spouses fully accept and appreciate this benefit of the sacrifice, they will be able to let go of the judgments they hold against their partners. As God did not give judgment but rather forgiveness for their sins, they have attained the capacity to forgive others.

\(^{13}\) Romans 2:15, “…since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them,” James D.G. Dunn claims the conscience is a “promise to have been fulfilled in the gift of the Spirit to Christians. He also points out in Jeremiah 31:33, “I will write them [my laws] on their hearts”; also in Isaiah 51:7, “[my people] in whose heart is my law.” James D. G. Dunn, Romans 1-8, vol. 38a of Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1988), 100.

\(^{14}\) Through Romans 12:2, Paul urges us to search our hearts and minds what is good and pleasing to God’s will. When our hearts and minds are cleansed, we will not follow the pattern of this world. Regarding that we may ascertain the will of God, Dunn, in his book Romans 9-16, vol. 38b of Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1988), 714, says, “The outworking and test of inward renewal is ethically responsible conduct.”
Forgiveness

God was completely satisfied and pleased with the sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of the human race. God has already forgiven the sins in the past, present, and future of all those who accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior (Is 43:25; 44:22, Heb 9:12). God loved all people, allowing people to be reconciled with him through the blood of Jesus (Jn 3:16, Eph 2:13) and conceive a new life based on Christ’s atonement, which is the central theological foundation of forgiveness.

Justification, or “judicial forgiveness,” frees believers from an eternity separated from God. When Jesus gave believers the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6, he was talking to people who were already in a state of justification. They had confessed their sinfulness and acknowledged that Jesus Christ was their Savior and the Lord of their lives. Louis Berkhof states that true converted Christians are already justified:

Justification may be defined as that legal act of God by which He declares the sinner righteous on the basis of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is not an act or process of renewal, such as regeneration, conversion, or sanctification, and does not affect the condition but the state of the sinner.15

All sincere believers have already confessed their sins and been forgiven by the blood of Jesus. Thus, they have been adopted into God’s family and can call God their father. They are all forgiven sinners as long as they walk this earth, but Jesus Christ forgives, and, over time, he enables them to live lives that are less entangled by sinful thoughts and actions. Because they have put their faith in Christ, they have been eternally forgiven once and for all. However, none of them can guarantee, even though they have

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confessed they previous sins and repented of them, that they will never sin again in the future.

For Christians, receiving forgiveness from God is based on a “parental forgiveness” following the believers’ “justification.” According to Jay Adams, it is “parental forgiveness” that allows people who have strayed from the Father to find forgiveness and return to full fellowship. The sins of believers do not cause them to be banished from the family of God. However, they do lead to strained fellowships with the Father until believers confess what they have done, express their remorse, resubmit themselves to the Father, and resolve to avoid such sin again in the future.

As the divine pattern of God’s forgiveness is a gracious and active gift, it allows all believers to reconcile with him. The forgiveness believers remit to others comes from the Father and is founded on God’s love. His love grants Christians the power and will to release interpersonal forgiveness, and further understand unconditional forgiveness and its necessity in a healthy marriage.

Interpersonal Forgiveness

In contrast to uni-directional, divine forgiveness from God, interpersonal forgiveness among all Christians is essential to make peace with one another. The Bible teaches all Christians that “…whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you forgive one another” (Col 3:13). So believers can ask, “Have I received the gift of God’s forgiveness by turning from my sin in repentance to

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Christ in faith?” If the answer is yes, as the next step, they may ask themselves, “Did I really express authentic forgiveness toward my wrongdoing friends or neighbors (regardless of who the offender or the offended is)?” Chris Brauns defines Christian forgiveness as “a commitment by the offended to pardon graciously the repentant from moral liability and to be reconciled to that person, although not all consequences are necessarily eliminated.” With this central concept of forgiveness in mind, Christians ought to perform God’s forgiveness as he has done for them in daily life, in ways such as “[being] kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph 4:32). As believers, their forgiveness clearly has two aspects: receiving forgiveness from God and extending forgiveness to others.

In order to release forgiveness to others, believers need to first be able to forgive themselves. Ironically, they may now struggle with forgiving themselves for things they have done in the past—some of those mistakes having occurred many years ago. As Charles Stanley says, “Yet the ability or capacity to forgive ourselves is absolutely essential if any peace whatsoever is to be found.” Some who are not at peace may be feeling guilty, blaming themselves for having been victims. Charles Kraft says that “victims usually blame themselves for what has been done to them. They blame themselves for the fact that someone else hurt them.” They can interpret mistreatment by parents, teachers, or other believers as being their own fault. In this sense, believers

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need to forgive themselves as Jesus has forgiven, accepted, and chosen them to be his children. They need to accept themselves as Jesus accepted Peter after his betraying action (Mk 14:72). Though guilty of an enormous sin, he was as forgivable as a child who had made a mistake.

Christian forgiveness of both self and others is founded on the expression of God’s love. Gary Chapman presents this love as “God’s promise to forgive us not conditioned by our response. God has made full provision for our sins, and he stands fully ready to forgive at any moment.”

Christian forgiveness is an earthly form of love. As followers of Jesus, Christians extend the love of God through their acts of forgiveness, reflecting the qualities of love: “Love is patient; love is kind;… is not selfish; is not provoked; does not keep record of wrongs…” (1 Cor 13:4-8).

Matthew 18:5-10 teaches believers to extend God’s love from within themselves to others, not excluding any of the “little ones.” Failing to do this precludes their acceptance of Jesus. As Jesus said, “Anyone who welcomes a little child…in my name welcomes me” (Mt 18: 5). If, through their unforgiveness, they are an obstacle to even young Christians, then they are the ones who will suffer. To reject another is to reject

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21 *Matthew Henry’s Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible, Matthew 18.* http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/matthew-henry-complete/matthew/18.html?p=3. Matthew Henry warns all people, “… not to offer any injury to one of Christ’s little ones. Even the little ones that believe have the same privileges with the great ones, for they have all obtained like precious faith.” Christians are careful not to offend these little ones, by drawing them to sin, grieving and annoying their righteous souls, and discouraging them.
God’s love. Jesus has given a new commandment to love one another, including even a little one, by which all people will know that they are his disciples.

Furthermore, Christian forgiveness means believers no longer want to take revenge against those who have committed offenses against them. To take another’s eyes—“an eye for an eye”—does not restore their own loss (Mt 5:38). Their forgiveness allows them to accept the inner tranquility that comes when they allow themselves to stop their frustrating efforts to punish offenders. David Augsburger states, “Revenge not only lowers you to your enemy’s lowest level; what’s worse, it boomerangs; it continues the injury within you. Revenge is not its own reward; it is its own punishment.”

He warns that, when one seeks to reattribute the wrongs of his enemy, he becomes corrupt himself by accepting and repeating his offender’s tactics and treachery. Romans 12:19 advises, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God…” In Hebrews 10:30 God claims, “…Vengeance is mine, I will repay…” Revenge is not a believers’ own right, but one that belongs to God. Accordingly, a believer should not pay back the offender once having accepted and prayed in accordance with Jesus’ petition: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34).

Lastly, forgiveness of others means believers are reconciled with their neighbors. Through the grace of the cross—Jesus’ atonement, God and all believers were already reconciled. In its significance, the blood of Jesus affected believers’ relationships with their neighbors as well as with God. Thus, the atonement truly enables them to understand and live by the good news that their debts are totally canceled and forgiven.

It means that their old selves have truly died in order that their new selves may be born. It means believers are reconciled, not only with God, but also with their friends and neighbors. In Ephesians 2:14, Paul declares that the work of Jesus’ incarnation broke down the walls of hostility dividing them from God. Shirley Guthrie also says there is no such thing as reconciliation with God without reconciliation with our fellows.23 Christian forgiveness will move them to reconciliation with others. However, unlike regular interpersonal relationships, because KIB couples make a promise to love under the marriage covenant, the couple’s relationship requires forgiveness without a cost.

Unconditional Forgiveness toward the Spouse

In addition to the key points about forgiveness presented above, there is one further consideration, which is important when working with troubled KIB couples--unconditional forgiveness. Troubled KIB couples can understand that their forgiveness for each other should not have a cost, meaning that their forgiveness should be unconditional. The kind of forgiveness that is called for is one which extends to and releases even the wrongdoing partners who are unrepentant of their offenses. Because of the divine forgiveness they have received through Jesus’ atonement, troubled KIB spouses have to commit to forgive each other unconditionally. Even in the midst of marital problems and conflicts, they are to adhere to and follow this essential theological concept. After all, Christian matrimony requires permanent commitment to unconditional promises.

Taking a deeper look at Christian matrimony in the biblical sense, it is a covenant made uniting a man and a woman. The New Testament describes the eternal covenant as a law that requires “nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb 9:22). O. Palmer also depicts the covenant as a “‘bond-on-blood,’ or a bond of life and death.”

Upon entering the covenant relationship, only death can compensate for the violation of the law. Likewise, marriage is a similar bond permanently sealed by the exchange of the marital vows. The way in which the Old Testament viewed marriage was also as a covenant for the man and his wife were to unite and “they will become one flesh.” Matthew 19:6 substantiates the rule of the marriage covenant, “Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

Christian marriage cannot be broken under the covenant of the blood. In order to maintain the marital union, a thorough understanding of the principles of unconditional forgiveness is necessary.

With the correct theological foundation of the marriage covenant, KIB couples can form a stable concept of unconditional forgiveness by better understanding its

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25 For example, many ceremonies in the Korean immigrant community ask this question: “Will you have this woman to be your wedded wife? To live together in the holy estate of matrimony; will you love her, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keep you only unto her so long as you both shall live until death?” To which the husband responds, “I will.” And the wife makes a similar pledge to the husband. We understand that this is the language of covenant marriage, not contract marriage.

26 Bible Academy, *Matthew and Mark*, vol.14 of *The Grand Bible Commentary* (Seoul: Disciples Publishing House, 1999), 498. *The Grand Bible Commentary* interprets the verse segment in Korean, which I have translated into English, “…let man not separate.” One of the concepts of marriage is that the union should have the purpose to offer dedication to God. The husband and wife are to devote themselves to each other, and as a unified couple, they are to devote themselves to God. Therefore, couples are not to separate. One who splits a couple’s marriage, an offering to God, commits a sin against God. Therefore, he or she will be inevitably punished by God.
principles. The first is that true repentance from one’s spouse is not a prerequisite for forgiving the spouse. The second is that both spouses have faults and sinful natures.

Requiring sincere repentance from one’s partner is not a prerequisite for the giving of unconditional forgiveness between troubled spouses. Spouses can—and should without any cost, selfishness, or reasoning—forgive each other, even if the one at fault does not admit wrong, show remorse, and ask for forgiveness. KIB couples are accustomed to praying for the resolution of their marital problems, including their spouse’s repentance. This could be viewed as an arrogant and presumptuous attempt to put themselves in God’s position of offering forgiveness. If they stubbornly insist they will not forgive their mate until after their partner’s repentance, they might well end up waiting forever, and the marriage will continue to be unhappy and entangled in hatred.

The apostle Paul encourages his readers to persevere: “We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint…” (Rom 5:4). Without practicing endurance and hope by faith, both spouses will continuously mistrust and fight with each other, and their marriage will probably fall into a more difficult and serious situation. Some pray for their marriage, but how do some KIB spouses actually become the first to repent in the midst of conflict and fighting?27 It is not easy for troubled KIB spouses to be willing to relinquish their own destructive

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27 In my counseling ministry, KIB couples often ask, “Why can’t (or won’t) my spouse change? I cannot and will not forgive my partner until he/she totally repents and shows a great change.” Some KIB couples experience difficulties in forgiving “unforgivable” spouses. This is because many of them expect the other party to first completely turn away from their repetitious sins. Since they do not see the other person repent or change, they themselves are reluctant to grant forgiveness. Thus, conflict is a part of every marriage, and it can be a major source of anger, discouragement, and regret.
thoughts, habits, and lifestyles. By reflecting on the grace of Jesus’ atonement, couples in trouble must be forgiven by their partners and reconciled with each other—without any prerequisite of repentance.

In a couple’s negative dynamics, described as the interaction/exchange between the husband and wife, when conflicts arise or when there is continual unforgiveness, each spouse may hold self-victimizing viewpoints. Conflict, however, is not caused by a one-way offense but by a cycle in which each spouse reciprocates each other’s hurtful actions. Consequently, conflicts are recurrent and ongoing in the KIB marriage life. The conditional manner of forgiveness is rooted in the erroneous belief that one is without faults or mistakes. In conflicts, KIB spouses often think that only their offender is at fault, failing to realize and accept their own infirmities. Thus, they continue to blame, criticize, and accuse their spouse. At any point, the offended may have been/become the offender (in the view of the sanctification theory that we are all continual sinners in daily life) and may need to receive forgiveness and experience change in themselves rather than the partner. No person in any marriage is perfect or without blemish (Rom 3-12-18).

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28 In my counseling, a woman complained she and her husband fought because her husband always came home late and they had difficulty communicating. Her husband admitted that he purposely avoided interacting with his wife because she was ill-tempered and pushy. The husband is not the only one at fault here because, considering his account, the wife’s character towards him makes him hesitant.

29 Louis Berkhof describes sanctification as a “recreative act… one that never reaches perfection in this life.” It is the gradual cleansing of the wrongful human nature (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 5:24) and the “gradual development of the new life in consecration to God” (Col. 2:12; 3:1-3). Berkhof, *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, 143. Apostle Paul emphasizes that we need to “seek the things above” because we are already justified but not yet perfect (Col. 3:1-4). Peter T. O’Brien says that people are to “look upward so as to receive clear direction for their conduct… a continuous ongoing effort is required, something that would not occur naturally.” Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 44 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1982), 160.
Since all spouses have sinful natures and tendencies, none of them rightfully stands in the position to give conditional forgiveness.

Thus, KIB couples only have the privilege of granting free forgiveness to their wrong-doing spouse. Such a privilege of freeing their partners from guilt, bitterness, and despair for their own failures is a one they receive through God’s mercy. This is because God has already bestowed on both of them complete and perfect forgiveness, so they may likewise forgive their spouse. Gary Collins strongly advocates this:

> If we want to know the power of the Cross, if we want to see whether that Cross still has the power to change lives today, if we want to know what the forgiveness of our sins really means and what it really cost, then we will know those things only as we forgive.  

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Until couples exchange unconditional forgiveness, they will not be able to experience the full effects of the Cross manifesting in their lives. It is essential for spouses to have forgiveness towards each other without any demands or desires.

**The Critical Necessity of Forgiveness**

Forgiveness is an imperative biblical approach for KIB couples who may question the necessity of forgiveness to resolve their marital conflicts. Three reasons why KIB couples should forgive each other will be discussed. First, forgiveness mortifies the sin of unforgiveness. Secondly, it offers a preventive measure against negative emotions. Thirdly, it ultimately helps KIB couples to recover their broken relationships.

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Forgiveness Mortifies the Sin of Unforgiveness

Mortification of sin is believers’ duty to be “perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1). Such holiness cannot be done without the daily mortification of sin of unforgiveness. The sin of unforgiveness sets its strength against every act of holiness and against every depth to which people grow in their spirituality. Because this sin abides in people, believers need to mortify it continuously. Some believe mortification only requires the avoidance of sins. However, it requires the continual weakening of, and battle against, sins. Christians are to renew their inward man “day by day” (2 Cor 4:16).

Ralph P. Martin writes that “the believers have a composite of a material shell and a precious kernel, the soul, which aspires to be immortal…the contrast is then drawn with ὡς [ἀνθρωπός] ἡμῶν, ‘our inward[man]’ which is being renewed (ἀνακαινόται) ‘day by day’.”31 Thus, believers inward man should also be renewed in their daily lives. John Owen adds, “We can not do this without daily mortifying sin. Sin does not only abide with us, but it continually labors to bring forth the deeds of the flesh.”32 As the

31 Ralph P. Martin, 2 Corinthians, vol. 40 of Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1986), 91. Ralph Martin says that “Paul’s [the believer’s] physical existence was wasting away and the death sentence was already in process. Yet Paul’s ‘inmost self’ (Rom. 7:22) is undergoing renewal—not by absorption, as in hellenistic and Gnostic thought, but by the hope of resurrection which entails a future for the outward person in his bodily existence (νόμιμο)” Thus, the hope of KIB couples is not a shedding of the existing body, but its being taken up into God’s purpose in the eschatological body that awaits the resurrection. Of this hope, they already have a foretaste in the new persons given by Christ through the Spirit (Eph. 3:16, “….he[the Father] may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”).

32 John Owen, Sin and Temptation: The Challenge of Personal Godliness (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1983), 160. In applying John Owen’s spiritual awareness of sin, KIB couples are to look out for the self-centered blindness into which the Israelites fell during the time of Isaiah. The Israelites, under a sense of sin, drew near to God with much diligence and earnestness in prayer and fasting. Isaiah 58:2 says “For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways….They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them.” Yet God rejected it all. Their fasting could not heal them because, while they were particular in that duty, they were careless about others. The Israelites had a chronic wound of which they could never heal themselves, for they never considered injustice toward
apostle Paul recognizes his struggles with sin, he sees the opposing law of the body rebelling against the good will of his mind. He acknowledges the need to renew his inward man in order to break free from the imprisoning law of the body (Rom 7:23).

Mortifying the sin of unforgiveness is essential for resolving marital conflicts. Once couples search their sinful hearts and minds in Christ’s indwelling, they can allow themselves to not commit the sin of unforgiveness; moreover, they move into fearing God. In doing so, God instills the will of forgiveness in the hearts of KIB couples, empowering them to overcome the detriments of unforgiveness, which cause their minds to darken and their hearts to grow cold.

