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Enriching the relationships that matter most!

How to Let Go of Toxic Emotions

I don't spring clean my house like some people do, but these days I am trying to simplify. Recently I was clearing out a paper pile, and I ran across an old letter I'd saved, written years ago by my mother. I remembered the first time I read it. I felt hurt and angry.

My mother and my relationship had been tumultuous since childhood. Mom had a sharp tongue and bitter spirit often spewing her anger out on me. We had been estranged for a long time. But in the final year of her life we were able to reconcile our relationship. Then, why did I save this letter and rip open old wounds by reading it again?

In the same way, many of us hang on to hurts, past memories and negative emotions long beyond what is needed. We tuck them away in a dark corner of our heart. Before long our life becomes cluttered with unfinished business that interferes with healthy relationships and happy living now. So, how can we let go of those toxic feelings so they don't continue to affect us now?

1. Acknowledge the truth of what happened to you. We can't change something we won't own, but when we face it and deal with it we can grow from it.
2. Allow yourself to feel your painful feelings. Let them serve their purpose. They are here to teach us something about life, about ourselves or others. Learn from them, but don't coddle or save them, especially when they're negative. They become more toxic the longer we hold on to them.
3. Listen for your internal self-talk. Our emotions are linked to our thoughts, and it is often our thoughts that get us stuck in repeating the painful feelings. Evaluate what is true and what are lies. Rereading my mother's letter I felt hurt and angry all over again. I told myself she didn't love me and I wasn't important to her. I know now those thoughts aren't true. She didn't know how to love and just because she didn't love me well didn't mean I was unlovable.
4. Choose to say good bye to those painful emotions. Let them go.



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5. Receive God's forgiveness. Forgive yourself and others. We are all imperfect and sinful beings. Live in love and grace not anger, hurt or resentment.

If you're like me and tempted to rehearse old wounds or negative emotions, take some time this week to write a letter to yourself working through these five steps. When you're all finished writing, read it slowly one more time and then shred or burn it. This symbolizes that you are done and are letting go.

If these painful emotions surface again, remind yourself you have moved on. They have served their purpose and now it's time to say goodbye. Breaking free of toxic feelings empowers us to live happier and more productive lives right now. Remind yourself that nothing is wasted and God will make you a stronger, better person, not in spite of, but because of what you've experienced.