

# Beauty for Ashes: The Healing Path of Forgiveness

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To live in such a way that you give beauty for the ashes of your life is an act of faith that follows the Savior.

The book of 1 Samuel includes a lesser-known story of David, the future king of Israel, and a woman named Abigail.

After Samuel's death, David and his men went away from King Saul, who sought David's life. They provided watchcare for the flocks and servants of a wealthy man named Nabal, who was mean-spirited. David sent 10 of his men to salute Nabal and request much-needed food and supplies.

Nabal responded to David's request with insult and sent his men away empty-handed.

Offended, David prepared his men to go up against Nabal and his household, saying, "He hath requited me evil for good."<sup>1</sup> A servant told Abigail, Nabal's wife, about her husband's ill treatment of David's men. Abigail quickly gathered the needed food and supplies and went to intercede.

When Abigail met him, she "fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground,

"And fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be. ...

"Now therefore, ... the Lord hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand. ...

"... Now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men. ...

"I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid. ...

"And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me:

“And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand. ...

“So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house; ... I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person.”<sup>2</sup>

They both departed in peace.

In this account, Abigail can be seen as a powerful type or symbol of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> Through His atoning sacrifice, He can release us from the sin and weight of a warring heart and provide us with the sustenance we need.<sup>4</sup>

Just as Abigail was willing to take Nabal’s sin upon herself, so did the Savior—in an incomprehensible way—take upon Him our sins and the sins of those who have hurt or offended us.<sup>5</sup> In Gethsemane and on the cross, He claimed these sins. He made a way for us to let go of a vengeful heart. That “way” is through forgiving—which can be one of the most difficult things we ever do and one of the most divine things we ever experience. On the path of forgiveness, Jesus Christ’s atoning power can flow into our lives and begin to heal the deep crevasses of the heart and soul.

President Russell M. Nelson has taught that the Savior offers us the ability to forgive:

“Through His infinite Atonement, you can forgive those who have hurt you and who may never accept responsibility for their cruelty to you.

“It is usually easy to forgive one who sincerely and humbly seeks your forgiveness. But the Savior will grant you the ability to forgive anyone who has mistreated you in any way. Then their hurtful acts can no longer canker your soul.”<sup>6</sup>

Abigail’s bringing an abundance of food and supplies can teach us that the Savior offers to those who have been hurt and injured the sustenance and help we need to be healed and made whole.<sup>7</sup> We are not left to deal with the consequences of others’ actions on our own; we too can be made whole and given the chance to be saved from the weight of a warring heart and any actions that may follow.

The Lord has said, “I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men.”<sup>8</sup> The Lord requires us to forgive for our own good.<sup>9</sup> But He does not ask us to do it without His help, His love, His understanding. Through our covenants with the Lord, we can each receive the strengthening power, guidance, and the help we need to both forgive and to be forgiven.

Please know that forgiving someone does not mean that you put yourself in a position where you will continue to be hurt. “We can work toward forgiving someone and still feel prompted by the Spirit to stay away from them.”<sup>10</sup>

Just as Abigail helped David not to have an “offence of heart”<sup>11</sup> and to receive the help he needed, so will the Savior help you. He loves you, and He is meeting you on your path “with healing in His wings.”<sup>12</sup> He desires your peace.

I have personally witnessed the miracle of Christ healing my warring heart. With permission of my father, I share that I grew up in a home where I didn’t always feel safe because of emotional and verbal mistreatment. In my youth and young adult years, I resented my father and had anger in my heart from that hurt.

Over the years and in my efforts to find peace and healing on the path of forgiveness, I came to realize in a profound way that the same Son of God who atoned for my sins is the same Redeemer who will also save those who have deeply hurt me. I could not truly believe the first truth without believing the second.

As my love for the Savior has grown, so has my desire to replace hurt and anger with His healing balm. It has been a process of many years, requiring courage, vulnerability, perseverance, and learning to trust in the Savior’s divine power to save and heal. I still have work to do, but my heart is no longer on a warpath. I have been given “a new heart”<sup>13</sup>—one that has felt the deep and abiding love of a personal Savior, who stayed beside me, who gently and patiently led me to a better place, who wept with me, who knew my sorrow.

The Lord has sent me compensatory blessings just as Abigail brought what David needed. He has sent mentors into my life. And sweetest and most transformative of all has been my relationship with my Heavenly Father. Through Him, I’ve gratefully known the gentle, protective, and guiding love of a perfect Father.

