

7 Steps Toward Healing

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Congratulations on taking courageous steps toward healing your heart from the harmful effects of the abuse you experienced in childhood. True healing can only be accomplished with the help of God. If you desire to be healed, depend on Him, and decide to reach for Him, your life will never be the same again.

7 Steps Toward Healing is a guide that will lead you through a process of reflection and conversations, and will invite you to reach for God in prayer. This process is best done in partnership with a trusted friend, spouse or other person you feel safe with. If you do not have someone you feel safe confiding in, I would love to support you by providing a safe place for you to reflect, talk and pray with as you work on healing. You may also choose to complete these steps on your own with God as your partner. The key to healing is honesty with God and with yourself. God will meet you right where you are and deliver healing where you need it with the resources you have around you.

HERE ARE THE 7 STEPS

1. TELL SOMEONE YOU TRUST

You cannot heal alone in secret. As you step out and boldly say, "Me Too," or "Yo Tambien," you will find comfort and support, and gain new insights. It is within the process of revealing our true selves that healing begins to unfold. As you prepare to share your story, set some time aside to reflect and journal your experience(s). Choose a place without distractions where you are calm. Limit interruptions. Include as much detail as you feel comfortable including. Tell your story to someone you trust. Be flexible and open to the process. After the conversation, journal your insights: What did you discuss, feel and learn?

2. FEEL YOUR FEELINGS AND GRIEVE WHAT YOU LOST

Pray an honest prayer, using your Step 1 journaling exercises as a guide. Tell Him how you feel about the abuse you experienced. Allow yourself to feel the feelings that come up and verbalize

them at His feet. God can handle it and He won't hold it against you. He sees you through and through. Nothing you can say will surprise Him.

3. UNBRAID IT

Separate the shame you feel for the abuse you experienced from the guilt you feel for actions and choices you made later, as a result. You were powerless as a child, but as an adult, you can take your power back by releasing responsibility for the sins of others, taking responsibility for yours and asking God for forgiveness. The following are some practical actions you can take to help you identify and separate shame that does not belong to you from guilt that is rightfully yours.

First, ask God to help you with this process. For example, you could pray, "Lord, help me to see the shame that I am carrying that does not belong to me, and reveal to me the areas of my life being affected by the abuse I experienced. Help me to see the harmful choices I made as a result and to take responsibility for them.

Next, take a piece of paper and separate it into two columns. On one side, write the words "Shame that does not belong to me." Make a list of the painful things that happened to you. Now, imagine yourself sitting in front of the person(s) who abused you. Visualize yourself giving them back that shame. It does not belong to you. Return it to the hands of its rightful owner.

In the other column, write down "My Guilt." Make a list of things you have done that you are not proud of. It could be things you did or ways in which you treated people in the past, even if you are unsure if they are related to the abuse. No one else is going to see this—only you. Be honest.

Now you know. Ask God to take the shame that was given to you by those who abused you. Ask Him to forgive you for the bad decisions you made as a result of your experience and to help you to be different going forward. Journal your thoughts.

4. ASK FOR FORGIVENESS

Abuse leaves emotional scars deep within us. Those scars can cause us to hurt others later. Is there someone who has been hurt by YOU as a result of the pain you have been carrying inside? It could be your husband, children or a parent. If you are able to apologize to someone you have harmed directly, and you feel safe to do so, I encourage you to have a conversation and apologize for the harm you caused. There is so much power in taking responsibility for our actions and asking for forgiveness. Amazing things happen when we are seen and are still loved exactly as we are, in all of our imperfection.

If you are unable to apologize directly, write a letter to that person in your journal and ask God to forgive you. Also, pray for the person(s) you hurt.

5. ACCEPT FORGIVENESS

God chose to take human form and walked this earth so that He could relate to us in all of our pain and weakness. He walked among us for the sole purpose of understanding and taking upon Himself all of our pain and shame. He came in the form of a man, the Son of God, Jesus. Through His sacrifice on the cross, He made a way for us to come to Him in purity. He took on the punishment for our transgressions so that forgiveness could be possible. No matter what happened to you, He cleansed you on the cross. You only have to accept His grace and He will make you a new creation through Jesus. It is through choosing Him and inviting Him into your heart that you will receive the transformation you desire.

Study Hebrews Chapter 10 and meditate on verse 10.

For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time."

– Hebrews 10:10

How does this verse make you feel? Journal your insights.

6. ABIDE IN FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is a thread that runs throughout almost every step in this framework because it is the key to true healing; however, it is complex and challenging. Forgiving the people who harmed us is the toughest step. Most of us will never get an apology or know if our abusers have repented in their hearts. The people who harmed us may not be accessible to us. You may not know their whereabouts, or it could also be that your abuser is no longer living. Therefore, you will need to lean into God when it comes to forgiving your abusers. You may never know the condition of another's heart, but be encouraged that you are only responsible for your own.

