



LEARNING

Name withheld

When I was a child, my days and nights were filled with terror. Verbal, physical, and sexual abuse were all part of the way I was raised. I dreamed of the time when I could feel safe and accepted.

Sometime around age eight, I began to read the Bible in secret, under my blankets, in bed, with a flashlight. The Bible taught me right from wrong, and I realized how corrupt my family life had become. The Bible also taught me to pray as the Savior prayed. I sought my Heavenly Father and found Him. He became my best friend in these most difficult circumstances. Indeed, I witnessed many miracles as the Holy Ghost gave warnings and also helped me make decisions. At long last, I knew what love was.

But deep in my heart I harbored hatred for my father because he was the perpetrator of

the abuse. In my mind, the family situation was entirely his fault, while my mother was an innocent bystander.

Someone once said that hatred is like “burning down your own house to get rid of a rat.” My hatred for my father poisoned my soul, and my spiritual house was on fire.

I trusted no one except my Heavenly Father, poured myself into my schoolwork, and stayed away from home as much as possible. I learned to literally pray without ceasing. Still, the bitter feelings toward my father festered in my heart.

At age 12, I took matters into my own hands and left home to live with a teacher, the mother of two of my friends, who knew and understood my challenges. Living with them presented some legal difficulties, however, and before long I was placed in foster care. Soon I realized that even though I was

TO FORGIVE

I couldn't possibly forgive my father—his crimes against me had been cruel. Yet the Bible made it clear that forgiveness was essential. What was I to do?

no longer living under my father's roof, I had taken my hatred for him along with me.

I continued to read the Bible. In the New Testament I found scriptures that meant the most to me. The Sermon on the Mount taught me just how precarious my spiritual situation was. In Matthew 6:14–15 I read: “For if ye forgive men your trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you:

“But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

I reasoned that the crimes against me had been unusual and cruel. Yet I read in Matthew 18:21–22 that Peter was told he must forgive “seven times seventy.” What was I to do?

I longed to let go of the hatred I carried like a millstone in my heart. The example of the Savior as He hung on the cross kept coming to mind. “Father, forgive them, for

they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Why couldn't I be more like Him? If I was to have any chance at a normal life, forgiveness must come. I imagined that forgiveness could happen in one easy step. But for me, it was to be a long journey.

When I married and gave birth to my own children, I realized my mother had not been an innocent bystander, as I had so long thought. She had not protected me. So now I had another parent to forgive. Instead of getting better, my need to forgive was growing deeper, and I did not know what to do or where to turn. My husband and friends were sympathetic listeners and encouraged me in the healing process, but I needed something more.

Missionaries came to my door, and in 1969, I joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I was the only one among



THERE IS PEACE IN FORGIVENESS

“There is no peace in reflecting on the pain of old wounds. There is peace only in repentance and forgiveness. This is the sweet peace of the Christ, who said, ‘blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God’ (Matthew 5:9).”

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1910–2008), “Of You It Is Required to Forgive,” *Ensign*, June 1991, 5.

my family who did, but I finally I felt completely at home. I read the Book of Mormon and learned many long-awaited truths. Forgiveness was a prevalent theme in this latter-day scripture. Mosiah 26:31 taught me that in not forgiving my parents, I was bringing condemnation upon myself. I continued to pray that I might forgive.

Soon after joining the Church I became keenly interested in genealogy. Family history started me down the path to genuine forgiveness. My maternal grandmother and great-uncle helped me unearth information about past generations. And what I found amazed me.

I learned that when my father was just a child, his father had robbed a bank. My grandmother found herself alone raising a young son. She turned to sinful behavior to support the two of them while her husband was in prison for 12 years. My father’s mental health worsened.

As far back as I could research my father’s family tree, I found ancestor after ancestor had fallen into grave error. This tradition of trespass had been passed from one generation to the next until my father’s day. I finally felt the stirring of sweet forgiveness for the young boy who inherited such a disturbing lineage.

I began to see myself in a new light. Error was a long chain, reaching back for generations. I was the breaker of that chain, daring to rear my own children in the light of truth.