Forgiveness Guards against Negative Emotions

KIB couples who have been hurt often experience pain and injustice, and they go through a period of emotional devastation involving anger and/or hatred. Explosive anger is usually an unnecessary evil, hurtful to oneself and the spouse as well.\(^{33}\) Such anger may be a violent desire to punish the mate, inflict suffering, or exact hatred. These emotions rarely disappear overnight. David Augsburger also says, “…when hatred is harbored, it grows, spreads, and contaminates all other emotions…. Hidden hatred turns others to be sin. Likewise, some KIB husbands and wives do not see their spouse’s pains and agonies, and they pursue their own self-love. KIB couples’ efforts end in quarreling and strife and in striking each other, withholding God’s forgiveness in their sinful minds.

\(^{33}\) Gary Smalley and Ted Cunningham, From Anger to Intimacy: How Forgiveness Can Transform Your Marriage (Ventura, CA: Regal from Gospel Light, 2009), 16. Anger is a God-given emotion, but it can negatively affect our spiritual, mental, and emotional health. Gary Smalley and Ted Cunningham believe, “Anger can be triggered by rejection, judgment, failure, control or lack of control, neglect, loneliness or inferiority…. We still must make sure we handle anger in the appropriate way.” Regardless of its cause, anger can lead one to sin. Consequently, the physical body may suffer the consequences of these mental and emotional ailments.
trust into suspicion, compassion into caustic criticism, and faith in others into cold cynicism.”

However, when KIB couples in conflict forgive their spouses, they let go of the negative emotions they hold toward their mate. Forgiveness allows the spouse to view the offender with compassion, benevolence, and love, even though he or she knows of the wrong committed (Zec 7:9). Forgiveness “… ends their obsession with feeling vulnerable and the need to protect themselves by helplessly recycling and refueling their anger.” Once KIB couples can forgive in advance, they cut off the connection to the painful event and disconnect the pain linking the soul to the injury.

Forgiveness Recovers the Broken Marital Relationship

Forgiveness opens couples’ communication, deepens compassionate understanding for each other, and promotes honest sharing. Forgiving leads troubled KIB couples into becoming compassionate listeners. Healthy communication in marriage begins with listening, and it grows with genuine understanding and acceptance. If they avoid forgiveness, they often tend to internalize conflicts.

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35 Zechariah 7:9 says, “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.” Ralph L. Smith, in Micah-Malachi, vol. 32 of Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1984), claims, “The right relationship between God and man, and between man and man, go together. It is not individual piety expressed in fasting that keeps the fabric of society secure, but honesty, integrity, compassion, faithfulness expressed in one’s conduct, and attitude toward other people.” The Lord wants us to be merciful towards one another instead of only worshiping him (Matt. 9:13, “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice…’”). If spouses consider each other to be brothers and sisters in Christ, they are to show mercy to each other.

If a person hates his or her spouse and refuses to forgive, that person is the one who loses in the end. Instead, when there is forgiveness between husbands and wives, both the forgiver and the offender benefit, for their relationship is recovered. Collins, citing McCullough and Worthington, points out: “…forgiveness can lead to restored relationships and to restored peace of mind for both parties. Once people forgive, there are decreased feelings of revenge, more positive feelings between everyone involved, and more efforts to bring conciliation.”

Forgiveness enables couples to get over the past moment of pain, be freed from the related emotions, and rebuild and recreate their relationship.

**Conclusion**

All in all, in order for believers to build the biblical foundations necessary to be able to give sincere forgiveness, Christians need to fully understand the entire entity of Jesus, the significance of Christ’s atonement, and how to react in accordance to the benefits they receive through the atonement. Having two natures, Christ came to this world as the Word in flesh, Immanuel God. As man, he sympathized with believers through their pain and suffering. As a deity, he was free of sin and blemishes; he was almighty with the power transcending from God. Thus, he was fully qualified to forgive believers of their sins.

As an expression of God’s love, Christ’s atonement restored the broken relationship between believers and God and let them be reconciled with him. This eternal

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atonement allowed them to have forgiveness among them. When applying the atonement to the marriage covenant of the KIB couples that God has joined together, forgiveness needs to be unconditional. In forgiving, the couples mortify their sin of unforgiveness, prevent negative emotions, and ultimately renew relationships. In healthy matrimony, both spouses will listen to and obey God’s word: “…forgive each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Eph 4:32). The following chapter will discuss the implications of forgiveness for couples in conflict.
CHAPTER 4
THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: A MODEL OF FORGIVENESS FOR COUPLES IN CONFLICT

It is understood that there are limitations to the scope of the model presented in this section. For instance, because of its theological underpinnings, this model is only appropriate for troubled KIB couples working within a Christian context who are dealing with ordinary issues that arise in the course of a normal Christian marriage. These must be people who sincerely wish to avoid divorcing, and who are willing and able to make a long-term commitment to working on these issues within a Christian context. It may be of little or no value for crisis situations in which immediate intervention is required, or for the couples in which one or both members have no sincere commitment to a Christian life and marriage. The paper also excludes cases in which a couple has already made a decision to separate from each other. Many such tragic cases do exist, usually as a result of long-term abuse of a very serious nature, such as a lengthy history of chronic adultery or repeated and severe domestic violence. Such relationships may have already deteriorated far beyond repair long before marital education or counseling has begun and have little hope of survival or recovery.

Troubled KIB couples for whom this model is appropriate can usually understand and deal with the challenges discussed in chapter 2 and are usually able to embrace the
theological foundations of forgiveness, as presented in chapter 3. These first two steps are relatively easy for couples to understand. However, the next step can be somewhat more challenging.

Two biblical processes exist which can permit troubled KIB couples to forgive in a more extensive way: repentance and reconciliation. This chapter will discuss these two processes. In this model of forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation enable and enrich forgiveness. These steps of repentance and reconciliation are necessary before a troubled couple can get to a place of forgiveness. Without first going through the steps of repentance and reconciliation, troubled KIB couples can seldom if ever go to a place of forgiveness. Repentance, described as the reorientation of the mind, shifting to Christ’s mindset, and surrendering to Christ, sets the stage for reconciliation between troubled couples. Reconciliation in turn confirms repentance and leads to forgiveness. Through these two processes, forgiveness expands. The arrows have two heads because there are not one-way relationships between forgiveness and repentance and forgiveness and reconciliation.

![Diagram of forgiveness process](image)

Fig. 4.1. A model of forgiveness.
Of course the stories of KIB couples are varied, and forgiveness may not always follow repentance and reconciliation in sequential order. However, for the purpose of developing this model, forgiveness will be presented as a product of both repentance and reconciliation. Of these two, repentance is often the primary step on the road to forgiveness; without a strong theological understanding of repentance, it is difficult for reconciliation and forgiveness to develop.

**Repentance**

As discussed in chapter 2, in order to attain repentance, troubled KIB couples must acknowledge their wrongful and destructive thoughts. If they are to acknowledge their sinful thoughts and attitudes toward their spouse and repent of their unforgiveness, each spouse must reflect on himself or herself and on his or her sin before examining the other spouse for sins and wrongdoings.

A couple who could not resolve their long-term conflict once came to me and said:

Pastor, we have prayed for a long time for the resolution of our marital problems, and have even done fasting prayer. But our prayers and efforts have not helped. One of our Christian counselors suggested that we separate from each other for about a month. For now, we cannot love each other. We are not sure about what to do next. What do you think of about this?\(^1\)

\(^1\) I am often confronted with what amounts to this same question in various forms. In this case, I urged them to reconnect and try to mend their broken relationship. At this point, I was not concerned about who had done what, who the offender was, or who had been offended. This is generally the case, even though one or both partners will often have much to say about this, and will frequently insist, “my husband/wife has done wrong to me!”

Surprisingly, even though they had prayed, and even fasted, they indeed had not yet confessed their sin of unforgiveness, nor were they even aware of their disobedience to and distance from God. The focus of their prayer is in changing the other person, oblivious to their own sinful thoughts. At this point, they did not even think about what their destructive thoughts or their unwillingness to forgive had brought into their hurtful marriage relationship.
A repenting attitude towards the Lord is rarely found in troubled KIB couples, especially not in those who are in long-lasting quarrels and disagreements. For such long lasting conflicts, spouses should focus on seeking repentance for their own sins instead of trying to find fault in the other person.

Couples gradually show outward change in their interpersonal relationships when they first transform their inner selves. Thomas Watson states, “Repentance is a grace of God’s Spirit whereby a sinner is inwardly humbled and visibly reformed.”

In the following sections, repentance will be further explored as a reorientation of mind, shifting the individual mindset to Christ’s mindset, and finally surrendering to Christ.

Reorientation of the Mind

Repentance demands not only a sense of shame and sorrow, but also a reorientation of one’s own thought. Believers often misunderstand repentance as comprising merely their shame and sorrow about fighting, or regrets about domestic violence in their broken marriage relationship. Such a superficial and incorrect definition of repentance does not include granting their spouses unconditional forgiveness, which is what is actually needed to reduce the tensions and challenges in their relationship. When troubled KIB couples have a new attitude toward and understanding of repentance, forgiveness can grow and assume a greater part in resolving marital conflicts.

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Edward Anton defines repentance as follows:³

Repentance is metanoia. Its verb form, metanoeo (met-a-no-eh-o), opens the New Testament as the first proclamation of the good news….Thus, repentance is all about the Greek word “metanoia”: meta or “after,” and noia or “mind-set, worldview, paradigm or philosophy of life.”…Noia is a form of the word nous, which “denotes the faculty of physical and intellectual perception, then also the power to arrive at moral judgments.” Together, meta-noia means “an altered worldview, a reoriented philosophy of life, a mental revolution, a cosmic paradigm shift.”

Two different and well-respected dictionaries of biblical Greek define the word as “a change of mind”⁴ and “to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness.”⁵ Metanoia results in a rejection of sinfulness or excuse-making. This is because it is in pursuit of a righteous future and is quick to abandon sin to an obsolete past. Hence, “…biblical repentance is not merely a sense of regret that leaves us where it found us; rather, it is a radical reversal that takes us back along the road of our sinful wanderings, creating in us a completely different mind-set in trouble.” With an understanding of metatonia, couples can stop sinful attitudes of blaming and judging the mate’s faults and weaknesses, instead covering them with pitiable hearts (Eph 4:32).⁶

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³ Edward J. Anton, Repentance: A Cosmic Shift of Mind and Heart (Waltham, MA: Discipleship Publications International, 2005), 29-30. Edward Anton asserts, based on Paul’s own metanoia of Acts 9, that “…metanoia is a transfiguration for your brain. The result is a radically transformed mind-set or worldview. It is a mental revolution which rewrites all the rules for the game of life.”


Repentance leads to change in one’s mind and in the purpose of KIB couples’ marriages. Repentance should be “…a from and a to. The old is renounced (turned from) and the new is embraced (turned to).” For the couples here, from may be compared to unforgiveness of the mind and to may well be called forgiveness of the mind. James D. G. Dunn presents the combination of the ideas of “transformation and renewal” in Romans 12:2,

“ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοοῦ” (…be transformed by the renewing of your mind…). Here, “ἀνακαινώσεις” “renewal” occurs only in Christian literature. The combination of the ideas of “transformation” and “renewal” may indicate some sort of balance of continuity and discontinuity with what was before. There is a continuity of the subject; but fundamental attitudes must be changed and new perspective taken up.

Understanding repentance lets troubled KIB couples change unforgiveness in their minds to a mindset of forgiveness. The couples may have already forgiven each other in some conflicted events, but they need to continuously and repeatedly practice the mind of forgiveness, now and in the present time—moment by moment, not putting off forgiveness to a later time. This correct consideration gives troubled KIB couples a

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8 Richard V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 85. Repentance, to troubled KIB couples, should be improved from the old mind—that is unforgiving intentions—, to a new mind—forgiving intentions—trying to obey God’s will for extending forgiveness. Peace helps the couples to understand these changes, saying that “The one side is the old life, flawed, out of set with What God wants. On the other side of the turning is the new life, grounded in God’s people, and opening out into new horizons of growth (sanctification)”, 86.

9 Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 714. Dunn presents, “In view of the εἰς τὸ… clause, the renewal is necessary for Jew as well as Gentile. And also the tense of the renewal is now, present time. Through the Scripture of both the 2 Cor. 4:16 and Col. 3:10, Paul similarly uses the verb to show present tense.” Referring to Romans 12:2b, “then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Dunn also adds that “the outworking and test of inward renewal is ethically responsible conduct.”
much-needed, in-depth look into their hearts and minds and helps them to enlarge their forgiveness. Therefore, troubled KIB couples can understand true repentance as surrender, redirection, and reshaping the intentions of their sinful minds and hearts.

Shifting of the Mind to Christ’s Mind-set

Repentance is the internal process of awareness through which hidden pride transforms to humility. It is propelled and empowered through close introspection of one’s heart. Through Christ’s atonement, believers were justified for their sins and forgiven, and their hearts were renewed. As a step in the process of sanctification, couples must fill their renewed hearts with humility. Christ has set a model of humility and ordered that they follow in his example. In the difficulties of married life, he expects couples to reshape the intentions of their hearts. Humility is among the most important traits that allow couples to resolve their conflicts.

Having the Mind of Christ

The mind has always been more important to God than outward actions. People are usually content with satisfying the expectations of society and the requirements of God by their outer, visible actions. However, God looks at their inner thoughts; he said as early as Samuel’s day, that “man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sm 16:7). In the emphasis of the New Testament, believers can say, “The
Therefore they should make it their focus to shift their sinful mindset toward that of Christ.

The destiny of believers is to be like Christ. God intends it, and the Scripture directs them to participate in the process of becoming like him (Phil 2:5). Jesus himself invites them, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me” (Mt 11:29). In them, the mind of Christ matures in a process of growth. They are to be like Jesus, who was God made human; he became like them so that they might become like him.

As Christ’s followers, KIB couples have the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), but, in subsequent growth, that mind should contend with established habits, the culture in which they live, and the work of Satan. To help them learn, he gave his life to give them an example of how to live their lives, “…Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Pt 2:21). To teach them servanthood, he washed the disciples’ feet. Likewise, they are to love because that is the example of Christ. Paul told the Ephesians, “And live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Eph 5:2). He went from birth to death living our kind of life to give an example of what God meant humans to be.

10 The Bible uses the words heart and mind interchangeably. At times, the Bible uses the word heart where readers today would use the word mind, as in the injunction, “Apply your heart to instruction…” (Prv 23:12). Believers understand the importance of their hearts in following the Word of God. In the New Testament, Jesus used the word heart in the same sense: “Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, ‘Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts’ (Mt 9:4)?”

11 Gerald F. Hawthorne, Philippians, vol. 43 of Word Biblical Commentary, (Waco, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1983), 79. Gerald Hawthorne explains Philippians 2:5, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus,” and “…Jesus [is] as the supreme example of the humble, self-sacrificing, self-denying, self-giving service that Paul has just been urging the Philippians to practice in their relations one toward another.” Believers consider that Paul’s motive in this verse (in telling his readers to follow Jesus’ mind) is not theological but ethical. His objective of course is not to give instruction in doctrine, but to reinforce instruction in Christian living.
Pursuing Christ’s Humility

If couples are to follow in Christ’s footsteps and live with his mindset, they can also pursue his humility. The incarnation itself is an act of humility (Heb 2:17). God had to stoop low to become a man. Everything about his earthly life was lowly; he was born in a stable, and his cradle was a feeding trough. He who was perfectly holy submitted to a baptism intended for sinners. One of his purposes was to identify with the lowest and vilest of them. Jesus submitted to his own creation. By virtue of his nature and office, he was inherently higher than the high priest, higher than kings. He was above all humans and human agencies. Yet he traveled simply as an itinerant preacher, gave his life in lowly service, and died the most despised death possible in his time.

Some people have a faulty understanding of humility. Their idea of humility is a self-degrading attitude that does not see God’s greatness as the primary basis for their humility. This false attitude is full of self-pity, stirring up self-victimizing thoughts. It may cause one to degrade oneself in front of others and complain about one’s self-sacrifices in the troubled marriage. Some correspond their false idea of humility with

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12 Hebrews 2:17 says, “...in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.” Christ’s atonement worked to not only satisfy God but also to show humility by obeying God.

13 Zechariah 9:9 says, “...See your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The Grand Bible Commentary explains the image of Christ riding on a donkey. The image does not portray Christ as having mundane authority, but rather as a humbling Messiah to serve others. Bible Academy, The Grand Bible Commentary, 119. The New Testament also says, “...See, your king comes to you... riding on a donkey...” (Mt 21:5), fulfilling the prophecy of the Old Testament.

14 In my counseling ministry, I have known couples who incessantly remind their spouses of their self-sacrifices, sometimes costing others extra effort to accommodate the “humility” of the person. Self-victimizing spouses often ask the questions, “Why am I the only one making sacrifices?” “I have been sacrificing to keep the marriage together. I have tolerated so much until now. Why must I put up with more?” It can be seen that these spouses do not have sincere humility, for they only see their own losses
humiliation. When they think they are acting in humility, they experience shamefulness and a loss of self-esteem.\textsuperscript{15} True humility does not entail shame, self-pity, or self-degradation; it is not self-destructive. Instead, it helps spouses to recognize the limitations, problems, and inadequacies they each have, and directs each toward repentance.

The true humility couples seek is one that humbles them to others in fear of the Lord. Humble people are open to the Lord and also to others, knowing that God often speaks through people. Proud people are closed to others; all their attention is on themselves. They disregard the Lord for they only look downward. The proud work from their own initiatives while the humble work from God’s initiative. Since God dwells with the humble (Is 57:15),\textsuperscript{16} they are in constant contact with him. They know when he speaks and are quick to obey him. If believers only obey their self-exalting impulses, they cannot hear God, for “God is opposed to the proud” (Jas 4:6). Humble people first look upward to God and then outwardly to others.

Accordingly, as Terry D. Hargrave states, humility “helps spouses not to think of themselves more highly than they do their spouses. It helps them to be realistic and

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\textsuperscript{15} Virginia T. Holeman, \textit{Reconcilable Differences: Hope and Healing for Troubled Marriages} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 131. Holeman uses the example of a wife who said she was “covered with shame” because of her husband’s affair with one of their coworkers. She lost face and found facing her coworkers very painful.

