

FINDING PEACE THROUGH Forgiveness

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I wrestled with rage after someone had deeply hurt me. How could I find peace?

Sick with anger, confusion, and grief, I decided to search LDS.org for articles about forgiveness. I wanted to know what Church leaders had said about how to find peace after experiencing an egregious offense. As the search engine processed my request, I mentally relived the painful episode. My stomach churned and my pulse quickened. “How is it humanly possible to be at peace?” I asked myself.

Dozens of general conference talks seemed to address the issue. I clicked on a promising piece from President James E. Faust (1920–2007) and quickly skimmed its contents.¹ An Amish community forgave the distraught milkman who shot and killed several of its schoolgirls. A man forgave the drunk driver who caused the deaths of his wife and children. What could I learn from these scenarios?

As I considered this question, I became agitated. These stories did not mirror mine. In both cases, the offender had either died or faced immediate prosecution, so the victims did not have to fear ongoing or future offenses. In my case, the perpetrator was still part of my life and wasn’t facing death or a public justice system. This person had not committed a crime, but had nearly destroyed two significant relationships. How could I

forgive someone who had not yet repented or suffered any punishment? How could I forgive when the offense might even recur?

I reread Elder Faust’s article and noticed I’d missed a few vital points:

- “Forgiveness is not always instantaneous.”²
- “Most of us need time to work through pain and loss.”³
- “Forgiveness comes more readily when . . . we have faith in God and trust in His word.”⁴
- “If we will get on our knees and ask Heavenly Father for a feeling of forgiveness, He will help us.”⁵

Each of these truths inched me closer to the hope that eventual peace might be attainable.

That evening I pondered something about forgiveness that I had understood in principle but never fully appreciated: Forgiveness was not primarily about restoring my relationship with the person who had offended me. Instead, its focus was restoring and improving my relationship with God. It was about trusting—really trusting—that He would take care of me and that He hadn’t allowed anything to happen to me that wouldn’t eventually work out for my benefit. Forgiveness centered on



drawing close to Heavenly Father, understanding the Atonement of Jesus Christ, and laying everything on the altar—and doing this cheerfully, with confidence that I was safe in Heavenly Father’s care.

Being safe, I learned, didn’t mean living an idyllic, stress-free life. It meant that even while coping with harrowing challenges, I had a lifeline to my Father. As I navigated life’s perils, I could be as safe as Daniel in the lions’ den (see Daniel 6), David facing Goliath (see 1 Samuel 17), Esther approaching the king (see Esther 2–7), Alma and Amulek in prison (see Alma 14), or Nephi when he returned to Jerusalem for the brass plates (see 1 Nephi 3–4). Like Abinadi, I could experience peace and loving direction even in the midst of profound distress (see Mosiah 12–17). If I stayed connected to heaven as circumstances and conversations unfolded, then I could, in the way He wanted me to, interact with—or avoid—the person who had caused me pain. I took strength in envisioning how the Savior would live if He stepped into my shoes. Turning my focus to Him was the key to freedom, the key to forgiveness.

However, staying focused wasn’t easy. Often tempted to mentally replay the offense and re-stir the painful emotions it wrought,



I constantly battled negativity. Again, I was helped by what President Faust taught: “The Savior has offered to all of us a precious peace through His Atonement, but this can come only as we are willing to cast out negative feelings of anger, spite, or revenge.”⁶ Knowing it was important to redirect my thoughts, I groped for ways to focus my energy on light, hope, and joy. For me, it was helpful to memorize scriptures whenever I was troubled by hurt and anger. After a few weeks of implementing this practice, I’d memorized several chapters from Isaiah, and my recollection of the troubling offense seemed to hold less prominence in my thoughts.

Time passed. In response to much fasting and prayer, Heavenly Father helped me heal. But healing was a gradual process, not an overnight miracle. Some days I felt peaceful and forgiving. Other times I wrestled with rage or despondency. As I drew near to Heavenly Father, however, He helped me think more as He did and see others more as He saw them—through eyes of mercy. As time passed, I experienced promptings that helped me understand, empathize with, and finally love the person who had hurt me. While it would be premature to say I’m now completely at peace with the past, I do feel more connected to God than I have ever felt before. That’s an invaluable blessing.

President Faust closed his conference talk with this testimony: “With all my heart and soul, I believe in the healing power that can come to us as we follow the counsel of the Savior ‘to forgive all men’ (D&C 64:10).”⁷ I share this testimony. Healing does come. In fact, it’s my experience that the Savior doesn’t heal souls by simply restoring us to our former state of wellness. When He heals, He graciously overdoes it. He makes us healthier than we ever were before the onset of the affliction. His objective is our happiness and peace. ■

NOTES

1. James E. Faust, “The Healing Power of Forgiveness,” *Ensign*, May 2007, 67–69.
2. James E. Faust, “Forgiveness,” 68.
3. James E. Faust, “Forgiveness,” 68.
4. James E. Faust, “Forgiveness,” 68.
5. James E. Faust, “Forgiveness,” 69.
6. James E. Faust, “Forgiveness,” 69.
7. James E. Faust, “Forgiveness,” 69.



Forgiveness Heals Your Wounds

“Forgiveness . . . can be hard to understand, even more difficult to give. *Begin by withholding judgment.* . . . Leave the handling of aggressors to others. As you experience an easing of your own pain, full forgiveness will come more easily.

“You cannot erase what has been done, but you can forgive. (See D&C 64:10.) Forgiveness heals terrible, tragic wounds, for it allows the love of God to purge your heart and mind of the poison of hate. It cleanses your consciousness of the desire for revenge. It makes place for the purifying, healing, restoring love of the Lord.

“The Master counseled, ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them *who despitefully use you and persecute you*’ (3 Nephi 12:44; italics added).

“Bitterness and hatred are harmful. They produce much that is destructive. They postpone the relief and healing you yearn for. Through rationalization and self-pity, they can transform a victim into an abuser. Let God be the judge—you cannot do it as well as he can.”

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, “Healing the Tragic Scars of Abuse,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 32–33.