A kind Heavenly Father also helped me find forgiveness through my talent for writing. I wrote a series of short pieces about my childhood for a prominent newspaper. The articles were light-hearted and even nostalgic.



Before writing these stories, I thought of my childhood as all bad. Afterward, I could clearly see there were good times to be recalled. The shackles of hatred were loosening their grip on my heart.

Reaching out to others by serving the elderly was another way I worked through my distressful feelings. As I made new friends and even offered assistance, I learned what it meant to “honor thy father and thy mother” (Exodus 20:12).

I also found relief in writing letters to my parents—letters that were never mailed and that were eventually destroyed. The first ones I wrote served primarily as an emotional outlet—I vented my anger and asked questions. Over time my letters evolved into decent exchanges, which later led me to making contact with them.

On Christmas, birthdays, and special occasions, I sent cards and small gifts to my parents with the best of feelings. (Of course, not everyone who has been abused by a family member should feel obligated to have

contact with that person. It was just something I chose to try.) My efforts were never acknowledged. I received a certified letter telling me they did not want even a long-distance relationship with me. But the small gifts were never returned.



TRUST IN HEAVENLY FATHER'S LOVE

"If you have been abused, Satan will strive to convince you that there is no solution. Yet he knows perfectly well that there is. Satan recognizes that healing comes through the unwavering love of Heavenly Father for each of His children. He also understands that the power of healing is inherent in the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Therefore, his strategy is to do all possible to separate you from your Father and His Son. Do not let Satan convince you that you are beyond help.

"Satan uses your abuse to undermine your self-confidence, destroy trust in authority, create fear, and generate feelings of despair. Abuse can damage your ability to form healthy human relationships. You must have faith that all of these negative consequences can be resolved; otherwise they will keep you from full recovery. While these outcomes have powerful influence in your life, they do not define the real you.

"Satan will strive to alienate you from your Father in Heaven with the thought that if He loved you He would have prevented the tragedy. Do not be kept from the very source of true healing by the craftiness of the prince of evil and his wicked lies. Recognize that if you have feelings that you are not loved by your Father in Heaven, you are being manipulated by Satan. Even when it may seem very difficult to pray, kneel and ask Father in Heaven to give you the capacity to trust Him and to feel His love for you. Ask to come to know that His Son can heal you through His merciful Atonement."

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "To Heal the Shattering Consequences of Abuse," *Ensign*, May 2008, 41.

I like to think that they were cherished to some degree.

I knew forgiveness didn't mean condoning or accepting the abuse or forgetting that it had occurred. It meant I needed to take what I could from life's experiences and through the Atonement of Jesus Christ and the grace of God, find healing and forgiveness.

Forgiveness didn't come in one "warm fuzzy" moment either. It came gradually, over decades. Time is a great healer.

My father died in 1992. A year later, I submitted his name for saving ordinances in the temple. (I would do the same for my mother following her death 15 years later.) This brought me further healing. I knew I had done something good, and I knew it was not up to me to judge him. Around that time, the grip of hatred or anything like it was lifted from my soul. Forgiveness took its place.

I was freed at last from negative feelings that had haunted me for years. My heart was finally light, burdened no more. A kind Heavenly Father had given me a wonderful gift, one that I completely embraced.

After my father died I tried to reconnect with my mother. My efforts were rebuffed. But in quiet moments I knew I had done my part. The desire to judge her was gone, and I saw her as a daughter of God. I am convinced that when she died in 2007, she knew that I loved her—and that I had forgiven her completely.

Both of my parents are now in a place where they may have the opportunity to hear the gospel. My prayer is that they will cling to the truths they are taught in the Spirit world. In the meantime, I see more clearly now that the debilitating cloud of hatred is gone from my life and I have learned to forgive. ■

If you or someone you know is a victim of physical, sexual, or verbal abuse, talk to your bishop or branch president. He will know how to assist you. Where necessary, he can help arrange counseling and other resources.

For more information, contact the LDS Family Services office in your area or visit ldsfamilyservices.org.