\textsuperscript{16} See, Isaiah 57: 15, saying, “...I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit,...”. Believers also can regard “...him who is contrite and lowly in spirit” as humble people who repent of the sins in their daily lives. Reflecting on this passage from Isaiah, Peter C. Craigie remarks about Psalms 34:18—“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Peter C. Craigie, \textit{Psalms 1-50}, vol. 19 of \textit{Word Biblical Commentary} (Waco, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1983), 281. The evildoers who are depicted as repenting and receiving deliverance from God in time of trouble.
honest about the limitations, personalities, and characteristics that have shaped their individual personalities and need improvement….” In the absence of true humility, troubled spouses justify their own actions, minimize the damage they have caused, blame their partners, and argue defensively for themselves, leaving no room for honest introspection, confessing, and seeking forgiveness. However, when they become humble, they become aware of their own sinfulness. They are able to admit their wrongs and lift the blame they put on their partners. Humility allows spouses to be willing to improve themselves and adds hope for resolving their marital problems.

True humility does indeed sacrifice itself, but it never costs others. It is genuinely other-directed, meaning that it shifts its own initiatives to ones that are self-giving in the service of others. It draws spouses away from their fault-finding tendencies and fills them with sympathy and mercy. Humility is an attitude and act of the will that genuinely grows out of a faith in the greatness of God and a confidence that God will act. It is an important trait that Christ has exemplified for KIB couples, and it is a key shift in mindset that they need to follow in the reorientation of their minds to be like that of Christ. With humility, they can take the steps needed to surrender themselves to Jesus.

Surrendering to Jesus

As humans, spouses have the innate determination to run their own lives and an unwillingness to be mastered by Christ. They stumble into selfishness and pride and leave no room for Christ to correct them and work in them. However, when they put their faith

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in Christ’s sacrifice for their sins, they relinquish control of their lives to him. God equips them by his spirit to walk in the light. To do anything short of that is to rob themselves of the opportunity to become the person he has designed them to be—a person who bears his image and glorifies him by surrendering to him in married life. As the final stage of repentance, complete surrender is necessary to accept God’s will to work in them. A surrendered life encourages them to say no to self and yes to God.

**Dying to self**

Spiritual growth in a Christian’s life involves death—death of self. Each believer in his or her sinful nature has created a self that is contrary to God’s best for that person. Unless one is willing to die to the old self, God cannot bring forth the new self, created to be like Jesus. In order to have this transformation, one first recognizes and deals with the old self. Dying to self means realizing there is something far more significant to one’s life than achievements. With this realization, one forsakes the path of self-interest and begins a journey of repentance. In the process of forgiveness, a person may be called to lay down his or her very life. Andrew Murray advises, “You must deny self once for all. Denying self must every moment be the power of your life, and then Christ will come in and take possession of you.”

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18 O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 189. O’Brien explains the old self in Colossians 3:9, (“...since you have taken off your old self, ...”) as a character of evil ways, such as immorality, impurity, lust, and greed. Colossians 3:10 tells us, “... put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” As Christians, we need to continually surrender ourselves to allow the new self to replace our corruptive old nature. In explaining Apostle Paul’s exhortation, O’Brien claims the initial surrender “occurred to the readers[Colossians] when they were incorporated in Christ.”

In the process of repentance, KIB couples come to realize that they center themselves in their own lives. They will fully mature only when they learn that they do not find life in themselves or in their pursuits. As each mates acknowledge this truth, God moves him or her toward a greater depth of spiritual growth. The person comes to understand that self-discovery, self-satisfaction, or self-fulfillment are all false prizes of life—they seek it, get it, and find it empty. Jesus tells them as much when he says, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 10:39).

The desire of the people of the Old Testament surrender to God was expressed through the burnt offerings (Lv 1:3) they made in conjunction with sin or guilt offerings, giving the Lord their dedication and consecration. These offerings were intended to express the worshiper’s whole dedication and consecration to the Lord. The burnt offerings parallel complete surrender to the will of God. The New Testament also reveals perfect consecration and surrender, first through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross as an offering, and second through the exhortation to believers make an offering of their own: “…offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (Rom 12:1). From this, Nancy DeMoss notes that Christians are to give themselves as living sacrifices, meaning “we are to live in our bodies knowing...

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20 Bible Academy, *The Grand Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, 530. The commentary states the Hebrew root of burnt offerings, mentioned in Leviticus 1:3, “If the offering is a burnt offering from the heard, he is to offer a male without defect…,” means “ascending to heaven.” The meaning of the word is described as God’s acceptance of the offerings that are lifted to him. The symbolic meaning of the offering is the perfect sacrifice and full obedience of the offerer to God’s will. Thus, Christ’s atoning sacrifice on Gethsemane was given as a living sacrifice in significance of his obedience to God.
that they are not our own, but that they belong to God, whose temple we are." In
making a “spiritual sacrifice,” couples offer themselves to the worship of and
obedience to God and as a pattern of daily conduct. Offering their bodies demonstrates
living out a devotion to the Lord, not partially, but in its entirety.

As Christians, couples may forsake worldly pleasures and call it dying to self, but
many of them will demand interior pleasures. They pray to God to satisfy their restless or
painful emotions. They seek God to satisfy themselves, not to satisfy him. They may
deceive themselves into thinking they center their lives in God by constantly seeking him,
but their primary focus remains on themselves, even when their focus changes from
satisfying themselves outwardly to satisfying themselves inwardly. In repentance,
spouses need to give themselves absolutely to God, to let him work his will in them.

**Living for God**

Alongside Christ’s atoning sacrifice itself, Jesus’ prayerful decision at
Gethsemane expressed full surrender to God’s will. Jesus, who delighted to do the will of
God, who loved his father and never disobeyed him, knew his purpose as the bearer of all
sins of mankind. He was in anguish from the prediction of his imminent death and came
before the Lord but expressed no resistance to the will of God. Putting aside his agony

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22 J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, vol. 49 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word, Incorporated, 1988), 101. In his book, Michaels asserts that the “spiritual sacrifices” in the verse 1 Peter 2:5, “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ,” refers to an all-out personal commitment to do the will of God. They require worship and a pattern of social conduct. The two aspects cannot be separated. God expects believers to make the same sacrifices to serve each other in marriage as we do to serve him.
and desires, “the surrendered Son of God was about to take on Himself all the cumulative, compounded resistance and rebellion of all humans who had ever lived or ever would live on this planet.”

His total submission was shown in his prayer, “Not my will, but yours be done.”

To help believers follow Jesus’ perfect surrender, God gives them guidance in the book of Colossians for them to mature through the transition of dying to self and living for him. Peter O’Brien quotes Colossians 3:1-3 to say that believers have been set free from the rule of earthly conduct and that they were made alive together in union with Christ for new life. He then goes on to say that “because we have been raised with Christ, our lives are to be different: [Christians] have no life of their own since their life is the life of Christ. So their interests must be his interests.”

Paul’s proclamation to seek the things above has reference to the orientation of their will. Christians are to look upward, giving Christ the longings of their heart so that he may bestow upon them the ways to live a life in his glory.

Transformation through prayer leads KIB couples to set their hearts and minds on God’s agenda and not their own. It teaches them to reflect on their false repentance and limited or conditional forgiveness and to discipline their hearts according to the ways of God. God is greatly delighted and glorified when they humbly recognize their need to

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24 Colossians 3:1-3 says, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above… Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” which relates to a previous verse “Since you died with Christ…” (Col 2:20).

live under his conduct, abandoning their human principles for his abiding grace to live every moment of their lives. The ultimate goal of repentance is the relinquishing of their sinful natures and thoughts, and shifting their mindset to that of Christ. KIB couples can look to the humanly manifested qualities of Christ, such as humility, sacrifice, and surrender, to fulfill what God expects them to live in.

**Reconciliation**

Interpersonal reconciliation is a process involving a change of attitude that leads to a change in relationship. It requires the effort of both the offending and offended parties to humble themselves—the offender to repent, and the offended to give their transgressors the opportunity to show repentance and regain trust. Ken Sande defines, “To be reconciled means to replace hostility and separation with peace and friendship.”

This section will examine the biblical relevance of interpersonal reconciliation and how the whole picture of reconciliation involves the dynamics of the individual relationships that affect the use of repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

**Biblical Considerations of Interpersonal Reconciliation**

When couples come to worship, interpersonal reconciliation is significant, not only for their well-being, but more importantly for God’s pleasure. Just as God delights in receiving worship, he delights in spouses who come to him having overcome their conflicts and incompatibilities with each other by repenting and reconciling. For this reason, couples need to have biblical considerations for reconciliation in their marriage.

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lives. God values worship as much as he values interpersonal reconciliation and has declared his presence to be with those who reconcile.

**Interpersonal Reconciliation Carries the Same Weight as Worship**

Jesus teaches the priority of reconciliation before coming to God. In Matthew 5:23-24, he says, “Therefore, if you are offering your gift… and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there… First go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.” God wants KIB couples to come to worship with a pure heart, one that is unburdened with guilt or hate through self-directed repentance and forgiveness for others. He will not accept the offering from those who have not done so. He puts more value on the pure heart of the giver than on the offering itself. Therefore, Jesus directs couples to first reconcile with their brothers or sisters prior to making their offerings.

Moreover, Jesus reveals how religious rituals and moral relations compare in God’s eyes (Mt 5:24). Some Christians believe their religious rituals, such as making offerings, will compensate for their moral disqualifications. However, this is a serious misconception, for any offering, regardless of its grandeur or worth, is meaningless to God if it comes from a sinful heart.

The apostle Paul also emphasizes the importance of believers’ interpersonal affairs when they come to worship God. In Romans 12:1b, he urges, “…offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” Christians need to serve each other with a sacrificial heart—this is their spiritual act of worship that God delights in. Their worship cannot be holy if they instill feelings of hate
and guilt, and they cannot bring glory to God when they try to worship with such tainted hearts.

The mention of the word brother in Romans 12:1a refers to neighbors, friends, and acquaintances. This indicates the relationships KIB couples all have in the body of Christ—they were all made brothers and sisters, having received the same atonement in Christ’s blood. Therefore, in the broader meaning of brother, husbands and wives may be brothers and sisters.

Couples can realize the connection of their worldly horizontal relationship with people to their spiritual vertical relationship with God. God mirrors their attitude of worship with the attitude they have toward each other. As worshippers of God, when they are sinned against or when they commit sins against others, they need to consider the horizontal and vertical reconciling relationship they have with each other and with God. Spouses need to reconcile first before they want come to please God.

**Interpersonal Reconciliation Invites Jesus’ Presence**

Jesus has promised his presence to those who overcome their conflicts and reconcile. In order to fully understand and receive his promise, believers need to apply what the Bible teaches them about the act of reconciliation. KIB spouses need to have in their hearts the right intentions for achieving reconciliation with their transgressors and take the approach Jesus directs them to follow.

According to Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus spells out specific steps that a person who has been hurt is to take. However, these instructions are often misunderstood: “If your brother sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone… and
if the offender refuses to listen… let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector… For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

When Jesus tells Christians to point out the faults of their offenders, he does not mean for them to confront their wrongdoers with a scrutinizing and scornful attitude. He wants them to approach their transgressors not out of self-righteousness, but out of the motivation to draw out repentance and offer forgiveness. Christians are not to judge another for his or her faults; instead they are to help guide the other toward correction. If they are successful in mending broken relationships, both sides will enjoy the fruits of reconciliation—the offended will have the joy of spiritual maturity, and the offender will have the joy of repentance.

The importance of this passage is emphasized by the words in the final verse (v. 20): “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” The word “gathered” conveys the image of bringing together people who were once estranged from one another. The theme of the whole passage, then, is reiterated once more, as Christ promises to be present whenever reconciliation takes place. Exodus 20:24 says, “Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice… fellowship offerings… I will come to you and bless you.” John I. Dunham notes, “Yahweh himself will choose the place where such altars are built and he will come in person to his people assembled at these places and there bless them.”

The fellowship offering is signified as one that reconciles people with one another and people with God.

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The descending of the holy presence described in the Old Testament is the same principle as the promise Jesus made in the New Testament. Taking this into further consideration, KIB couples need to come together with the attitude of offering God their reconciliation. They need to openly request and accept reconciliation to enjoy God’s presence and blessings.

How Repentance, Reconciliation, and Forgiveness Relate to Each Other

To elaborate on the model of forgiveness previously outlined, the following describes the dynamic interactions of repentance, reconciliation, and forgiveness. In understanding the empowering relationships of these three elements, KIB couples can recognize the areas in which they may be lacking in their efforts to resolve their marital conflicts. From there, each partner can more readily forgive the other.

Reconciliation and Forgiveness

Reconciliation and forgiveness are closely related, as one event often pushes toward the other, but they differ in their natures. Forgiveness is the internal replacement of negative emotions and is granted as a gift of freedom from guilt to the offender. Reconciliation is an interpersonal acceptance that is earned by the regaining of each other’s trust. While forgiveness is the replacement of emotions, reconciliation is the replacement of outward behavior.

Virginia Holeman believes that forgiveness gives the injured parties a new way to look at the past and the perpetrator through insight and understanding.\(^{28}\) It frees the

\(^{28}\) Holeman, *Reconcilable Differences*, 160.
injured parties from the negative effects of violated trust but gives no desire for reconciliation. From this stage, the injured party in a marriage can take a step further in hope for the couple’s future by reaching out to the transgressor and allowing him or her to make up for the wrongs. As reconciliation involves the effort of both parties, the transgressors can then dedicate themselves to change their behavior. Holeman describes, “…restoration gives both parties the means to rebuild their future by giving opportunities for compensation and by the overt act of forgiving.” In order for forgiveness to promote reconciliation, spouses need to move on from salvage to restoration.

Reconciliation and forgiveness are not dependent on each other—one act does not necessarily cause the other to happen, nor does it mean one is impossible without the other. Forgiveness can be given as it is an internal act of emotion, but reconciliation cannot be accomplished if the partner in conflict is not present or is unwilling. To reconcile requires that spouses grieve whatever they feel they have lost. Forgiveness helps resolve the grief in a way that allows them to move toward building love. The spouses have a mutual inclination toward each other---the more one is able to grant forgiveness, the higher the opportunities are for reconciliation, and the more acts of reconciliation occur, greater amounts of forgiveness and love can be given.

**Forgiveness and Repentance**

Jesus’ response presumably states that he will grant forgiveness to sinners however many times they repent. In Matthew 18:21-22, Peter asked Jesus how many times he

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should forgive his brother when he sinned against him. Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” Just as Jesus sets no limit to the number of times he will forgive his followers, he expects KIB spouses to do the same with their transgressors. “If he sins against you… and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him” (Lk 17:4). This passage confirms Jesus’ decree that forgiveness should be granted to the repentant. The more KIB spouses practice repentance toward Jesus, the more they are to receive his forgiveness and grow in the faith of being forgiven. Through this faith, they will be able to grant forgiveness to others more easily.

In the following verses of Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus told a parable of a servant who owed his master ten thousand talents. The master took mercy on his begging servant and cleared all his debts, but the servant left to find a fellow servant who owed him a smaller amount and demanded his money back. The fellow servant also begged for mercy, but the servant had the man imprisoned. The master heard of this and threw his servant into prison saying, “I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” Jesus teaches believers that God will treat them the same way if they do not forgive one another.

By the atonement of his son Jesus Christ, God has provided KIB couples with limitless forgiveness for any and all of their sins. Freely receiving the gift of atonement, they are indebted to remit the grace they were granted. When they allow their human selfishness to retain forgiveness from their offenders, though, God gives them consequences as the master gave his servant.
In the process of repentance and forgiveness, couples evaluate and reflect upon their past conflicts and the events related to them. The transgressors can see the damage they caused and, from a humbled state, repent. The offended can accept the contrite heart of the wrongdoer and grant that person forgiveness. Repentance may nurture forgiveness to help bring closure to a past event, and both can work together to promote reconciliation.

**Repentance and Reconciliation**

As discussed earlier, repentance and forgiveness can bring closure to a painful event by evaluating the past. With closure, KIB couples can move into the future together by deciding to restore the trust that was lost. They can progressively move toward reconciliation when the transgressors express sincere repentance. When transgressors come to realize the wrongs they have committed and the damage they have caused, confess their wrongs, show remorse, and renounce their sins, the injured party can acknowledge the humility and initiative of their wrongdoer’s hearts. In this view, the offended can see the potential in the partner to regain trustworthiness. Holeman claims, “Trustworthy actions help you lay claim to a new future together.”

Genesis 33:3-9 shows Jacob reconciling with his brother Esau, from whom Jacob took his father’s blessing. **“He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground**

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30 Holeman, *Reconcilable Differences*, 177.

31 See Genesis 33:3-9: “He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother. But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him and kissed him. And they wept… Esau asked, ‘What do you mean by these droves I met?’ ‘To find favor in your eyes, my lord,’ he said. But Esau said, ‘I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.’”
seven times as he approached his brother. But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him…” Years after running from Esau, Jacob returned with a herd of cows as a gift. Esau saw the repenting heart of Jacob and accepted his desire to close their broken relationship. Matthew Henry interprets Jacob’s gestures as “humble, submissive behavior that goes far towards turning away wrath.” Instead of acting in anger and vengefulness, Esau received the gifts and accepted Jacob as a brother, and there is tenderness between them. Repentance can promote both parties to feel more open with each other and set the basis for a restoration of trust.