Forgiveness is something we do for our own individual healing. Forgiveness involves 1) letting go of hatred and personal revenge and 2) extending grace to others. Know that to forgive is not to condone, excuse or ignore.

1) Forgiveness means that we willingly choose to let go of our desire for revenge, and in the place of that, extend kindness to our enemies. We decide to extend grace based on the grace we ourselves received from God. God is just and He will rightly repay everyone according to their deeds. God does not take what happened to you lightly. He will avenge you. Consider what He says about those who harm His children:

If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!

– Matthew 18:6-7 (NIV)

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

– Romans 12:19 (NIV)

It is also important to recognize that the pain we feel about what happened to us creates resentment, not only toward the people who abused us directly, but also toward the people around us who were absent or unable to protect us. Those lingering and unaddressed feelings can drive our relationships and create distance or even conflict. We must take steps to forgive them too. The Bible calls us to make amends wherever possible. If you are harboring resentment toward a parent or other family member you can have a conversation with, the Bible calls us to address them directly. Have those difficult conversations—do it in love and kindness—and be open and honest about your feelings.

2) The simplest way to extend grace in forgiveness is to understand that the person(s) who abused you gave in to their evil desires and need God's help to break free from the evil that controls them so that they can stop harming people and themselves spiritually. What we can do for them, and ourselves, is understand this and pray for their healing. We can make a conscious decision to let go of any desire for vengeance, and choose to turn them over to God. God's love and mercy is so great that even the worst among us can repent, stop hurting people, and experience His transformative love. Scripture instructs us to love our enemies and to pray for them (Matthew 5:44).

This is the most difficult step. Say or write a prayer for your abuser(s) or anyone else you feel resentment toward. Ask God to help them see the pain they have caused and to lead them to repentance. Ask God to release them from the evil that led them to hurt others and to help you experience true forgiveness and healing.

Then, choose to abide in forgiveness each and every day. Make it your lifestyle to give grace freely to yourself and others. We all make mistakes, but we don't have to accumulate pain within us by keeping score of wrong-doing and carrying around the burden of resentment. This active step of abiding in forgiveness will help you to stay free. Choose to forgive yourself, and others, every time.

7. TRUST AGAIN

My prayer for you is that God will bring the right people into your life to love and serve you well. If you have those people in your life already but struggle to embrace their kindness, extend trust slowly. It's okay to be cautious. Ask God to give you wisdom, and to bring the right people around you. When they arrive, lean on them, seek their guidance, and allow them to love you.

By their fruits you will know them: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
– Galatians 5:22 (NIV)

Now that you have invited God and healing into your life, look for a group or Church and commit to being in authentic relationship with people who love and encourage you. Through intimate relationships, you can learn to **TRUST AGAIN** and **REPLACE MEMORIES** of the hurt you experienced with new and beautiful ones.

One final word on trust: building it takes time and effort. Don't be discouraged if people don't always meet your expectations. Expect that people may disappoint you from time to time. Keep an ongoing dialogue, make a commitment to extend grace, and always be honest.

Congratulations on taking courageous steps toward healing. I encourage you to take some time to celebrate your accomplishment and rejoice in the new season of life you are stepping into!

NEXT STEPS

Healing abuse is a process, but you do not have to do it alone. Regardless of where you are in your healing journey, you are not alone. There are a variety of ways in which I would love to support you.

JOIN OUR COMMUNITY!

INDIVIDUAL COACHING: If you would like additional support as you walk through your 7 Steps Toward Healing, I am available to work with you one-on-one as you work through this process. Individual coaching offers a safe space to reflect, discuss and walk through the steps in partnership with me as your safe, committed listener.

GROUP COACHING: You might be interested in joining one of my groups. This is a fantastic way to connect with others on a similar journey, receive guidance for your healing, and give and receive support and encouragement. These groups are also an exercise in building trust and healthy relationships, and are an opportunity to create positive memories.

FOR ORGANIZATIONS: Workshops, individual and group coaching packages are available. To bring 7 Steps Toward Healing to your organization, contact 7steps@unbraidedlife.com or visit UnbraidedLife.com.

COMING SOON!

Unbraided How to Heal from Abuse by Trusting God's Promises



This guide has been adapted from my book, *Unbraided Once for All Time*, which will be released in 2019. There you will be able to read the complete story of how God healed me from abuse and transformed my life. You will also learn how you, too, can heal your heart from the harmful effects of abuse.

By faith we profess that we have been made free!

If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.
—John 8:36 (ESV)