And finally, many people report getting through the first two steps, but are unable to complete the last step. Once again, that's because it's very hard to ask for forgiveness and to forgive. But that's where our faith in God can give us the needed nudge we'll need to complete this exercise.

Epilogue

As I shared this information with the couple I introduced at the beginning of this article, both stopped arguing seemed to settle down and left in a more settled state. As they departed, I was left wondering if this intervention would have any lasting effects.

Two weeks later, I received my answer when I asked for an update. They both stated that *The Three Rs* helped. The frequency and intensity of their arguments dramatically lessened, along with the anxiety and stress associated with their arguments. They also stated that with God's help they were committed to integrating *The Three Rs* into their arguing style.

Two Final thoughts

In many cases, when couples understand and embrace the value and wisdom behind *The Three Rs*, amazing change and healing often result which leads to increased oneness. However, if you try this technique and experience little or no success, it may be that you need some outside help. In this case, I would suggest you consult your pastor for help. He might either be willing to provide some help or offer a helpful referral.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
INTERFAITH WEB SITE
www.Interfaith.goarch.org

Center for Family Care
www.family.goarch.org

OUTREACH & EVANGELISM WEB SITE
www.Outreach.goarch.org

PUBLICATIONS
By Charles Joanides Ph.D., LMFT
When You Intermarry
Ministering to Intermarried Couples
Attending to Your Marriage

Marriage and Family
Some Practical Steps
Department of Marriage and Family

Produced by the Department of
Marriage and Family
Greek Orthodox Archdioceses of America

The Three Rs:
Recognition, Remorse and Repair

Rev. Fr. Charles Joanides, Ph.D., LMFT

The other day I was working with a couple who were especially angry at each other. Try as I did to get them to focus on something other than their anger, nothing I did and said seemed to resonate. After trying almost everything I knew and with only about ten minutes left, it seemed to me that nothing significant was going to be accomplished in this session.
Not wanting to see them depart in such an angry state, I made one last attempt by offering the following information. "I don't know if what I'm about to share will help, but I'm going to share it anyway, since I don't want you both leaving in such a conflicted state." I then launched into an explanation of a technique that I had used with other couples called, *The Three R's*. For more information about this technique, consider reading Patricia Love and Steven Stosney's book entitled, *How to Save Your Marriage Without Talking About It*. What follows are some of the nuts and bolts of this technique from a decidedly Christ-centered perspective.

Recognition

Spouses who are locked in conflict are usually only focused on their partner's shortcomings and transgressions and generally don't spend much quality time considering how their own actions and remarks have contributed to their problems. Even when they are partly aware of their contributions, most would steadfastly rationalize their actions with statements such as the following: "I really feel like my reactions are justified, especially in light of what he or she has done to me." Such injured spouses can wax eloquently for hours describing their partner's transgressions, while trying to convince anyone who might listen how horrible their partner is and how much of a martyr they have been for enduring their partner's insensitivity for years.

As good as it may sometimes feel to vent, these strategies are self destructive and counterproductive. Moreover, until one or both partners recognize their personal shortcomings and transgressions, nothing will change and the couple will continue to slip-slide toward marital meltdown and divorce. So, it is that our Lord offered the following counsel: "…first take the log out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye" (Mt. 7:5). He knew very well that unless we are willing to take this first step and recognize our shortcoming, our efforts to improve any relationship will fail miserably.

Remorse

But recognition isn't enough. Partners must also experience remorse. Spouses who are locked in conflict must discern how their actions and caustic remarks have hurt their partner, then actually feel the pain as well as the painfully destructive consequences that their actions have had on their partner. By the way, the level of remorse that I am describing here is deep and profound. It rivals the level of remorse and shame that Saint Peter felt after denying Christ three times. It also rivals the depth of remorse that prodigal son must have felt upon returning to his father penniless and full of shame.

Repair

Recognition and remorse are powerful allies in any couple's efforts to neutralize the toxicity that has emerged from unresolved conflict, but these first two steps are insufficient in helping to turn a conflicted marriage around until partners engage in some repair. This requires that partners ask for forgiveness and receive forgiveness. But make no mistake about it, as easy as this may sound, this last step can be a very difficult one to take for people who have been angry at one another for days, months and even years. As a result, in your efforts to take advantage of *The Three Rs*, don't forget to enlist God's help.

God Can Help

Let's face it, each of the above steps requires a great deal of personal strength and resolve – strength and resolve that conflicted couples generally don't possess. So remember this, in your efforts to take each one of these three steps, don't forget to enlist God's help. You'll need it.

For example, when taking the first step toward recognizing their own shortcomings and faults, many spouses have stated that it was easy for them to lose focus, and quickly refocus their attention on their partner's misdeeds. That's when God's help proved indispensible in their efforts to stay on track.

Then again, should you get past the first step, you might have difficulty with the second step, since remorse is not an easy feeling to sit with for any length of time. In an effort to complete this step, you'll need to sit with certain very uncomfortable feelings, thoughts and memories long enough so that you feel a deep sense of remorse and not simply a superficial sense of remorse – feelings like shame, guilt and resentment. That's when you'll want to enlist God's help. Asking God to help you stay with these feelings, thoughts and memories long enough so that you feel a deep sense of remorse is crucial to helping you sustain the needed momentum to get you through this stage and onto the next step.