Thus, to conclude, the model of forgiveness essentially consists of the processes of repentance and reconciliation, which work together to enable and nurture forgiveness. KIB couples seldom if ever reach forgiveness without first moving through the steps of repentance and reconciliation. By reorienting their minds, couples can continuously and repeatedly practice the mind of forgiveness. In doing so, they understand that repentance involves reshaping of the mind to resemble that of Christ, and that surrendering to Jesus will allow him to work in their marriage, bringing them to a stage of reconciliation. Likewise, when KIB couples understand the biblical perspective of reconciliation, that it is God's will for believers to reconcile and that Jesus' presence is with those who reconcile, they see that it confirms repentance and leads them to forgiveness. Reconciliation seeks to heal wounds in hurtful marriages and gives spouses the means for restoration. With strong theological understandings of repentance and reconciliation and

their relation to forgiveness, KIB couples can move past their challenges and pains. When they follow the model of forgiveness, spouses will come to reach out to each other in acceptance, reopening their future life in marriage.
PART THREE
STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

CHAPTER 5
STRATEGY OF FORGIVENESS FOR RESOLUTION OF MARITAL CONFLICT

There are three basic strategies of forgiveness for resolving the marital conflict. These strategies are: initiating and maintaining changes of thoughts; diagnosing the problems that discourage forgiveness and their remedies; and maximizing forgiveness. The section about initiating changes will focus on three of most fundamental thoughts that troubled Korean immigrant boomer couples need to change. The section entitled “maintaining changes” will focus on how couples can continually change their unforgiving thoughts to forgiving thoughts. The section about diagnosing problems that discourage forgiveness will discuss each of these issues in detail, and provide an effective strategy for dealing with each one. The section about maximizing forgiveness will discuss how couples can enlarge their ability to forgive by using two procedures: repentance and reconciliation. The more they can learn how to repent and reconcile with each other, the greater will be their ability to resolve marital conflicts.
Initiating and Maintaining Changes of Thought

In resolving marital conflict, once some of the deeper causes of conflicts have changed, such as unforgiving thoughts toward the spouse, the couples will be able to grant forgiveness to their spouse. This is because forgiveness is a choice – a deliberate decision to obey God’s Word. The willingness to make such a decision is influenced by the person’s thoughts. Archibald Hart emphasizes the influence of thought: “One’s thought life influences every aspect of one’s being.”¹ Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinks within himself, so he is.” Thus, initiating changes in thought patterns is important for troubled Korean couples wishing to resolve their conflicts. Once they are firmly determined to become forgivers, marital conflicts will be more readily resolved.

The following counseling strategies can be said to operate within the framework of Cognitive Therapy. Michael Neenan and Windy Dryden explain this:²

Cognitive therapy, originally developed as a treatment for depression, is now applied to a wide variety of ailments such as anxiety disorders, substance abuse and post traumatic stress disorder. It is also the most widely used and validated approach in the cognitive behavioral field. What makes it so widely used as a therapeutic tool is its insight in linking negative feelings and emotions to maladaptive thought patterns.

Before delving into treatment strategies for KIB couples, it will be helpful to briefly overview cognitive therapy.

¹ Hart, Habits of the Mind, 5. Hart summarizes the influences of thought claiming that thought forges character, changes emotion, determines behaviors, and shapes attitudes. He also asserts, “Everything about us is constantly being shaped by the stream of our ideas. These ideas take the form of recalled memories, self-conversation, and reflection. They comprise the thoughts that flow through our conscious and not-so-conscious minds.” Ibid., 6.

Cognitive therapy posits that a person’s behavior, feeling, and emotions are subjectively constructed from thoughts that are generated in response to an event. In essence, KIB spouses act the way they feel, and they feel according to what they think. Since each individual has different values and perspectives on the outside world, different people can have totally different feelings from the same event. This concept is especially relevant during KIB couples therapy where each spouse often has differing points of view from the same incident. The first step in cognitive therapy is to enable KIB couples to identify negative automatic thoughts as they go through their daily lives. By pointing out negative thoughts and offering alternatives, they can shift their thinking and have greater control over their feelings.

Initiating Changes of Thoughts

Troubled couples need to take a few moments to observe their habits of thought and reflect on the actions and reactions they have during each marital conflict. Habits of thought are powerful factors that troubled couples need to change. This is primarily because habits of thought are consistent and often unconscious patterns. Thoughts are tools that forge and shape their beliefs and will. Habits of thought form the basis for their day-to-day responses to life.

Initiating changes in habitual thought patterns is necessary. Thoughts are seeds. Thoughts are planted in the garden of the mind, and, if these thoughts are good seeds, they will bring forth much that is profitable. The words of Paul in Galatians 6:7 are relevant here, when he reminds troubled couples that they reap what they sow. This verse appeals to the principle of cause and effect, and to the metaphor of thoughts being
analogous to seeds: if they sow forgiveness, they will reap the products of love. Conversely, if they sow thoughts of unforgiveness, they will reap thoughts of unforgiveness, which will lead to bitterness, hatred, anger, and the like. Two initiatives are necessary for troubled couples to change their thought patterns: identification of unforgiving thoughts and rediscovering the presence of God.

**Identification of Unforgiving Thoughts in the Marriage Life**

In KIB couples’ sessions, there are three questions that can be used for identifying unforgiving thoughts, which hinder the resolution of marital conflicts. Each can be used to focus upon a different aspect of their thinking in which forgiveness may be necessary. First of all, the person needs to reflect upon and pray about forgiving himself or herself. The reason is that “our pain becomes our hate. The pain we cause other people becomes the hate we feel for ourselves. For having done them wrong.”

The first thing husbands/wives need is honesty. The person honestly needs to identify the unforgiveness that remains within his or her heart, which has accumulated throughout the entirety of life to that point. This work on oneself should include the periods of early childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, the time of marriage, and everything else up to the present time. KIB couples are instructed to write down all the unforgiving thoughts from their entire marriage life. I instruct people to look back on their life and ask themselves: “How

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3 Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don’t Deserve* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 72. He says, “…the climax of self-forgiving; it comes when we feel at one with ourselves again….The self inside of you, who condemned you so fiercely, embraces you now. You are whole, single; you have come together.” Ibid., 74. Thus, that KIB husbands and wives should dare to heal themselves by this simple act is a signal to the world that God’s love is a power within them. They cannot really forgive themselves unless they look at the failure in their past and call it by its right name.
long have I had these feelings, such as resentment, bitterness, and guilt?” God knows the regrets they have for the foolish ways they cheat themselves.

Secondly, regarding the offended, wounded husbands or wives need to identify what unforgiveness towards their spouse is still within their own hearts. Each spouse can write down a list of all the unforgiveness issues that exist within their marriage, asking the following questions: “Do I still hold unforgiving thoughts against my partner? How many times do I bring up past events in arguments? Am I willing to push myself to forgive or not to forgive?” Next, they ask themselves, “Am I ready to accept forgiveness from my partner. If not, then why not?” They can write down their reasons for not being willing to forgive, and in doing so recognize that each spouse is both an unforgiving and an unforgiven person.

Thirdly, the offending parties can identify and pray about the times they may have really hurt their partner. They need to ask themselves, “Have I taken responsibility and have I apologized?” They can list what kinds of apologies toward their partner they need to make. They may be holding onto some unwillingness to change. They may also be standing in the way of reconciliation on some issues if they have never taken responsibility for their own part in the matter. In addition, they can ask themselves, “Have I taken steps to change any recurrent patterns that may offend my partner?” They specify the kinds of patterns that should be changed within their marriage. This meditation is useful for initiating changes in their unforgiving thoughts.
Rediscovering the Presence of God in the Marriage Life

Remembering that God’s presence is within every Christian marriage, even if it is a troubled marriage, is absolutely essential. KIB spouses can change their thoughts, keeping faith that God is still working in their lives, rather than doubting of the presence of God in their marriage. By changing their thoughts to rediscover God’s presence, many conflicts can be easily resolved. A Deacon who was forty-nine years old – one of the team members of Calvary Mission Church – who was a committed Christian, has struggled with God’s presence in his troubles. One Sunday morning, he called me, saying: “Pastor, I have slipped and fallen again and I couldn’t resist the urge to fight. I hit my wife in anger this morning. I am in no shape to attend the service today. I am not sure that God is still with me. That is why I am letting you know that I will not be there.”

While it was evident he had been in severe a marital conflict, he was not out of control. I responded by telling him:

For that reason, this is exactly the place you should be. I want you to come in with me and be with us. Do not stop praising and worshiping to the Lord. Although you have been fighting with your wife, even so, ask God’s forgiveness, and God is always with you in his love even in the midst of your troubled marriage.

He at last appeared at the church, obviously very disappointed with himself. However, he repented, and stayed to participate in our celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

Likewise, KIB couples are assured of being filled with God’s presence, and with God’s abiding love, even in their painful marriages. They can grasp hope in faith. When they face the difficulties within their marriage, they are likely to doubt or fear. They may engage in desperate thoughts, such as, “Can I really be sure of God’s forgiveness and love for me?” or “Can I be sure my troubled marriage can actually be recovered?”
Driven by their own guilty feelings and hurtful negative emotions, they begin doubt God’s presence. However, even in the midst of all this pain and suffering, they are still near to God, and are still capable of making a clear decision to change their doubting thoughts. And in doing this, they can remember, “He [the Lord] heals the brokenhearted and binds up their[your] wounds” (Ps. 147: 3). Jesus also said to the hopeless woman caught in the act of adultery, “I do not condemn you” (John 8:11). The work of forgiveness through Jesus is still performed because he is “the same yesterday and today, yes and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Ray Anderson adds, “The human community that comprises the body of Christ is the people of God through whom Christ continues to be present, despite their failure, sinfulness, and disobedience.”

Thus, by the changing of thoughts through the rediscovering of God’s presence in their troubled marriage, couples are given another opportunity to experience God’s presence and grace.

Maintaining Changes in Unforgiving Thoughts

How can troubled KIB couples maintain the changes of unforgiving thoughts in their troubled marriage? To continually maintain changes of what and how to think, they can exercise three processes for the changing of unforgivable thoughts. These practices may require a great deal of concentration, but once they have become established, the husband’s or wife’s new forgiving way of thinking will have become a habit for them. To maintain changes of unforgiving thoughts, each spouse can review their own thinking.

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They can use three processes for this: capturing unforgiving thoughts, evaluating unforgiving thoughts, and replacing unforgiving thoughts with forgiving thoughts.

Capturing Unforgiving Thoughts

Each troubled KIB husband and wife can capture what he or she is thinking before deciding whether either wants to change it. Capturing a thought means to identify and become aware of thoughts that have precipitated a particular emotional reaction relating to unforgiveness. First of all, they need to ask themselves, “What unforgiving thoughts led up to my present feeling?” The person may reveal the chain of ideas that preceded the emotion. Perhaps his mate had criticized his behavior or words. What did he say to himself when he became aware of the criticism? Did he say, “I could not forgive my wife because she did not care for me?” Both husbands and wives can to write down the thoughts that passed through their minds in the sequence in which they occurred. They are to take their thought flash cards and review all of their entries. They are to compare them with previous entries and ask themselves, “What do they tell me?” They need to examine the reality of what they actually think.

Secondly, in order to collect the thoughts preceding an obsessive or ruminating thought of unforgiving, the husband or wife can realize that he or she is thinking excessively about some unpleasant happening or troubling event. The spouse can write down that idea in a brief sentence that completely communicates the thought. The hurtful thoughts or emotions can go round and round in one’s head until he or she feels quite dizzy. The spouse can keep a journal next to the bed to write down is or her thoughts, asking: “When did this thought start, and why does this idea bother me?” The spouse can
then write down a brief statement about why he or she thinks the idea is troubling. By carefully recording and reviewing one’s reactions over a period of time, the person will develop considerable insight into his or her marriage and personality style. It will help them to quickly pinpoint what their unforgiving thoughts are, decide which need to be changed, and which they wish to maintain.

**Replacing Each Unforgiving Thought with a Forgiving Thought**

In addition to capturing the unforgiving thought pattern, it is also necessary to have KIB couples systematically replace unforgiving thoughts with forgiving thoughts. There are two general methods for accomplishing this. The first method is to have the person practice replacing an old unforgiving thought with the new forgiving thought as often as possible throughout the day. For instance, spouses can write an old thought on a card. Every day, as often as negative feelings or hurtful memories related to their partner come to the mind, they should take out the relevant card and repeat the new positive thought they have created for themselves. They will gradually come to believe it. Repetition in self-talk will change their thoughts. This process certainly works when they say negative things to themselves continually, so there is no reason why it should not work when they say –and pray for –positive things.

The second method is for the spouses to simply decide what it is they want to believe, and then believe it. KIB husbands and wives can use the Scriptures to assist with this process. They can rehearse their reality thinking either during an interval of conflict or during “sane” moments when relating with their spouse. They can utilize the Scriptures relating to forgiveness wherever those Scriptures can support rational
counterstatements. Reading aloud the Bible verses relating to forgiveness seems to have the same effectiveness as self-talk. Self-talk is a powerful controller of emotions and behaviors. Archibald Hart asserts, “The cognitive approach to psychotherapy emphasizes that every emotional reaction is the inevitable consequence of our beliefs and attitudes. Emotions are not the consequences of any particular action or event.”

This procedure will help couples to develop the habit of rational thinking so that it can be used spontaneously when a conflict situation arises. By reading the Scriptures listed in their notes, they can see many rational counterstatements. Therefore, spouses need to write their own personalized responses on cards and keep them at hand for frequent reviewing.

Diagnosing the Problems and Making Appropriate Responses

It is necessary for KIB couples in conflict to diagnose what the major problems are which deter them from forgiveness, and to practice suitable responses to each of these problems. Prayer is the primary method of responding, and it is absolutely required for KIB couples to invite the Lord to participate in finding solutions to their important problems. Through the guidance of the Spirit, God leads the troubled couples to peace and helps them experience more spiritual intimacy. Proverbs 3:5,6 encourages them: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, And he will make your paths straight.”

However, practical procedures and details are also needed. In my experience, troubled KIB couples commonly encounter four destructive barriers to forgiveness. These

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Hart, Habits of the Mind, 184.
barriers are: misunderstanding, blaming, unresolved or cyclic patterns of conflict, and exploding anger between husbands and wives. Helpful techniques exist which can lead to a more rational understanding, and such understanding may result in being able to forgive an unforgivable spouse.

Figure 5.1, entitled “Chart for Diagnosing Problems and Suitable Skills,” shows four major problems that Korean immigrant boomer couples often confront, and four suitable skills the couples can practice to resolve them. The first column is labeled, “Problems which Deter Forgiveness.” Beneath it are listed: blaming, misunderstanding, unresolved or cyclic patterns of conflict, and exploding anger. The second column is labeled: “Suitable Skills.” Under this heading are listed: problem solving, clean communication, negotiation, and coping with anger. These terms indicate techniques, which can be exercised to remedy the corresponding problems listed in the first column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems which Deter Forgiveness</th>
<th>Suitable Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Blaming</td>
<td>Problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Misunderstanding</td>
<td>Clean communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Unresolved or cyclic patterns of conflict</td>
<td>Negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Exploding anger</td>
<td>Coping with anger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 5.1. Chart for Diagnosing Problems and Suitable Skills.
Blaming and Its Solution: Problem Solving

What Is Blaming?

Blaming is one of the most serious conflicts that KIB couples commonly face in their marriage. Blame means to reproach, reprove, and criticize. Blame means “finding fault with someone or something because of some error, mistake, omission, neglect, or the like.” M. Farouk Radwan says that, while the habit of blaming the spouse is very common, there are some reasons behind the habit of blaming the other party. These include fear of losing control, an attempt to control others, or an effort to evade responsibility. Some people panic when they lose control of a situation, and so they try to restore the sense of being in control by blaming the other partner. They try to control others by blaming their mates and making them feel bad. Some spouses cannot admit failures and mistakes, so they blame others in order to escape the responsibility.

As for KIB couples blaming each other, a right understanding of how to remove this barrier to forgiveness is required. What they think of as the problem may not actually be the problem. Instead, the previous “solution” to the problem may now have become their main problem. McKay, Fanning, and Paleg explain, “A problem is defined as a persistent failure to find an effective response. In problem solving the first and most important step is to describe the problem in detail, in terms of what you have done so far that has not worked.”

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8 McKay, Fanning, and Paleg, Couples Skills, 106.
Institute for Korean Marriage and Family in Los Angeles. She complained and blamed her husband, saying:

Pastor, our families live in a very small apartment and have no car. My husband promised, and my husband and I made a plan to move out to another apartment and buy a new car for our family, but he several times broke his promise, and there still has been no answer for six months. In most of the matters, he acts in these irresponsible ways. He does not care about concerns of the family. I cannot wait. I am very irritable and embarrassed, and cannot trust him any more.

This situation becomes problematic because the wife and husband each give answers and responses that seem satisfactory at the time, but which do not work in the long run. If they are a little short of money, that in itself may not be a serious problem. However, it can become a problem if they apply short-term solutions, such as making unreasonable promises. If they are harboring old resentments, hidden agendas, or looking for someone to blame more than for solutions, the conflict is more serious. Both partners end up feeling sad, and unforgiveness accumulates. However, if each partner can be honestly open and cooperative, then they can set reasonable objectives together and engage in mutual problem-solving. With even a small amount of effective practice, they can learn the skill of setting emotion aside for a moment to analyze situations.

**How to Cope with Blaming**

Skillful problem solving is one key method for dealing with blaming. Four steps are involved. First, the troubled couple needs to learn to state the problem by writing it down in a way that contains neither blame nor interpretations that are critical of either partner. Such a description should be separate from their feelings about that situation and include only the so-called “five Ws and 1 H”: who, what, where, when, how, why.
Secondly, they need to set goals. Both can then objectively examine every part of their description. They can make two categories for discerning what the real problem is - or is not. They can write down: “The real problem is not” and “The real problem is.” After this, they can continue working together on specifying the who’s, what’s and why’s until they have three or four good and realistic ideas.

The third step is for the couple to use brainstorming. During this process, they must promise to follow four rules: first, no value judgments, no concerns about whether a person or a suggestion is good or bad - all evaluation is to be saved for later; second, more is better, so write down as much as possible; third, just make suggestions for how the other partner could improve; and, fourth, try to collaborate, with the intention of eventually combining several good ideas into a coherent plan, considering the long-range consequences of each suggested component.