Elder Richard G. Scott said: “You cannot erase what has been done, but you can forgive.”<sup>14</sup> 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.”<sup>15</sup>

My earthly father has also had a miraculous change of heart in recent years and has turned to the Lord—something I wouldn’t have anticipated in this life. Another testimony to me of the complete and transformative power of Jesus Christ.

I know He is able to heal the sinner and those sinned against. He is the Savior and the Redeemer of the world, who laid down His life that we might live again. He said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to *heal the brokenhearted*, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to *set at liberty them that are bruised*.”<sup>16</sup>

To all who are brokenhearted, captive, bruised, and perhaps blinded by hurt or sin, He offers healing, recovery, and deliverance. I testify that that healing and recovery He offers is real. The timing of that healing is individual, and we cannot judge another’s timing. It is important to allow ourselves the necessary time to heal and to be kind to ourselves in the process. The Savior is ever merciful and attentive and stands ready to provide the succor we need.<sup>17</sup>

On the path of forgiveness and healing lies a choice not to perpetuate unhealthy patterns or relationships in our families or elsewhere. To all within our influence, we can offer kindness for cruelty, love for hate, gentleness for abrasiveness, safety for distress, and peace for contention.

To give what you have been denied is a powerful part of divine healing possible through faith in Jesus Christ. To live in such a way that you give, as Isaiah has said, beauty for the ashes of your life<sup>18</sup> is an act of faith that follows the supreme example of a Savior who suffered all that He might succor all.

Joseph of Egypt lived a life with ashes. He was hated by his brethren, betrayed, sold into slavery, wrongly imprisoned, and forgotten by someone who had promised to help. Yet he trusted in the Lord. “The Lord was with Joseph”<sup>19</sup> and consecrated his trials to his own blessing and growth—and to the saving of his family and all Egypt.

When Joseph met his brothers as a great leader in Egypt, his forgiveness and refined perspective were manifest in the gracious words he spoke:

“Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. ...

“So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.”<sup>20</sup>

Through the Savior, Joseph’s life became “beauty for ashes.”<sup>21</sup>

Kevin J Worthen, president of BYU, has said that God “can make good come ... not just from our successes but also from our failures and the failures of others that cause us pain. God is that good and that powerful.”<sup>22</sup>

I testify that the greatest example of love and forgiveness is that of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who in bitter agony said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”<sup>23</sup>

I know that our Father in Heaven desires goodness and hope for each of His children. In Jeremiah we read, “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace.”<sup>24</sup>

Jesus Christ is your personal Messiah, your loving Redeemer and Savior, who knows the pleadings of your heart. He desires your healing and happiness. He loves you. He weeps with you in your sorrows and rejoices to make you whole. May we take heart and take His loving hand that is ever extended<sup>25</sup> as we walk the healing path of forgiveness is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

#### Notes

1. 1 Samuel 25:21.
2. 1 Samuel 25:23–24, 26–28, 32–33, 35.
3. See *Old Testament Seminary Student Material* (2018), 449–50.
4. See James L. Ferrell, *The Peacegiver: How Christ Offers to Heal Our Hearts and Homes* (2004), 29.
5. See *Old Testament Seminary Student Material*, 449–50.
6. Russell M. Nelson, “Four Gifts That Jesus Christ Offers to You” (First Presidency’s Christmas devotional, Dec. 7, 2018), [broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://broadcasts.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).
7. See Ferrell, *The Peacegiver*, 53.
8. Doctrine and Covenants 64:10.
9. See James E. Faust, “The Healing Power of Forgiveness,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2007, 67–69.
10. “Forgiveness Doesn’t Mean Putting Up with Getting Hurt,” Mar. 16, 2022, [ChurchofJesusChrist.org](https://ChurchofJesusChrist.org).
11. 1 Samuel 25:31.
12. Malachi 4:2.
13. Ezekiel 36:26.
14. See Doctrine and Covenants 64:10.
15. Richard G. Scott, “Healing the Tragic Scars of Abuse,” *Ensign*, May 1992, 33.
16. Luke 4:18; emphasis added.
17. See Alma 7:11–12.
18. See Isaiah 61:3.
19. Genesis 39:2, 21.

20. Genesis 45:5, 8.
21. Isaiah 61:3.
22. Kevin J Worthen, “The Y on the Mountain” (Brigham Young University commencement address, Apr. 25, 2019), 3, [speeches.byu.edu](https://speeches.byu.edu).
23. Luke 23:34.
24. Jeremiah 29:11.
25. See Jacob 6:5.