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The Healing Ointment of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a glorious, healing principle. We do not need to be a victim twice. We can forgive.

All that is of God encompasses love, light, and truth. Yet as human beings we live in a fallen world, sometimes full of darkness and confusion. It comes as no surprise that mistakes will be made, injustices will occur, and sins will be committed. As a result, there is not a soul alive who will not, at one time or another, be the victim to someone else's careless actions, hurtful conduct, or even sinful behavior. That is one thing we all have in common.

Gratefully, God, in His love and mercy for His children, has prepared a way to help us navigate these sometimes turbulent experiences of life. He has provided an escape for all who fall victim to the misdeeds of others. He has taught us that we can forgive! Even though we may be a victim once, we need not be a victim twice by carrying the burden of hate, bitterness, pain, resentment, or even revenge. We can forgive, and we can be free!

Many years ago, while I was mending a fence, a small sliver of wood entered into my finger. I made a meager attempt to remove the sliver and thought I had done so, but apparently

I had not. As time went on, skin grew over the sliver, creating a lump on my finger. It was annoying and sometimes painful.

Years later I decided to finally take action. All I did was simply apply ointment to the lump and cover it with a bandage. I repeated this process frequently. You cannot imagine my surprise when one day, as I removed

the bandage, the sliver had emerged from my finger.

The ointment had softened the skin and created an escape for the very thing that had caused pain for so many years. Once the sliver was removed, the finger quickly healed, and to this day, there remains no evidence of any injury.

In a similar way, an unforgiving heart harbors so much needless pain. When we apply the healing ointment of the Savior's Atonement, He will soften our heart and help us to change. He can *heal* the wounded soul (see Jacob 2:8).

I am convinced that most of us want to forgive, but we find it very hard to do. When we have experienced an injustice, we may be quick to say, "That person did wrong. They deserve punishment. Where is the justice?" We mistakenly think that *if* we forgive, somehow justice will not be served and punishments will be avoided.

This simply is not the case. God will mete out a punishment that is fair, for



mercy cannot rob justice (see Alma 42:25). God lovingly assures you and me: “Leave judgment alone with me, for it is mine and I will repay. [But let] peace be with you” (D&C 82:23). The Book of Mormon prophet Jacob also promised that God “will console you in your afflictions, and he will plead your cause, and send down justice upon those who seek your destruction” (Jacob 3:1).

As victims, if we are *faithful*, we can take great comfort in knowing that God will compensate us for every injustice we experience. Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin stated: “The Lord compensates the faithful for every loss. . . . Every tear today will eventually be returned a

hundredfold with tears of rejoicing and gratitude.”¹

As we strive to forgive others, let us also try to remember that we are all growing spiritually, but we are all at different levels. While it is easy to observe the changes and growth in the physical body, it is difficult to see the growth in our spirits.

One key to forgiving others is to try to see them as God sees them. At times, God may part the curtain and bless us with the gift to see into the heart, soul, and spirit of another person who has offended us. This insight may even lead to an overwhelming love for that person.

The scriptures teach us that God’s love for His children is perfect. He knows their potential for good, regardless of their past. By all accounts, there could not have been a more aggressive or harsh enemy of the followers of Jesus Christ than Saul of Tarsus. Yet once God showed Saul light and truth, there was never a more devoted, enthusiastic, or fearless disciple of the Savior. Saul became the Apostle Paul. His life offers a wonderful example of how God sees people not only as they currently are but also as they may become. We all have, in our own lives, Saul-like individuals with Paul-like potential. Can you imagine how



our families, our communities, and the world at large might change if we all tried to see each other as God sees us?

Too often we look at the offender the way we would look at an iceberg—we see only the tip and not beneath the surface. We do not know all that is going on in a person's life. We do not know their past; we do not know their struggles; we do not know the pains they carry. Brothers and sisters, please do not misunderstand. To forgive is not to condone. We do not rationalize bad behavior or allow others to mistreat us *because* of their struggles, pains, or weaknesses. But we *can* gain greater understanding and peace when we see with a broader perspective.

Certainly those who are less spiritually mature may indeed make serious mistakes—yet none of us should be *defined* only by the worst thing we have ever done. God is the perfect judge. He sees beneath the surface. He knows all and sees all (see 2 Nephi 2:24). He has said, “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men” (D&C 64:10).

Christ Himself, when He was unjustly accused, then savagely assaulted, beaten, and left suffering upon the cross, in that very moment said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

In our shortsightedness, we may sometimes find it easy to develop resentments toward others who do not act or think the way we do. We may form intolerant attitudes based on such things as rooting for opposing sports teams, holding different political views, or having different religious beliefs.

President Russell M. Nelson gave wise counsel when he said, “Opportunities to listen to those of diverse religious or political persuasion can promote tolerance and learning.”²



The Book of Mormon speaks of a time when “the people of the church began to be lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and . . . began to be scornful, one towards another, and . . . began to persecute those that did not believe according to their own will and pleasure” (Alma 4:8). Let us all remember that God looketh not upon the color of the jersey or the political party. Instead, as Ammon declared, “[God] looketh down upon all the children of men; and he knows all the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Alma 18:32). Brothers and sisters, in the competitions of life, if we win, let us win with grace. If we lose, let us lose with grace. For if we live with grace toward one another, grace shall be our reward at the last day.

Just as we are all victims to the misdeeds of others at one time or another, we are also sometimes the offender. We all fall short and have need of grace, mercy, and forgiveness. We must remember that forgiveness of our own sins and offenses is conditioned upon our forgiving others. The Savior said:

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

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

forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14–15).

Of all the things the Savior could have said in the Lord's Prayer, which is remarkably short, it is interesting that He chose to include “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12; 3 Nephi 13:11).

Forgiveness is the very reason God sent His Son, so let us rejoice in His offering to heal us all. The Savior's Atonement is not just for those who need to repent; it is also for those who need to forgive. If you are having trouble forgiving another person or even yourself, ask God to help you. Forgiveness is a glorious, healing principle. We do not need to be a victim twice. We can forgive.

I witness of God's enduring love and patience for all of His children and of His desire that we love one another as He loves us (see John 15:9, 12). As we do so, we will break through the darkness of this world into the glory and majesty of His kingdom in heaven. We will be free. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Come What May, and Love It,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 28.
2. Russell M. Nelson, “Listen to Learn,” *Ensign*, May 1991, 23.