During the fourth step, it is now time for the couple to evaluate results and come to an agreement. Stanley, Trathen, McCain, and Bryan advise that both parties emphasize the word agree. This is because the solution is not likely to be useful unless they both agree to try it.⁹ A trial period of several weeks is necessary to practice the matters that they have agreed to. Evaluating the results of the problem-solving efforts are an important part of changing their attitude toward each other and helping them see what kinds of special efforts may be needed in the future. These peaceful discussions let both parties begin to remove the blame and guilt, and move closer to granting forgiveness and resolving their conflicts.

⁹ Stanley, Trathen, McCain, and Bryan, A Lasting Promise, 81.
Misunderstanding and Its Solution: Clear Communication

A major problem at the heart of many conflicts between troubled KIB couples is misunderstanding. They require clear communication. Couples in my counseling sessions often ask me, “Pastor, neither of us can understand the mind of the other partner at all. What is the problem between us?” One example of misunderstanding took place between Mr. and Mrs. K. After they had a fight, Mr. K and his wife visited the counseling office. According to the wife’s explanation, they went to a Palm Springs resort on their most recent summer vacation. They were supposed to stay three days and two nights. However, she asked her husband to stay one extra day so they could have a little more fun. He responded, “I need to do some work at home tonight.” She responded by saying, “Work? You are always working. We had only two days after three years. Since when is your precious job so much more important than me?” He suddenly got angry, stared at her, then yelled, “You’re, stupid! I will leave right now!” What had until then been a pleasant vacation now ended terribly for both of them. Then, what is misunderstanding and how can it be dealt with? Communication patterns to avoid will be presented.

What Is Misunderstanding and How Can It Be Dealt With?

Webster’s Dictionary defines misunderstanding as “Failure to understand something correctly and a disagreement: quarrel.”¹⁰ When KIB couples misunderstand something, they are failing to correctly interpret their mate’s true intention, and, therefore, unexpectedly begin fighting. They experience the frustration of being misunderstood.

¹⁰ Webster’s II New College Dictionary, s.v. “misunderstanding.”
McKay, Fanning, and Paleg say that clean communication means taking responsibility for the impact of what one says, being honest rather than lying or telling half-truths, and being supportive. This means fostering closeness and understanding rather than defensiveness and distance. Members of troubled couples often report that what their partner *hears* them say is *very* different from what they were trying to say.

The XYZ communication format\(^\text{12}\) can be one of the most practical methods for clear communication. This same method can also help misunderstandings between KIB couples. First, it is helpful to examine the XYZ communication format. The individuals transform each of their concerns into an XYZ statement: When you do (X) in situation (Y), then I feel (Z). The XYZ statement has been consciously designed for clarity and to minimize the possibility of a negative reaction. The way many people ordinarily talk is almost guaranteed to lead to defensiveness and escalation, but the use of an XYZ statement is far more constructive. Figure 5.2 shows in graphical form the making of an XYZ statement.

During this process, troubled KIB couples should be instructed to first spend some time thinking about things their partner has done that bother them in some way. After this, they visualize the XYZ graph when speaking, and practice as follows: “When I

\(^{11}\) McKay, Fanning, and Paleg, *Couple Skills*, 56.

\(^{12}\) Stanley, Trathen, McCain, and Bryan, *A Last Promise*, 78. They quote the theory of XYZ statements from the book, *A Couple's Guide to Communication* (Champaign, IL: Research Press, 1976), 35, written by J. M. Gotman, C. Notarius, J. Gonso, and H. Markman. They say, “When discussing problems, it can be helpful to have a specific way to share gripes constructively.” On the other hand, McKay, Fanning, Paleg, in the book *Couple Skills*, describe four stages: observations, thoughts, feelings, and needs or wants. In the case of KIB couples, they are interested in a simpler structure for clean communication—XYZ statements. For this reason, my intention is to adapt the XYZ format for giving clear messages between spouses in KIB couples.
came home at night (X), there were many things out of place the living room (Y), and I felt very frustrated (Z).” This is very different from saying, “You are totally sloppy. I am sick of your rude, inconsiderate attitude, and you make me angry!” Through the use of XYZ statements, a specific behavior is identified in a specific context, and connected to a specific emotion. Such statements can avoid the apparent threat of a nonspecific attack on character between husbands and wives in sensitive moments.

![Diagram](image)

Fig. 5.2: The XYZ Statements for Clean Communication

**Communication Patterns to Avoid**

Troubled KIB couples commonly fall victim to three fatal pitfalls, which hinder good communication. Correcting them is referred to as the “three avoidances” – three communication patterns that should never be used. Awareness of these three avoidances can help a couple correctly understand and take preventive measures against negative emotions, which may interfere with the willingness to forgive.

The first avoidance is the “you” statement. Troubled KIB couples are encouraged to avoid “you” messages, which convey an implied accusation. Instead, they are encouraged to use an “I” statement. Ken Sande describes “I” statements by saying they:
…give information about yourself rather than attack the other mate, for example—“I feel hurt when you make fun of me in front of your friends, because it makes me feel stupid and foolish.” An “I” statement can explain why this issue is important to you, why you would like to discuss it, and how the other’s conduct is affecting you.\(^\text{13}\)

Concerning the previous example of the couple in Palm Springs, if the husband had used an “I” statement, instead of saying “You’re stupid,” the situation would probably not have escalated into uncontrollable anger. The use of “I” statements can shift blame and negative feelings away from the spouse and prevent exacerbating sensitive situations.

A second communication pattern troubled couples should avoid is the use of judgmental words. Judgmental words can trigger a painful emotion in the other person by implying that she or he is flawed or blemished in some way. In addition to the previous example of the husband in Palm Springs saying his wife was stupid, words such as childish, helpless, poor, thoughtless, or “idiot” tend to have the same effect. They tend to be interpreted as a judgment – an attack. They are, therefore, usually responded to with defensiveness, or with a counterattack. First Peter 3:10 teaches those who want to love life and see better days ahead to, “…refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile.” Couples in conflict must avoid the use of judgmental words: “When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise….The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of understanding” (Prv 10:19, 21).

\(^{13}\) Sande, The Peace Maker, 178-179.
Troubled KIB couples should also avoid the use of negative comparisons. Here is an example of a negative comparison: “See that husband of my friend; he is very helpful to her, but what about you? You are lazy!” These negative comparisons often cause a couple to punish each other. Such a communication pattern distorts each person’s opinions and intentions, thereby leading troubled couples to fall into even more fights and emotional conflicts. Negative comparisons also implant feelings of inferiority into their mate’s heart. This type of communication never resolves anything, for it only belittles the self-esteem of the other partner. Troubled couples are strongly encouraged to avoid indiscreet comparisons, “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing” (Prv 12:18).

Another communication pattern to avoid is known as “mind reading.” When a person talks about his or her thoughts, feelings, and concerns, the listener should avoid projecting his or her own perceptions or interpretations about what the listener actually means, which go beyond what the speaker has actually said. In practice, a listening person can stop the speaker frequently and offer a paraphrase of what has just been said or otherwise verify clear understanding of the meaning of the speaker’s words.

When clear communication and resolution of conflict are intended, above all, an attitude of humility must be maintained. Humility is required to correctly understand the other partner’s concerns and not react with pride to something that is being said by the other spouse. Stuart Scott says, “If you are humble you will be patient when what you say

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14 Stanley, Trathen, McCain, and Bryan say in A Lasting Promise, “‘Mind reading’ occurs when you assume you know what your partner is thinking or why he or she did something…when your mind reading includes negative judgments about the thoughts and motives of the other, you may be in real trouble, both in your marriage and in your spiritual life,” 38.
is misunderstood, or when you do not like what another is trying to say to you. To facilitate reacting with humility.”

Spouses can practice being mindful of all the subtle channels of verbal and nonverbal communication, such as the volume and tone of their voice, hand gestures, sighing or snorting, rolling of their eyes, or facial expressions that communicate disgust, contempt, or other negative judgments. By responding with humility and tact, troubled KIB couples can practice clear communication with a gentle answer that turns away wrath.

Unresolved or Cyclic Patterns of Conflict and Its Solution: Negotiation

Unresolved or cyclic patterns of conflict can be one of most difficult issues for troubled KIB couples. To cope with unresolved or cyclic patterns of conflict, negotiation is necessary. Whenever the spouses discuss how to discipline their children, where to go on vacation, how to divide household chores, or how to spend their money, they are negotiating. Negotiation is a special kind of communication, which requires skill. Negotiation includes four stages: a readiness to negotiate, discussion, proposal, and agreement. When there is a clear awareness of these stages, the results will come more quickly and be even more satisfactory.

How to Cope with Unresolved or Cyclic Patterns of Conflict

First of all, the couple must be ready to negotiate. Each person needs to be prepared with a paper and pencil. The page should have four columns. In the first column, each person is asked to write what he or she ideally wants in this specific situation, so this

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column is labeled “my interests/needs.” At the top of the second column, each person is to write: “what I think my partner wants that opposes my own interests/needs.” At the top of the third column, they are to write: “our shared interests/needs.” In this column, they need to list and review areas of agreement in this situation—things they and their partner both want and can agree upon. In the fourth column, they are to write three tentative solutions for the issue under dispute. These proposals should correspond to and answer these questions: what is my ideal solution; what could I live with; and what outcomes are unacceptable? Just before they start the discussion, each partner makes a note containing three promises, and a check box next to each. They each read the three promises, and check the box next to each one, acknowledging they have made this promise. This note would look like this:

( x ) I accept conflict calmly.
( x ) I want a fair, mutually agreeable outcome.
( x ) I am flexible.

At this second stage, the formal discussion begins with both partners sharing the information they have prepared. By sharing only what they have written in the first step, the couple can objectively approach the conflict without referencing and reliving past conflicts and hurts. Through discussion of needs, interests, and tentative solutions, each spouse can more clearly understand the disagreement and find the issue at the heart of the conflict.16

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16 I tell them, “You have four subjects to notice and think about. When either of you gets stuck in a discussion, go back and consider each of these categories: my needs, your needs, shared needs, and tentative solutions. When you feel stuck, you need to make a notation about it, and record the concern in one of the four lists.”
During the third stage, each person can begin giving proposals. After some discussion, the both partners are in a position to begin offering actual suggestions for action and change. One partner may come up with a new idea. The other partner may respond with a variation on the first offer. The first partner may then respond with a modified proposal that is closer to what the second partner wanted. If one partner does not like the latest suggestion, he or she can offer a counterproposal. If there is still one or more points of disagreement, they can try a new counterproposal, and brainstorm further to invent more creative solutions together. If the process continues long enough, eventually, they can reach a compromise that both find acceptable.

In the fourth stage, the conflicted couples need to arrive at an agreement. This requires the proposed solution to be clear to both partners. Once they have reached what at least seems to be a mutually acceptable agreement, in order to verify that both mean and intend the same thing, each of the partners should say (out loud) the full agreement as they understand it. If doing so reveals there are still points of disagreement, they must return to the negotiation stage until they resolve the remaining disagreements.

Having arrived at a mutually satisfactory agreement, there must be trial period in which the tentative agreement is implemented to see if it will actually work in “the real world.” If it does not work, they need to fine tune the agreement until it does work. This is a continuing process, and couples will often need to go through numerous cycles before it really begins working for them.
Exploding Anger and Its Strategy: Coping with Anger

Through administering marriage counseling for KIB couples over the years, I discovered a significant number of them were physically violent with each other. According to their reports, they do not merely shout at each other in anger, but actually punch, slap, or kick their partners. One woman in Los Angeles told me that her husband sometimes swung a golf club at family members and broke objects in the home. Anger itself is not a sin. It is what people do with their anger and how they respond to it that can potentially be classified as sin.

What Anger Is

Anger is defined as: “A feeling of great displeasure, hostility, indignation or exasperation.” Les Carter describes three categories of behavior that typify people who are trapped in nonproductive use of anger: “(a) suppression of anger, (b) openly aggressive anger, and (c) passive-aggressive anger.” In general, angry people may appear strong, willful, or certain, but be assured that beneath this veneer are fear, loneliness, insecurity, and pain.

However, angry people are also hurt people, and they have somehow come to believe that they can resolve their own pain by inflicting pain upon others. Their

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17 Webster’s II New College Dictionary, 2001, s.v. “anger.”

18 Les Carter, The Anger Trap: Free Yourself from the Frustrations that Sabotage Your Life (San Francisco, CA: Jossy-Bass, 2003), 19. Carter defines three types of anger. He says that suppression of anger is defined as ignoring the need to openly address problematic circumstances because of the assumption that openness will prove to be fruitless or uncomfortable. Openly aggressive anger is linked to the desire to preserve personal worth, needs, and convictions. However, it is communicated in a manner that robs others of personal dignity. On the other hand, passively-aggressive angry people want to preserve personal worth, needs and convictions, but they do so with quiet disdain toward the others involved. Ibid., 19-26.
reasoning is usually subconscious. Nonetheless, each time anger is misapplied, it is a reflection of a deep wound that longs to be healed. A simple and general strategy for coping with anger is needed for resolving angry conflicts in such troubled relationships. By trying to avoid dealing with anger, unforgiveness and bitterness take root, gradually poisoning the marriage. By coping with anger, forgiveness will be easier than before.

**How to Cope with Anger**

There are four positive processes that can be used to cope with anger. When anger is present, it can never simply be ignored. It *must* be dealt with and released somehow. Determining how spouses will release their anger at a proper time and an acceptable way is the most primary decision that the couples should make. The most important understanding about anger is that the Bible does *not* say that anger is a sin, but anger should be properly expressed and put away from one’s heart by sunset (Eph 4:26-27).

However, there are two ways in which anger can become sin: overly exploding anger, and long lasting suppressed anger. If a person denies anger or holds it in, never expressing it to the one with whom the person is angry, it will smolder and build within. Eventually, unexpressed anger in the mind can lead to sins such as hate, resentment, and revenge. A critical problem in most marital conflict is when one or both partners let their anger become sin. Such troubled couples need to learn to cope with anger before it becomes a sin – before it becomes expressed in abusive or destructive ways, either verbally or physically.
A second important part of anger management is for the people to admit to God that they are angry. As couples get the matter out into the open, they will be better prepared to deal with it. They are often reluctant to admit their anger in front of God. They think that that negative emotions are shameful, and that God will disapprove of their expression. However, if the person harboring sinful intentions and feelings can open up and confess to having sinful intentions and feelings, at that point, he or she ceases to commit sin. Ephesians 4:26 says, “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.”

Ephesians 4:27 also warns, “and do not give the devil an opportunity.” The couples need to not give the devil a foothold by dwelling on the offense. Rather, once the person is near to God, He will draw near to the person and purify his or her heart, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you…and purify your hearts” (Jas 4:8, NASB). They are forgiven by God, and the devil’s efforts are rendered ineffective. Thus, the person can ask God to heal that area of weakness or emotional turmoil inside. If that is done, the person can be freed and will no longer have to live with anger just constantly beneath the surface.

A third important aspect of anger management involves the person sharing his or her angry feelings with the spouse, rather than simply reacting to them. For angry KIB couples, it is important to make a distinction between acting on one’s feelings and sharing one’s feelings. A spouse will be understood better if one share those feelings. For instance, saying that “I feel angry right now because of such and such” constitutes a clean sharing of emotion. This is very different than acting on the emotion by saying
something like, “You make me crazy!” When attempting to share emotions, the couples do well to use “I” statements. In their discussion of “I” statements, Balswick and Balswick write, “When we can admit our anger, we take personal responsibility for our feelings rather than blame them on others.”\(^{19}\) In contrast, if one does not share feelings at the proper time and in proper ways, he or she cuts the spouse off from himself or herself.

In addition, when the angry spouse shares those angry feelings, the other spouse has the potential to help. To do so, the helper needs to recognize what the core cause of the partner’s exploding anger is. The core problem may be any number of things, including emotional instability, physical illness, chemical imbalance, or an addiction. Les Carter says, “At the heart of anger is a cry for respect. Though angry persons may not speak these exact words, their emotion may reveal such thoughts.”\(^{20}\) Thus, each spouse must try to share negative feelings and consider why his or her spouse is angry.

A fourth aspect of anger management is for the person to directly cancel his or her anger. Many troubled couples can benefit from learning how to do this. If the other partner causes a person to get angry, he or she can remember Jesus confronted many of the same kinds of painful situations but made a decision not to respond with anger. First Peter 2:23 says of Christ, “and while being reviled, he did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” A person does not have to respond with anger or seek revenge. Partners in a

\(^{19}\) Balswick and Balswick, *The Family*, 262.

\(^{20}\) Carter, *The Anger Trap*, 6. Carter suggests several ways to reveal the thoughts by saying things such as: “I deserve better treatment than what I am currently receiving”; “My opinions are as good as anyone else’s; Pay attention to me!”; “Do not look down on me, that is offensive”; and “You need to understand that I matter.”
troubled relationship can decide to act in accordance with Ephesians 4:31-32 and commit to: “[discard] all bitterness, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” If a person worries about saying or doing something that will be regretted, that person should walk away from the situation or place until control over emotions has been regained. He or she can take a deep breath to bring physical reactions to anger under control, realizing once again that one is totally responsible for one’s own actions. Thus, angry people in troubled marriages should ask the Holy Spirit for help in self-control and diffusing anger without sinning. Such people need to keep believing Luke 1: 37, which says, "For nothing is impossible with God.”

Maximizing Forgiveness

Regardless of how many other techniques are used, and how effective they are, the ultimate method for maximizing forgiveness is still to repent and reconcile each other. Archibald Hart points out the great importance of forgiveness by saying:

…a full ninety percent of the psychologists surveyed said they believe that forgiveness is an important issue in psychotherapy, and ninety-five percent said they often talked about it with their patients. Yet very few could agree on what forgiveness involves, and few had any clear idea of how to help people to forgive. What a strange paradox!21

KIB couples can practice God’s way of forgiving, which is the model for their forgiving. God has forgiven those who repent; He has reconciled with every each KIB husband and wife by virtue of Jesus’ atonement; and He loves each one of them. Lewis

Smedes says, “When we forgive people for things that do not need forgiving we dilute the power, spoil the beauty, and interrupt the healing of forgiveness. But when we forgive the things forgiving is for, we copy God’s own art.” 22 KIB couples follow two steps for maximizing forgiveness: Fostering repentance and promoting reconciliation.

