

Getting Rid of Unhealthy Ties

We were made for connection – with each other and with God. God created us to build relationships with others that help us meet our needs. When connections are healthy, they are supportive and based on trust. Bonds can be formed in different ways. Before birth, babies are physically connected to their mothers through the umbilical cord which provides everything they need to survive. Although this direct tie is cut at birth, infants remain completely dependent on their caregivers. Over time, this changes: children grow and become more independent; more capable of meeting their own needs. Though they still receive much from their parents, they learn to feed and care for themselves, build relationships with siblings and friends, and eventually to provide for themselves. Finally, they may build a relationship with a partner, commit to them, and become mothers and fathers of a new generation. The primary bond is now with their partner, not with their parents anymore. God explains this in Genesis 2:24, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.”

God’s desire is for us to build healthy ties through good relationships at the right time. Such ties provide commitment and understanding so that our needs are being met with appropriate expectations and intentions. It is appropriate that in a marriage, husband and wife expect high levels of loyalty, love, and support from one another. We should not expect the same support from someone with whom we have no commitment or relationship. Healthy ties are built over time and start to knit together our mind, will, emotions, and possibly our body, to that of another person.

Unhealthy ties

While we are designed for connection, not all ties that we build are healthy, some can be harmful. A tie is unhealthy if we or the other person uses the connection to meet their needs in a selfish or controlling way that takes, rather than gives. Ties become unhealthy when they are formed outside of appropriate commitment, expectation, or timing. If left unaddressed, negative patterns can develop over time. We may become overly dependent. We may start to manipulate or become manipulated. We may continue to give parts of ourselves to someone who doesn’t honor that or doesn’t care for us.

Three examples of unhealthy ties:

- Parent/child relationships which do not appropriately change or grow over time – If the connections of the mother and father towards their son never change, the son might not be able to form healthy emotional bonds with his wife.
- Idolization of an individual – giving a person too much influence so that their opinions matter more than God’s. This is a one-sided connection where expectations and commitment are not appropriate.
- Sex outside of a mutual covenantal relationship, whether coerced or consensual - it is the most intimate connection we can form and requires the strongest commitment.

Unhealthy ties in past or present relationships can block us from developing healthy connections now or in the future. We may feel stuck or weighed down by destructive patterns in our lives. As long as we don’t clean up this unhealthy connection it influences us and we’re bound. We need to cut it to become free again.

Breaking unhealthy ties

When there is an unhealthy tie in our lives, we can go to God to help us cut and clean it. This doesn't always mean we have to reject or end the relationship, although in some harmful cases, that may be necessary. We start the process of cutting these unhealthy ties by forgiving step by step the wrong done to us. Then there are often things that have been taken from us, or that we took from the other person. This could be things like: our self confidence, safety, purity, control, or even our sense of who we are. We no longer need to try to get those back from the other person. Instead, we can trust God to restore them back into our lives, because He gave them to us in the first place. Finally, we can ask God to bless the connections that are appropriate and healthy.

Application guide

Use the support of a good helper! If you're ready to engage in a conversation with God, you can start like this:

Ask God: *God, are there any unhealthy ties in my past or present relationships that you want to deal with?*

Forgive: *God, what do I need to forgive that person for?*

Forgive the wrong that has been done to you (see worksheet "Forgiving Step by Step" for details).

Repent: *God, where do I need to ask you for forgiveness?*

Repent for everything where you partnered with sin or where you did wrong to the other person. (See worksheet "Confessing Sins and Repenting" for details)

Break the unhealthy connection/tie: *In the name of Jesus, I break all unhealthy or sinful ties with _____. If necessary: I cut off all influence of _____ (abuse, control, sexual sin).*

In the name of Jesus, I surrender all the things wrongfully exchanged in this relationship to You, God. Please cleanse all these things. I let go of everything that was theirs and I claim back everything of mine, please restore all these things according to your good intention.

Thank you God for setting me free from this unhealthy tie! (Then, if you are still in a relationship with this person): Please restore and bless the healthy connections that I have with this person.

Next steps: Take a few minutes to ask God how you should move forward with the relationship now that the unhealthy ties have been cut. For example: How does God want you to pray for them? What healthy boundaries do you need to be put in place?