

Questions and Answers

“If a person I love did something horrible, how can I forgive them?”

“[God] has provided an escape for all who fall victim to the misdeeds of others. . . . 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!”

—Elder Kevin R. Duncan of the Seventy, Apr. 2016 general conference

Talk with Someone about Your Feelings

When someone you love has done something terrible that has caused you pain, it’s easy for you to think that bottling up your feelings will help you forgive them. Keeping your pain to yourself, though, can put unnecessary pressure on yourself mentally and emotionally. It won’t allow you to heal. Sometimes a good cry on a friend’s or family member’s shoulder is the best way to let go of some of the hurt, at least for a little bit. It can also be really helpful to talk with someone who has gone through a similar challenge.

Revenge Isn’t the Answer

You may feel justified in verbally or physically punishing the person who caused so much pain. These feelings are normal and understandable, but they’re also manageable. Again, you can talk with someone about the anger you’re feeling. Whatever you do, though, try to let go of feelings of vengeance, and be willing to apologize and repent if resentful words or actions slip out. Taking revenge is a burden that, thankfully, you aren’t supposed to burden yourself with. God said, “I will forgive whom I will forgive, but of

you it is required to forgive all men” (D&C 64:10). It’s nice to know that we can let go of the negative feelings and let Him handle the judgment.

Seek Mental and Emotional Healing

If someone you love has hurt you deeply, please seek professional help! You might think you feel fine, but many victims of abuse and trauma don’t realize they’re dealing with depression, anxiety, or PTSD from the incident. Sometimes symptoms can even start showing up years later. Talking with a therapist or psychiatrist, especially one who is a member of the Church, will help you deal with any mental and emotional challenges that you may be struggling with. Your bishop will have a list of resources you can use to get help, including Family Services professional counseling.

Set Boundaries

Forgiving someone doesn’t mean letting them hurt you again. Set limitations with those who have harmed you or another loved one. Forgiveness means being kind to them, but that shouldn’t be at the cost of your physical, mental, or emotional safety. Too many people mistakenly think that forgiveness means letting things go back to how they were. One teen, Anna, saw this type of situation after her father sexually abused her younger sister. Anna’s mother, Grace, divorced her husband and moved away with the children. Over the years after, many people said that because Grace had not gotten back together with her ex-husband, she hadn’t truly forgiven him. But Anna could see that her mother had forgiven her father. Grace just knew better than to trust him again with her children’s sexual safety. (This distance from their father also allowed the children to heal so that later they were able to forgive him.)

Focus On the Good

One young woman pointed out something her self-defense instructor taught her: “Bad people are just good people who do bad things.” When someone you love does something terrible, it’s easy to focus on everything negative about that person. If you want to forgive them, though, one way to start doing that is by choosing to remember or notice good things about them. A priest named Danny talked about how even though his uncle had been physically abusive in his marriage, he was now being very kind and generous with his money toward his ex-wife and their children. Danny said his uncle still made mistakes and hadn’t fully repented yet, but for Danny’s cousins, it was easier to work toward forgiving him because they could see the good things he was doing.

Give It Time

God commands us to forgive everyone, but He hasn’t said that forgiveness always needs to happen immediately. Sometimes people do things that are very hard for us to forgive. God understands this; that’s why He hasn’t set a rule for *when* we have to forgive. If you feel like you haven’t forgiven someone completely yet, or you don’t think you’ll be able to forgive someone for a long time, don’t let it weigh you down. It’s often enough to just *want* to forgive someone who has wronged you. Keep healing, living life, and growing in the gospel. If you do these things, eventually you’ll feel mentally, emotionally, and spiritually ready to forgive the person who hurt you.

Responses are intended for help and perspective, not as official pronouncements of Church doctrine.