Fostering Repentance for Maximizing Forgiveness

Repentance is itself a grace that comes by the work of the Holy Spirit. How then, are husbands and wives in troubled relationships to begin the process of repentance? There are five processes required for true repentance: Regret of sin, godly sorrow for sin, confession of sin, hatred for sin, and turning away from sin. 23

Regret for One’s Own Sins

The first step towards true repentance is to become aware of and regret one’s evil and hurtful intentions. Most troubled KIB couples who can easily detect faults in others see none in themselves. They often complain, crying out that they have good hearts and behaviors – “It is my spouse that is the problem!” They may sincerely feel this way, but, even so, there are also always problems within themselves. The truth is that every conflict has at least two points of view. Whenever a relationship ends with the trauma of betrayal, it has never done so suddenly. It has to have moved through a lengthy process that has involved much more than one lie, one affair, or one moment of slander. However, in


23 Watson, The Doctrine of Repentance, 18. Watson discusses the special ingredients for the nature of true repentance.
essence, every breakup begins with a failure to repent, a sin that has not been confessed, forgiven, nor reconciled.

There are many kinds of regrets about sinful intentions that need repentance. The couples can regret the corruption of the true love that was once present in their marriage, but that has already cooled and faded within their hearts. They can regret their cold-hearted attitudes, in which they have failed to have the heart of Christ, and have instead been devoid of kindness, serving, mildness, clemency, and the like. They can regret their irresponsibility towards their spouse and children, their failure to provide adequate financial support, and failure to keep their promises to each other. They can regret their sins about the great selfishness in all that they have done: acting for themselves, and only for themselves, with no concern for the feelings, needs, or well-being of others. They can regret neglecting opportunities for doing good things for their spouse. They can regret being too ready to complain and speak ill of their spouse. The list could be endless.

In the spiritual realm, troubled KIB couples can grieve for committing sins of ignorance of God’s presence in their marriage, lack of nearness with him, and taking up little of God in reading, meditating, and speaking of him. The couples can regret not esteeming the cross of Christ and suffering for his honorable name. They can grieve that they have fallen into refined hypocrisy: desiring to appear what, indeed, they are not. They can regret the evil intentions of an artificial confession of sin, without sincere repentance. Again, the list could be endless.

**Feeling Godly Sorrow for One’s Own Sins**

The second step towards genuine repentance is feeling godly sorrow for one’s
sins. For troubled KIB couples, one primary hindrance in coming to repentance is the hardness of their hearts. They need godly sorrow for their sins, including sincere willingness to repent. Edward Anton defines godly sorrow as “spoudē: earnestness, carefulness, diligence or haste….it is most often translated ‘make every effort’ and ‘importance and urgency.’”\(^{24}\) In the field of business accounting, the term “due diligence” indicates a thorough and careful examination of every important detail.

Troubled couples might have good intentions to make a peace together, but the critical question is: “Are those couples who are trying to make a decision to repent marked by diligence, haste, and earnestness?” Unwillingness to repent will serve as an obstacle, which will prevent them from searching their hearts, from acknowledging where they are at fault, and from feeling sorrow for it. King David consciously knew of and prayed for his own transgressions, iniquity, and sin, allowing his unclean, evil, and fleshly heart to be exposed and cleansed, saying: “I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me” (Ps 51:1-3).

Hence, the couples in conflict can willingly feel sorrow for not esteeming their partners more, not treating them respectfully, not loving them with a love that bears all things and suffers all things. Thomas Watson says: “This sorrow for sin is not superficial: it is a holy agony. It is called in scripture a breaking of the heart: ‘the sacrifices of God are a broken and a contrite heart’ (Ps 51:17); and a rending of the heart: ‘Rend your

\(^{24}\) Anton, *Repentance*, 149. Anton says that Paul began his celebration of the Corinthians’ godly sorrow with an exclamation: “Behold what this godly sorrow has produced!” and Paul used to introduce their noteworthy change as spoudē. Conversely, worldly sorrow employs a dark strategy of damage control in which the sinner begins an elaborate cover-up.
If there are not some awakenings of faith in the soul, it is not the sorrow of humiliation but of despair in the hardships of marriage.

**Confessing a Sin of Self-righteousness**

The third step troubled KIB couples must take is confession of sin -- a transcendence of their self-righteousness. Literally, confession means that one openly acknowledges and regards one’s sins in the same way that God regards them. Anton says that confession is “homologia” which means “same” (from homo) “word” or “reasoning” (from logos). It is a statement that reveals “our same-mindedness with Christ in our rejection of sin.” Accordingly, the confession of the troubled couples expresses their *metanoia* as they shift from the mind of selfishness and begin to reason with the mind of their mate.

Self-righteousness causes the troubled couples in marital problems to be blind and deaf to their own sins. It will cause them to defend themselves and blame others, become aggressive or angry toward their mate. Self-righteousness will make them excuse themselves and say, “It is perfectly all right for me to react like this.” Since they are so sure they are completely in the right, then they have good reason to justify themselves. They will say, “Why should *I* repent?” They no longer perceive how God speaks in judgment through their troubled marriages. Paul warns the self-righteousness who judge others by asking, “Why do you judge your brother/sister?”; we shall stand before the judgment seat of God; each one of us shall give account of himself to God; and therefore,

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26 Anton, *Repentance*, 152.
let us not judge one another anymore (Rom 14:10-13).”

Being with the mind of Christ lets the troubled couples modify their self-righteousness, and this leads to true repentance – a shifting away from the mind of flesh. Self-righteousness, insisting on one’s innocence and thus blaming the spouse, is a tendency all people have inherited from Adam and Eve (Gen 3:12). Unless the self-righteousness of the spouse be dethroned and broken to pieces, Jesus cannot come to the center of their hearts and control their lives with his mind as the Lord of their daily lives.

The troubled couples themselves need to stand before God, and annul all ungodly excuses. They can confess: “Lord, I have sinned and done wrong to my spouse.” This confession must be a self-accusation. “The confession of the wicked is extorted, like the confession of a man upon a rack,” but this confession must be voluntary, deep, sincere, and particularized to the troubled couples. It has already been justified through the atoning of blood of Christ Jesus.

27 The apostle Paul continually points out our self-righteousness and self-judgment toward the spouse by saying, “You are without excuses; every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things” (Rom 2:1). So, all troubled couples who display self-righteousness and self-judgment cannot escape the judgment of God (Rom 2:3). Because of their stubbornness and unrepentant heart, they are only storing up punishment for themselves on the day of judgment of God (Rom 2:5). James adds this, “There is only one lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?” (Jas 4:12).

28 As a biblical example, when Ezra the scribe read from the book of the law of God, the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities (Neh 8:18-9:4).

29 David confessed his sins to the Lord when he saw the angel of the Lord, who was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. He said, “Behold, it is I who have sinned, and it is I who have done wrong;...please let Thy hand be against me and against my father’s house (2 Sm 24:16-17, NKJV).

30 Watson, The Doctrine of Repentance, 29.
Abhorrence of Sin

The fourth step in repentance is the hatred of sin. Once people have truly repented, troubled KIB couples will be able to look upon their undesirable thoughts and evil intentions, feel a shame and revulsion towards them, and wish to banish them from their hearts. Thomas Watson says: “A holy heart detests sin for its intrinsic pollution. Sin leaves a stain upon the soul…a regenerate person hates this serpent not only for its sting but for its poison. He hates sin not only for hell, but as hell.”\(^{31}\)

When God intervenes in the troubled couples’ lives, he is doing so in order that both of them may partake of his holiness, and also hate sins: “…but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness” (Heb 12:10). Tragically, many troubled couples are apt to fail in this purifying and refining process of their personality. When the Lord sends suffering and problems into their lives, some people only feel: “I am a martyr” and “I should be pitied.” When the partners cause each other suffering and make each other’s lives difficult, their hearts are often filled with anger, and they feel sorry for themselves. Thus, both of them become imprisoned by their problems, without realizing God’s intervention, nor being opened to the opportunity it offers to grow closer to God.

The abhorrence of sins has another requirement --obedience to the word of God. Hating sins is just what God is waiting for. Both members of the couple need to pay attention to the true purpose of God behind conflicts. They need to detach from the feeling of hatred and rejection toward their mate. Grant Martin says that, “God wants us to grow. Every situation we experience is a growth opportunity. In our limited

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\(^{31}\) Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance*, 47.
perspective, we do not always see potential for growth, but it is there.” Thus, if they immediately listen to God’s voice in the midst of marriage problems, then they shall be able to bear the fruit of the Spirit. Otherwise, the axe will be laid to their root, because “every tree…that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Mt 3:10). There is no law that can bring a charge against the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:23). Obeying the word of God will be the proof that the spouses love God and are living in a God-centered way, not in self-centered stubbornness.

**Turning Away from Sins and Turning towards God**

The fifth process in repentance is to turn away from faults and iniquities with one’s whole heart. Troubled KIB couples can turn their minds away from complaining, resentment, and obsession with the faults and iniquities of their mates, and instead develop and attitude of gratitude. Apostle Paul offers many expressions of gratitude. Paul is grateful for his salvation and even for his suffering. If the heart of the troubled be not turned from sin—complaining, blaming, and judging — it is no better than a lie, in the sense of Christian life.

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33 See also Matthew 7:19-24, Jesus warns those who hear these words of mine, and acts upon them and do not practice the will of My Father who is in heaven this, “so then, you will know them by their fruits” (v. 20).

34 See Philippians 1:29-30, “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for his sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”

35 See Jeremiah 3:10, “And yet in spite of all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but rather in deception.”
In many cases, there may be a small amount of repentance about a few minor issues, but most problems continue the same as they were. The reason is that corruptions of the people are still stronger than their convictions. If couples in conflict are still too stubborn to forgive their mate, this demonstrates they are only “half-turned,” as with Ephraim who was like a cake baked on one side but raw dough on the other (Hos 7:8). Such people need to adopt a whole-hearted commitment to do “whatever it takes!” for reconciliation with their spouse and with God. In a more positive way, troubled couples must not let a lack of surrender rob their zeal for returning to the Lord.

Promoting Reconciliation for Maximizing Forgiveness

Following repentance, reconciliation can be promoted to rebuild marital relationships and to maximize forgiveness. There are three processes for moving towards mature reconciliation: decisions to reconcile; discussions, including account, appeasement, and apology; and compensation.

Decisions to Reconcile

Troubled KIB couples can make a mutual decision to resolve conflict in three ways. First of all, they can decide to please God by faith. Moses refused, by faith, to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose instead endure ill treatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin (Heb 11:24-27). This passage encourages troubled couples to make a good decision to reconcile for the purpose of pleasing God, by faith. Isaiah 56:4 also urges them to choose what pleases the Lord, and hold fast to God’s covenant. Choosing reconciliation—a matter pleasing the Lord,
without faith, is not easy. However, it is possible by faith to do all the required processes for resolving conflicts. Troubled couples wishing to please the Lord can believe that he is a rewarder of those who seek him.\(^{36}\)

The second process is discussion. This process involves analyzing why the spouses might or might not want to reconcile. For doing this, rational considerations are involved. There are a few questions that can be used to overcome barriers, such as “why might you not want to reconcile?” Is it because they feel it is already finished, and they do not want to reopen the relationship? For others, one of barriers might be feeling that they might like being apart for awhile because they are sick of the other partner’s blaming and accusations. Some people will ask, “Why do I want to reconcile?” In my counseling experience, one KIB wife once said to me, “I did reconcile with my husband after the severe fighting because I felt lonely and sad, although I was a wrongdoer at that time. After all, it did not work. Why, pastor?” I answered her by saying, “Because you just tried to fill the loneliness in your heart. You treated reconciliation like a bandage covering your wounds after fighting. Instead, you need to understand and value your husband with a sincere loving heart and compassionate empathy.”

In such situations, the wounded partner is indeed hurt and angry. Yet, in spite of the pain, the person truly wants to hold on to the love once held (and often still existing) and is willing to forgive. Everett Worthington says that “forgiveness is the bandage

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\(^{36}\) Hebrews 11:6 teaches couples in conflict to live only by faith, “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” By faith they can understand that the world were prepared by the word of God so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible (Heb 11:3) and they can practice the power of faith, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 Jn 5:4).
keeping away threats of infection. Love is the heart pump of healing, bringing the lifeblood to nourish the relationship and absorb germs.  

Thirdly, they can reconcile through doing pleasing activities together. The mates can often find that making love washes away relationship tension, in addition to shopping, watching television, or praying together. Gary Chapman insists on the importance of sexual intimacy.

…sexual oneness is: Love is the garden where sexual intimacy grows…. Because sexual intercourse involves not only the male and female sexual organs but also our minds, emotions, and spirits, the physical experience is greatly magnified by emotional, intellectual, and spiritual love. By love, I mean the conscious effort to look out for the other person’s interest.

It can be very useful for couples to work together on a common task, such as family affairs or interests. The troubled KIB couples can come to understand more clearly that they are members of one body, and this can help move them towards reconciliation. Assurance of unity in Christ will break down all the dividing walls between husband and wife (1 Cor 10:17; 12:13). Both partners are able to be positive and initiate reconciliation by faith, through making a rational decision to do so, and/or by participating in pleasing activities together.

**Discussions**

Even though they genuinely want to reconcile, some KIB couples in conflict fail to do so. This is often due to the lack of sufficient discussion skills. Fortunately, it is

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37 Everett L. Worthington, *Forgiving and Reconciling: Bridges to Wholeness and Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 179.

possible to improve their discussion skills. The main reason for failures of this type can be observed in the case of a husband and wife, in which both of them are totally self-absorbed and make statements such as this: “This is me; why do not you understand me?” Each one blames the other spouse for whatever goes wrong. Both are just concerned about what they see and hear from the other partner, so in discussion, they insist that their own perspective is the only thing that matters. Worthington says, “…two self-identified victims are usually found in relationships, both blaming the other. Both ‘victims’ usually believe that they perceive the events correctly. The other person is, thus, wrong (at best) or lying (at worst).”39 In fact, they are, in many cases, equally wrong in their perceptions. Unforgiving spouses have often failed to see how much they have hurt their partner. Thus, both victim and perpetrator unintentionally distort their memories in self-serving ways. This tendency among troubled KIB couples hardens their attitudes against reconciliation.

Such couples need to make a special effort to try to understand the feelings, stresses, and special circumstances that influenced them to hurt each other. Adopting this attitude during discussions will help the troubled couples to empathize with their partners, and it keeps the focus off themselves. For making discussion move effectively toward mature reconciliation, three procedures will be required: Accounting, appeasement, and apology.

First of all, troubled KIB couples can use the “taking account” technique as an appeal to reason. In this exercise, each partner needs to find out why the other one feels hurt or angry. The partner must listen carefully when the account is being taken—not try

39 Worthington, Forgiving and Reconciling, 191.
to pick holes in the person’s argument. The one needs to try very hard to understand the other spouse’s experience and emotion. If the both partners spend the discussion time actively justifying themselves by blaming the other partner, this may partially alleviate their own feelings of wrongdoing, but it will not actually resolve the matter. Both partners must keep in mind that the blame game is never a winning situation.

In a pattern that will often be observed, one partner says something like this: “Yes, I ignored you, but ….” At this point, it really does not matter what this spouse says next. When the mate hears the spouse say “but,” he or she instantly becomes defensive, preparing to respond to the attack that is sure to come rather than listening any further. Augsburger reminds troubled KIB couples, “An account is an appeal to the mind that points outward at circumstances and situational causes and asks the other to be reasonable.”40 He or she can give an account in reasonable forms without any legitimate ownership.

Secondly, troubled KIB couples may use a method called appeasement. Appeasement is another option for moving closer to one’s spouse without actually dealing with the injury or hurt. One of the partners may seek to regain closeness or be intimate by passive acquiescence or inactive persuasion, without any sincere attempt to work through the differences in their relationships. This strategy tries to avoid being selfish, so that one mate may ask for escape from the consequences, punishment for previous inappropriate actions, or humiliation.

There are, however, many potential problems with this approach. With such appeasement, there is no increase in maturity or genuine understanding of either partner, even if it works. Worse still, if it fails, a husband or wife is highly likely to move either toward angry attack or passive attachment. Troubled KIB couples are advised to be cautious with this approach. Such a method might sometimes be valuable if such appeasement is used as a gesture of goodwill or the first steps towards making an apology. Such actions may open the door for deeper work, but all by itself, appeasement leads only to a very superficial resolution, and leaves all of the real and more serious issues unresolved.

Thirdly, troubled KIB couples can apologize to their partners when seeking forgiveness for previous hurtful behaviors. A lasting reconciliation results from a centered act of giving a full, complete, brief, and focused apology. What exactly constitutes a sincere apology of the type necessary for genuine reconciliation of marital conflicts? A sincere apology acknowledges the fact of the wrongdoing, accepts ultimate responsibility, expresses sincere sorrow and regret, and promises not to repeat the offense. Virginia Holeman says that an authentic apology is acknowledgment of action with sincere sorrow and commitment to change in specific ways to restore trust and love to the relationship. She also says it includes desires to transform the broken relationship.\(^\text{41}\) In such statements of apology, an offending partner will confess to the offended partner, usually with statements such as the following: “I did this…, I hurt you by…, I deeply regret that…, I am seriously sorry for…, I will not do again….”

\(^{41}\) Holeman, *Reconcilable Differences*, 137.
offender should admit full responsibility, express distress for the harm done, and seek forgiveness from the offended partner. A full apology will include confessions of his/her sinful intentions and unreasonable expectations. One example of an apology in the Bible is King Saul’s apology to David, “…I have sinned…, for I will not harm you again because my life was precious in your sight this day. Behold, I have played the fool and have committed a serious error” (1 Sam 26:21). Saul had emotionally regretted, and his apology can serve as a good model, even though he failed to get an opportunity to return to God in the end.

KIB couples in conflict can use empathy and consoling emotions. In the case of the offending husband, they might make a confession as follows: “I see by your tears that I have really hurt you badly. You must be very disappointed with me. I also know that I wasted your time, which made you stressed and angry.” This empathy lets the wife know he really cares, which makes it easier for her to forgive him. Such communication actually helps the partner forgive from the heart. Everett Worthington says that if a wrongdoer is willing to repent, sincerely confess his or her misdeeds, then emotional forgiveness can be stimulated in people who would never otherwise forgive. Virginia Holeman adds that, when offenders offer a sincere apology for the damage they have done, and victims accept their apology, this strongly encourages true forgiveness and reconciliation. This clearly expresses my idea of reconciliation.

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43 Holeman, Reconcilable Differences, 173.
The offending party in a troubled marriage can remind himself or herself of Augsburger’s conclusion: “… full apology is an appeal to soul that points inward in sorrow or sadness at the hurts done while an account is an appeal to the mind that points outward at circumstances and situational causes and asks the other partner to be reasonable.”

Compensation

Troubled KIB couples can make compensation for hurts or damages. They can understand the biblical perspective about compensation expressed through both the Old Testament and New Testament. Second Samuel 12:5-6 teaches about being liable for damage. When David burned with anger against the rich man in Nathan’s parable who had callously taken another man’s only lamb, and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die!” Nathan rebuked David and said to him, “He [You] must pay for that lamb four times over, because he [you] did such a thing and had no pity.” Exodus 22:1-17 also shows that the law was concerned with making restitution to the offended parties, especially in verse 1, saying, “Whoever steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.”

Through the example of the confession of Zacchaeus, in the New Testament, troubled couples must come to realize how important the making of compensation is.

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44 Augsburger, Helping People Forgive, 40. Augsburger concludes that an apology is a speech that ultimately entreats from the other forgiveness and redemption; and it is an act of both self-affirmation and self-negation, of self-healing and self-punishment, of reducing self-esteem while increasing self-respect.
Zacchaeus made a decision to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount” (Luke 19:8). The troubled couples should also make compensation for the pain that the offended partner has experienced because of their actions and rebuild their troubled relationship, whatever the cost.

Offending partners can compensate the offended partner by doing whatever the wronged spouse feels is needed to heal the wound. The offender needs to demonstrate changed behaviors and attitudes to the offended partner. When the offended person gives the repentant wrongdoer the opportunity to make compensation, the couple can rebuild love and trust in their marriage. When this compensation is performed by wrongdoers and accepted by the injured party, a foundation of safety and love is reestablished. This rebuilding happens incrementally and is not without temporary setbacks. While this process is most powerful when acts of compensation are directly related to the offense, tangentially-related acts can also contribute to the overall sense of reconciliation.

There are two ultimate options for troubled couples: They can either move towards mature reconciliation and greater closeness, or they can move toward separation and greater distance. If they choose to avoid reconciliation, that truly offers them nothing. That option ends the relationship and creates emotional and physical distancing. However, if they are willing to practice repentance and reconciliation, and can willingly offer forgiveness with the sincere hearts, they can usually rebuild the hurtful relationship.

Thus, by fostering repentance and enabling reconciliation together, there will be a process of forgiveness led by the Spirit. The apostle Paul urges believers to rely on the
Spirit, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans” (Rom 8:26). KIB couples can be reminded that the Holy Spirit promised to help them in their weaknesses, and this promise extends to any troubled situation of their marriage.
CHAPTER 6
IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT OF FORGIVENESS
FOR RESOLUTION OF MARITAL CONFLICT

After coming to an understanding of the cultural difficulties and various challenges for conflict resolution among KIB couples in Los Angeles, this paper considered why forgiveness is such a critical necessity for resolving the marital conflicts arising in these marriages. After presenting the theological and biblical foundations of forgiveness and its implications for marriage counseling, it then examined how to maximize forgiveness by using repentance and reconciliation. Based on these theoretical resources and strategies, this next section deals with two topics: a three-day marriage retreat experience and the desired outcomes and assessment of forgiveness for conflict resolution.

The Three-Day Marriage Retreat Experience
The three-day marriage retreat program includes several distinct practices, primarily focused upon how troubled spouses can forgive each other. It also includes the teaching of preventative skills that help the participants overcome unforgiveness and renew their previously conflicted relationships. This program has been specifically
designed for KIB couples. The marriage retreat program contains five elements: a local church setting, a definite purpose, a program format, a set of small group team leaders who conduct the program, and a specific time schedule. This program is intended as a marriage enrichment experience. However, the effect on the couple is not only to enrich their marital relationship, but also to specifically teach the couples how to maximize forgiveness in their daily lives.

Local Church Setting

This three-day marriage retreat program can be sponsored by a local church. The local church is a natural context for programs intending to resolve marital conflicts. In restoring marital relationships, the church can enable KIB couples to resolve conflict through a forgiveness model—repentance, reconciliation, and love. This is because, through its membership, the church has access to numerous married couples, many of whom are in need of such a program.

Furthermore, because of four specific socio-cultural features, the church is uniquely positioned to make valuable contributions to the retreat program. As a center of values, the church has experience in assisting married couples in the clarification and exploration of the values and meanings within their lives, including the development of a normative view of the Christian marriage. As a lifelong learning-growth center with values and traditions related to human growth, the church enables married couples to develop their latent interpersonal and spiritual resources. As a sustaining-maintaining center, the church enables married couples to care for one another within an intimate and nourishing community. As a reparation center, with rich experience in restoring
relationships, the church enables married couples to resolve conflict through a forgiveness model.

**Purpose of the Three-day Marriage Retreat Program**

What can troubled KIB couples gain from experiences in a marriage retreat program? Marital conflicts provide an opportunity for both partners to forgive each other and be forgiven by each other. They can learn forgiveness. This program, which focuses upon God, can give them many constructive methods for resolving marital conflict. In addition, the present popularity of marriage and family counseling/therapy has provided people with hope for troubled marriages. Preventative skills have also become available for the general improvement of believers’ lives. These factors converge in the present time and setting to advance an emphasis on *prevention* as a way to promote healthy marriages today. A number of reasons can be given as to why prevention is better than cure. Among these are that prevention is less expensive, easier to apply, and generally more successful.

In this retreat, many practical issues for KIB couples are explored. Participants are also led through many exercises with demonstrated effectiveness, many of them developed and tested within my counseling practice. The support materials related to these exercises are provided in the appendices. For exercises designed for the discovery of unforgiving thoughts between couples, see Appendix 1. For changing speech patterns and communication, see Appendix 2. For facilitating repentance, see Appendix 3. The three steps of how to reconcile are described in Appendix 4. The “Certificate of Forgiveness” can be found in Appendix 5.
Program Format

There are four types of leaders involved in this retreat program. These are: the team leaders, who lead small groups containing four or five married couples; a general instructor, who teaches the whole group, presenting practical and biblical issues about forgiveness and resolving marital conflicts; the program host, who leads the whole process of the retreat program; and the intercessory prayer leaders. The importance of each of these leaders and their roles are described below.

Team Leaders and Their Role

There are two team leaders, who are a married couple. Small groups in the program are composed of four to five married couples. Each of the small groups meets regularly with one of the team leaders. While the instructor addresses issues to deal with the process of forgiveness, team leaders work directly with the individual couples. The participants observe the team leader couple utilizing the frameworks and skills themselves, so leading groups in this manner as a couple increases the credibility of the team. Working jointly can be fun and can also provide opportunities for partners to work together in helping other participants.

After an instructor has presented one of the main lessons, such as communication, love, or forgiveness, it is important for the participants to practice. The team leaders help their team members learn each subject more fully. They can expand upon and deepen the understanding of each topic, using additional brief lectures, exercises, feedback, and discussions with their team members. Written materials supplement the work carried on in the group sessions. A number of experiential exercises
are also used to help the couples practice and learn the necessary skills, thereby transferring learning to each couple’s relationship.

Team leaders present a series of dialogues about unforgiveness and forgiveness. This presentation shows how, in these crucial areas, each partner can reach out and accept the feelings of the other spouse. The purpose of this presentation is to develop the concept of being completely open toward one another. In this presentation, the participants concentrate on forgiveness related to personal matters within their lives, such as conflicts, anger, misunderstanding, and problem solving.

**The Instructor and His or Her Role**

An instructor can teach forgiveness and the resolving of marital conflict to the entire group of participants. The instructor differs from participants primarily in the number and quality of the roles he or she is competent and prepared to carry out. The instructor demonstrates involvement by receiving as well as giving feedback. As a teacher, the instructor tries to creatively include participants in understanding and mastering the materials presented. This person articulates and demonstrates the goals, frameworks, specific behavioral skills, and the model of forgiveness used in the program.

Only individuals with very specific qualifications are permitted to serve as instructors for this workshop. It goes without saying that instructors who have had healing experiences from their own marital conflicts can willingly and joyfully serve other troubled couples with a sincere compassion. In addition, instructors have to have successfully completed an instructor training workshop related to pastoral counseling.
disciplines, which is currently offered only by the Counseling Education Institute for Korean Marriage and Family.

The prerequisite for enrolling in an instructor training workshop is not a professional degree. Rather, the prerequisite is that the candidate must have completed a required course of experiencing forgiveness in resolving his or her own marital conflicts or problems. This course of healing experiences consists primarily of counseling sessions led by myself and other staff members of the Counseling Education Institute for Korean Marriage and Family. A further prerequisite is the demonstrated ability of the candidate in group leadership.

The first step toward certification by the Institute is the completion of a three-day instructor training workshop. Following the training workshop, the instructor trainee conducts three KIB couples intern groups and obtains written evaluations from group participants. Participant evaluations provide an important additional basis for approval or denial of certification. Once they have been certified, instructors are free to serve whomever they wish. They are also free to determine whatever fees are to be charged to couples enrolling in any three-day marriage retreat program course they conduct.

The Counseling Education Institute for Korean Marriage and Family has certain expectations for instructors, but these expectations are only concerned with their professional competence and responsibility. The material presented by these instructors consists of three components: what is communication and why it is so important; what is love, and why it is necessary to learn how to love; and what is forgiveness, and why it is so important in conflictive marriage relationships.
Intercessory Prayer Leaders and Their Roles

Intercessory prayer leaders are those who serve all people with prayer during the program. When the participants and team leaders pray, intercessory prayer leaders support them and ask for the powerful presence of the Lord in the place and in the hearts and spirits of all participants.

They also assist with administrative and registration activities and lead praise during each session. They also help with logistical details, such as cleaning, set up and organizing the facility for each session. They collect all necessary documents and materials and distribute them to the participants. Intercessory prayer leaders receive feedback and give feedback, and provide this valuable information to the program host to be used as appropriate.

Schedule for the Three-day Marriage Retreat Program

Included in the Friday-evening-through-Sunday design are five lectures and three exercises. The lectures are “biblical understanding of marital conflict,” “initiating changes of thoughts and identifying my forgivable thoughts,” “clear communication,” “promoting reconciliation,” and “creating love.” Three exercises will be given on how KIB couples apply these three issues in their marital conflicts: “how to maintain changes of unforgiving thoughts,” “how to use ‘XYZ statements’ for clear communication,” and “how to reconcile with each other.” These practices can help the participants to be properly used to apply to their marital conflicts.

In addition, three special events and two video clips will be provided. The three events are “Communion service,” “exchanging ‘Certificates of Forgiveness,’” and
“Maundy’ Communion service.” The first communion service implies that each of the KIB couples is a member of Jesus Christ--the Lamb of atonement. “Exchanging ‘Certificates of Forgiveness’” can give them assurance of forgiveness. “Maundy” may encourage them to serve each other in the footsteps of what Jesus has done. For helping them be more effective in both the sequence and way of forgiveness, two video clips are given: “Healthy Marriage and Forgiveness,” which is focused on the importance of sincere forgiveness in the midst of marital conflicts and “A Story of the Prodigal Son” that will inspire KIB couples with the importance of both forgiving and being forgiven.

Generally the Three-day Marriage Retreat Program begins with an icebreaker and supper on the opening day and closes with Sunday worship in the retreat place with all couples together. KIB couples who must arrange time off from work in order to attend can more easily arrange two or three extra days than four or five. A one-day retreat is too short for them to deal with unforgiveness, which has been piling up for few years. The time schedule seems long and intense, but it is common for retreat programs in Korean immigrant churches to be long and, in some cases, even more strict than the one proposed here. In fact, some committed Christians among KIB couples tend to welcome such inspired and well-organized programs. The primary reason that the retreat program should continue through to Sunday morning is that Sunday worship held on the last day of the retreat gives participants an opportunity to celebrate sincere forgiveness: repentance, reconciliation, and love. This worship implies that all participants are members of local churches, as “…in Christ we who are many form one body…” (Rom 12:5). The following outline is a typical KIB marriage retreat.
(Friday afternoon to Sunday noon)
1. FRIDAY (First Day)

6:00 – 6:20 PM: Registration.

6:20 – 7:00 PM: Welcome, icebreakers for getting acquainted, and singing. [The program host asks each couple to make a “shield,” which is a large paper upon which participants can draw pictures illustrating how they met, where they spent their honeymoon, how they have fun together, and their favorite vacation spots. They can share these subjects within each small group, with each couple hanging their shield at the edge of the table. Each small group can collectively create a name for the group].

7:00 – 7:40 PM: Dinner with other members of the small groups, photographs taken of each small group.

7:40-8:00 PM: Praising.

8:00-8:20 PM: Testimony about the lack of biblical understanding of marital conflict by one volunteer among the team leaders.

8:20-9:00 PM: First lecture on “Biblical understanding of marital conflict” led by an assigned instructor.

9:00-9:30 PM: Small group discussion: “What do I think of it.” [Team leaders can help each married couples within the small group].

9:30-10:00 PM: “Communion Service” and praising the Lord. [The participants can be invited into another room, which has already been prepared with a comfortable and “cozy” atmosphere].

10:00-10:20 PM: Announcements and assignment led by the program host [Assignments include three activities to be done in the evening: Writing a letter to their spouse including remembering beautiful events/happenings, things they are sorry for. Writing a letter to their children, including a happy times with them, things they are sorry for, expressing their hopes for the future of their children. Blessing to their spouse and children].

10:20- PM: Free time to relax and enjoy the evening.
2. SATURDAY (Second Day)

8:00-9:00 AM: Welcome, breakfast, praising and prayer.

9:00-9:20 AM: Watching the video clip “Healthy Marriage and Forgiveness” [focused on sincere forgiveness].

9:20-9:25 AM: Confessing it to the Lord, “Father, I am a husband/wife!” [When the program host leads and speaks aloud, all participants place his/her right hand on their left chest while standing].

9:25-10:00 AM: Second lecture for “Initiating changes of thoughts and dealing with my unforgivable thoughts” [Using Chapter 5: Initiating and Maintaining Changes of Thoughts].

10:00-11:00 AM: Exercising “how to maintain changes of unforgiving thoughts” [See, Appendix 1, based on Chapter 5, Maintaining Changes of Unforgiving Thoughts].

11:00-11:20 AM: Testimony about the power of forgiveness by a volunteer among the team leaders [Telling his/her own experience of forgiveness in the midst of his/her conflictive marriage].

11:20-11:40 AM: All participants discuss forgiveness and share their own experiences about the benefits of forgiveness [Team leaders in small groups lead, offering each couple an opportunity to share].

11:40-1:00 PM: Lunch, each small group eats together.

1:00-1:20 PM: Third lecture on “Clear Communication,” including four avoidances for preventing misunderstandings and resolving misunderstanding. [This lecture focuses on diagnosing the major issues for resolving marital conflicts KIB couples are often face within their marriages].

1:20-2:00 PM: Exercise about “how to use XYZ statements” for clear communication [See Appendix 2. Team leaders demonstrate this XYZ format to their groups].

2:00-2:20 PM: Watching the video clip, “A Story of the Prodigal Son” [This video clip focuses on true repentance as the first step towards maximizing forgiveness].

2:20-3:10 PM: Sharing the necessity and importance of repentance in each
person’s life. [Afterwards, the team leaders can give participants biblical advice and guidance and let them practice how to repent, according to Appendix 3].

3:10-3:30 PM: Coffee break and relaxation.

3:30-3:40 PM: Praising.

3:40-4:10 PM: Fourth lecture about “Promoting reconciliation” for maximizing forgiveness [Referring to Appendix 4].

4:10-5:10 PM: “Reconciliation exercises”, led by the team leaders [The team leaders lead prayers for inviting the Spirit into the lives of the couples].

5:10-5:30 PM: Music and songs focusing on reconciliation with God and with spouses. [The program host leads a meditation for intimacy with the Lord].

5:30-6:10 PM: Three or four testimonies led by those participants who have experienced reconciliation and the power of the Spirit during the previous session. [The team leaders in each small group recommend one volunteer from their group. Some volunteers from each small group stand and tell their own experience of reconciliation in the front of all participants].

6:10-7:30 PM: Dinner, each small group eats together.

7:30-8:30 PM: Short game and showing one’s favorite performance.

8:30-8:50 PM: Praising relating to forgiveness. [Participants will be asked to prepare to burn their lists of past injuries and forgiven issues].

8:50-9:20 PM: Committing to forgive. Each participant burns his or her own list of injuries and issues. [The team leaders help by having each team member write a letter to the offender, detailing the issue and his/her feelings, write “Cancelled” across it, and destroy it. The participants go out to the yard or move into another room with a fireplace and burn the lists. This is done while they all praise the Lord together.

9:20-9:40 PM: “Certificates of Forgiveness” are issued and exchanged. [The team leaders distribute a prepared “Certificate of Forgiveness” to each participant. The team leaders have them make up a forgiveness certificate (for their own personal use, not to be given to the offender!). They are
instructed to post it where they will see it every day. See Appendix 5].

9:40-9:50 PM: Announcements and assignments led by the program host. [The assignment is for each spouse to write a love letter to their husband/wife during the evening. The team leaders give a blank paper to all of their group members. Before each participant goes to bed, they need to find a proper time and place to write the love letter. Upon completion, the letters are placed into the mailbox at the front door of the main office. A designated intercessory prayer leader collects the letters and sends them to their recipient’s home addresses within one week.

9:50- PM: Free time to relax and enjoy the evening. [Optional game and activities are available].

3. SUNDAY (Third Day).

8:00-9:00 AM: Breakfast, praising and prayer.

9:00-9:20 AM: Introduction to Maundy, referring to John 13:5-14 [The program host leads].


9:30-9:50 AM: Praising relating to repentance, reconciliation, and love. [Some of the intercessory prayer leaders continue praising until the preparation finishes. The others help the couples prepare to perform the foot-washing ceremony described in the video. While praising, the helpers prepare water, washbasins, and towels for all participants].]

9:40-9:50 AM: “Maundy” [The team leaders (as a couple) start Maundy first, and all members follow. A husband first washes his wife’s feet, by kneeling down, washing. He then wipes and dries her feet with a towel. After this, the wife does the same for her husband. All other participants then perform the same procedure with their own spouses.


10:20-11:00 AM: The whole group worships all together.

11:00-11:30 AM: Closing and evaluation (All). Participants complete the written evaluation form (See Appendix 7). [The team leaders give the participants an opportunity to express how they have felt about the learning and
experience. The program host and the team leaders devise an appropriate way to close].

**Desired Outcomes and Assessment of Effectiveness**

There are several desired outcomes for both the three-day marriage retreat program, Los Angeles. Assessment of the retreat program is required to build a framework that can be of use to the local church.

**Desired Outcomes**

The three-day marriage retreat program unlocks hidden and unspoken feelings between KIB husbands and wives, creating a realization of how much each means to the other. The effect of this new realization and forgiveness is limitless and explains some of the impact the retreat has upon couples. This three-day retreat experience offers a structured educational experience directed toward equipping couples with forgiveness for: first, flexibly choosing to maintain or to change ways of relating to each other; second, heightening awareness of sinfulness in broken marriage relationships; third, effectively expressing their thinking, emotions, and behaviors; and, fourth, accurately exercising forgiveness.

We (the host of “the three-day retreat program”) believe that all participants (KIB couples) have the potential to grow, and we feel very optimistic about the things we see happening to KIB couples as the result of the three-day retreat experience. We are firmly convinced that they can learn skills and develop attitudes, which will help them have lives characterized by more releasing forgiveness and graceful experience.
We anticipate that most of the participants will take in the biblical understanding of marital conflict. They may accept marital conflict in a positive way and open their hardened hearts—their unwillingness to forgive their spouses—to rethink their unforgiveness. KIB couples will take the opportunity to identify their individual strengths and potentials and to share them with each other. By writing a letter to their spouse, they will recall lovely events and things they are sorry for, finding that this experience will let them understand the mate’s true heart and bring the couple closer together.

We expect that the participants will learn what true communication is—it’s simple skill and its effectiveness for resolving misunderstandings. Communication skills need be persistently practiced and more developed in their daily lives. It means being consciously and deeply aware of speaking and listening to each other and experiencing each other on a deep feeling level. The three-day retreat program presents exercises, which help KIB couples to experience each other at a deeper level than they normally do.

We desire that KIB couples in trouble openly discuss four skills: problem solving, negotiation, clear communication, and coping with anger instead of exploding anger. KIB couples’ lives and relationships are to be better and more empowering than they were before. They grow best when they are being loved, valued, respected, and recognized as persons of worth. The inevitable result in most the couples is a deeper sense of closeness and belonging.

Moreover, we hope that, when KIB spouses feel unforgiveness toward their mate, they will be willing to issue “Certificates of Forgiveness,” which let husbands and wives really make sure of their mate’s feeling and mind. They can practice a model of
forgiveness such as fostering repentance, promoting reconciliation, and creating love for each other. The program especially expects that KIB couples will take a chance to acknowledge and confess sins of unforgiveness, which block marital intimacy, and then let them practice how to repent of them.

We aim to see troubled KIB spouses—as much as possible—minimize complaining and blaming their spouses. We look for a major reduction in instances of domestic violence, more intimacy and lower separation rates, and even deterrence in the willingness to divorce. They cancel a plan of separation and divorce due to discords or misunderstanding in deep marital conflicts. In addition to these, they may follow the footsteps of Jesus, console wounded husbands/wives, and recover their broken relationships.

Assessment of Effectiveness

It is important to assess the effectiveness and responses to the retreat program. We therefore distribute a questionnaire to each participant, the content of which can be found in Appendix 7. The effects of three-day marriage retreat program will be tested in a field experiment. Assessment of the impact of the three-day retreat program is obtained formally from all participants, as well as informally through reports from instructors, team leaders, and intercessory prayer leaders.

For KIB couples who have experienced true forgiveness through the three-day retreat program, they give evidence that they have made many positive changes within their marriages, such as confessing their sins of unforgiveness to the Lord and to the spouses as well and exchanging “Certificates of Forgiveness.” They have also committed
to a continuing process of forgiveness in any situation, and are also often willing and able to serve as volunteers to help other couples achieve the same kinds of positive results. The churches utilize these experienced couples, equipping them to help other troubled couples who do not know what true forgiveness is, and teaching them how to forgive their “unforgivable” partners.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Forgiveness is the essential and biblical way for resolving the marital conflicts with which so many KIB couples in Los Angeles are struggling. Therefore, it is important to understand the major challenges in immigrant marriage, how such troubled couples can overcome cultural difficulties and individual differences of lifestyle, and how they can reshape their destructive thoughts towards each other. Along with four basic skills, which can help them release their unwillingness to forgive, biblical understanding of Jesus’ atonement lets them grant unconditional and mutual forgiveness towards their spouses. They can enjoy a healthy marriage relationship and become able to forgive their “unforgivable” partners.

To understand how such forgiveness can be possible in one specific population, this paper has overviewed Calvary Mission Church and its ministry in Los Angeles. This has included the cultural and demographic considerations of who KIB’s in Los Angeles actually are and how the beliefs and values of traditional Korean marriage, as informed by Confucianism, have influenced the process. The paper has examined four challenging issues, which causes marital conflicts within this population. Beyond the challenging issues of cultural difficulties and relational misunderstandings, it has examined why forgiveness is absolutely required in resolving marital conflict.

In Part Two, the theological foundation of forgiveness, its implications, and a model of forgiveness were discussed. This information helps KIB couples remember why Jesus died on the cross and how the work of his atonement can still heal their troubled marriages. As a biblical example for resolution of martial conflict, a model of forgiveness
centered upon repentance, reconciliation, and love was presented and discussed. By applying these three procedures to change their unforgiving attitudes and making a decision to forgive, troubled couples can make a decision to open their minds and to forgive each other.

In the Part Three, a methodology of forgiveness is discussed which can enable the troubled couples to maximize forgiveness towards their partners. Couples are shown how to identify and change unforgiving thought patterns and diagnose four major problems. In coping with these four issues, the troubled couples can practice four suitable skills, such as problem solving, clean communication, negotiation, and coping with anger. Building upon these skills, an additional biblical strategy for maximizing forgiveness to repent, reconcile, and love was also discussed. The implementation of these teachings and principles in the context of a three-day marriage retreat program was described. This resource, intended to be utilized in local churches, can be sued to help enhance and continue the benefits obtained in the retreat.

Troubled KIB couples, especially those struggling with long term, severe and chronic conflict, have serious doubts their marriage has any chance to survive. Such troubled couples need to have hope for a new future together, and such hope is often difficult to instill. However, as couples begin to practice the principles and procedures of forgiveness, even if reluctantly and imperfectly at the beginning, even a few encouraging experiences go a long way towards offering these much-needed glimmers of hope. The couple’s long journey of embodying forgiveness inspires them to rethink not only their marriages, but their entire life direction as well.
For KIB couples, developing communication skills for clear communication and negotiation will be successful, but problem solving and coping with anger will not be perfectly adopted because KIB couples as a middle-aged and older people are not apt to practice those sorts of logical procedures. Through the retreat program, they are aware of three conflict issues that KIB marriages are still struggling with: the loyalty issue, the caring issue, and the connection issue. However, in the family system, striking a balance between excessive cohesion and insufficient cohesion is not easy for KIB couples because it takes time. For maximizing forgiveness in the three-day retreat program, the difficulty lies in requiring both true repentance of sins of unforgiveness and changes of all destructive thoughts.

God is the greatest forgiver, for God remembers and God forgets. God remembers who we are as he sees the face of Jesus Christ reflected on our faces. He forgets our mistakes, infirmities, and sins in all situations because he knows they will pass away. We are not called on to subject ourselves to abusive behavior at the hands of our spouse, or to condone repeatedly untrustworthy behaviors. However, we are called to be forgivers and peacemakers until the world is at an end. This is because, at the center of the new world that will emerge after “the first things have passed away,” there will stand a throne, and on that throne there will sit the Lamb who has “taken away the sin of the world” and erased all memory of that sin (Jn 1:29; Rv 22:1-4).
APPENDIX 1

MAINTAINING CHANGES IN YOUR UNFORGIVING THOUGHTS.

Preparation Materials: Stack of blank flash cards and pens.

I. Capturing your unforgiving thoughts.
   A. Ask yourself, “What unforgiving thoughts led up to my present feeling?”
   B. Identify the chain of your ideas or thinking that preceded the emotion.
   C. “What did I say to myself when I first become aware of the criticism or blame from my spouse?”
   D. Then, write down each of those thoughts in the sequence in which they occurred within your mind. (A separate flash card for each separate thought).
   E. Three times each day, examine your stack of thought flash cards and review each of your entries. Examine each card for a moment. Ask yourself questions such as, “When did these thoughts or emotions start?” and “Why do these things bother me?”
   F. Write down a brief answer to each question and review your reactions. This exercise will help you to be conscious of your unforgiving thoughts, and understand which of them need to be changed.

II. Replacing your unforgiving thoughts with forgiving thoughts.
   A. Write your old unforgiving thoughts, related negative feelings and hurtful memories associated with your spouse on a different card. On the other side of the card, write the new positive thought you have created for yourself about the matter.
   B. Decide which of these alternatives you want to keep and believe.
   C. Collect the scriptures which especially relate to forgiveness which can help your past hurtful memories and minds. Read the Bible verses as you replace your negative emotions and thoughts.
APPENDIX 2

THE XYZ COMMUNICATION FORMAT

I. Understanding the XYZ Communication Format

It is helpful for all participants in conflictive situations to visualize this XYZ graph when speaking. They are to practice like this, “When I came home last night (X), there were many things out of place in the living room (Y), and I felt very frustrated (Z).”

II. Exercise

Team leaders should discuss the importance of communication skills as tools for preventing misunderstandings, irritation, conflicts or anger during a troubled couple’s conversations. The leaders should instruct each couple to practice using this format with each other.
APPENDIX 3

FOSTERING REPENTANCE FOR MAXIMIZING FORGIVENESS

I. Team leaders in each of the small groups share a brief testimony about repentance, telling of a time when they personally have faced a conflict or marital problem with an unforgiving heart or with a rigid intention.

II. Team leaders should illustrate the five steps toward repentance and encourage the couples to practice these steps. The five steps to repentance are:
   A. Experiencing regrets about sins and evil, hurtful intentions.
   B. Feeling godly sorrow for one’s sins.
   C. Confession of one’s sins.
   D. Hatred of sin.
   E. Turning away from one’s faults and iniquities with one’s whole heart.

III. Husbands and wives pray together, asking the power of the Holy Spirit to lead both of them to true repentance.
APPENDIX 4

PROMOTING RECONCILIATION FOR MAXIMIZING FORGIVENESS

Preparation Materials: Letter-size papers and pens

I. Three steps to reconciliation.
   A. Decision to reconcile: “What must I do to have a healthy marriage?”
   B. Deciding to please God by faith.
   C. Finding pleasing activities to do together, such as shopping, watching television, praying together, or sexual intimacy.

II. Discussion
   A. Accounting as an appeal to reason.
   B. Appeasing as a means to be close to the other mate.
   C. Apologizing as a step towards seeking forgiveness for hurtful actions.

III. Compensation to the offended partner, offering to make restitution for previous harm or pain inflicted.

IV. The team leaders lead a prayer for reconciliation between husbands and wives, (or have each couple pray for reconciliation with their own spouse)
APPENDIX 5

CERTIFICATE OF FORGIVENESS

Preparation: A "Certificate of Forgiveness," with blank spaces to fill in such information as: name, date, name of the offender, description of offense, and signature.

I. Selecting one’s favorite Bible verse about forgiveness. [The team leaders have all small group members select their own favorite Bible verse relating to the subject of forgiveness. They keep their chosen Bible verse, and use it as a prayer whenever they are struggling with unresolved or entangled marital conflicts.]

II. Proclaiming the Bible verse: Matthew 18:21-22
[The team leaders read this aloud: “We as a couple in Jesus Christ remember that the one who cannot forgive their mate breaks the bridge over which they themselves must pass.” At the conclusion, the team leaders proclaim to their members, “Now, Jesus says to this all of us: ‘Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times? No, not seven times, but seventy times seven’” (Matt. 18:21-22, New Living Translation)!

III. Confessing this: “Lord, let me never stop forgiving!” After confessing this, all participants receive a blank “Certificate of Forgiveness” and fill it out. Below is an example of a Certificate of Forgiveness. Later, if a husband/wife doubts whether he/she has forgiven, he/she can pull out the certificate and look at it to assure himself/herself that he/she did.

(To be continued)
IV. Sample Certificate of Forgiveness

Certificate of Forgiveness

I [your name] do hereby declare that on [today’s date] I have completely and unequivocally forgiven [name of person who hurt you] for [description of the offense] and give up my right to old feelings I have held, old characterizations of this person, and old stories about what was done to me.

Signed

“Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21-22).
APPENDIX 6

EVALUATION OF THE THREE-DAY MARRIAGE RETREAT PROGRAM

Please state whether you are a husband (    ) or a wife (    )

1. The most helpful experience in this retreat was ______________________.
2. The least helpful experience in this retreat was ______________________.
3. I would like to see ________________ removed from the program because ____________________
4. I would like to see ________________ added to the program because ____________________
5. Other comments and suggestions: ______________________

Thank you for your help. We have appreciated the opportunity to share with you, and you have helped us grow too in these few days we were able to be together.

***

There are two general categories of comments participants typically offer: positive and negative. Typical of the positive comments offered by the participants are the following:

-“A very effective way of bringing out my awareness of forgiveness and how to use this awareness in everyday situations.” (   )
-“I have learned I need to mutually forgive each other in any situation, as much as I possibly can.” (   )
-“Very positive changes in our couple relationship.” (   )
-“I have been amazed that such a model of forgiveness has been able to help our relationship so much.” (   )

On the other hand, some negative reactions to the program have also been offered. Typical of such criticisms are the following:

-“I am concerned that gains made during the program will not be maintained after the program ends.” (   )
-“I believe that the program is too short to permit integration of the material.” (   )
-“I am disappointed with that the spouse did not learn as much as the participants had hoped.” (   )
APPENDIX 7

ASSESSMENT FOR THE THREE-DAY RETREAT PROGRAM

We want to help enrich the experience of KIB couples through discussions, workshops, testimonials, mini-lectures, etc. The retreat program is held in the “Graceful Prayer Mountain” that Grace Korean Church operates in Los Angeles. This survey asks you two questions for assessment purposes:

1. From the list below, please check any further concerns for which you would like to be provided with further assistance:
   [ ] How to forgive my spouse who is hard to forgive? [ ] How to help people forgive? [ ] The virtues of forgiving and the practice of reconciling
   [ ] Why should I seek forgiveness and how is forgiveness possible?
   [ ] Who forgives whom in marriage? [ ] How to apologize and confess?
   [ ] Exercises for developing our thinking habits?
   [ ] How to change my self-talk? [ ] How to change destructive thoughts in the mind? [ ] How to practice love and reconciliation in marital problem?
   [ ] How can I learn skills of conflict management for resolving marital conflict?
   [ ] How to deal with domestic violence? [ ] How to fight fair?
   [ ] Coping with recurring anger, [ ] How about blended families?
   [ ] Healthy sexuality, [ ] Alcoholism in the home, [ ] Drug abuse in the family, [ ] Premarital education, [ ] Mid-life Blue,
   Other: ____________, ____________.

2. If a marriage retreat program is offered on any of the topics you checked in question #1, what would be the best time for you to attend? (Check all that apply)
   *For weekend program:
   [ ] Friday afternoon to Sunday morning—for a three-day retreat program
   [ ] Friday morning to Saturday evening—for a two-day retreat program
   [ ] Saturday morning to Sunday afternoon—for a one and half-day retreat program
   [ ] Saturday morning to Saturday afternoon—for one day retreat program
   *For weekend afternoon program:
   [ ] Friday afternoon, Saturday afternoon, and Sunday afternoon—for three-day afternoon schedule
   [ ] Saturday afternoon and Sunday afternoon—for two-day afternoon schedule
In addition, please choose your 3 most preferred formats for delivery.
(1=1st choice; 2=2nd choice)
[ ] Class or series, [ ] Group meeting, [ ] Lecture,
[ ] Film/ Video, [ ] Workshop, [ ] Self-study,
[ ] Discussion, [ ] Retreat, [ ] Other: _____


Braun, Roddy L. *Jesus: His Name and Titles: A Devotional and Theological Study* (San Jose, CA: Writers Club Press, 2000).


_______. *Reinventing Evangelism*. Class lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, October 23, 2008.


