

Why You May Be Unwittingly Playing Into Satan's Schemes

Our sin is what keeps us from enjoying a relationship with God. You could say that each of us offended Him through our disobedience. He chose to forgive us and restore our relationship with Him through His son, Jesus. Forgiveness is the gift of grace from the heart of Jesus. He carried our sins to the cross and bore the pain of those sins so that we might be pardoned from their binding power and consequences. Through His grace, we receive a release from sin that we have not earned or deserved. It is a gift, and in order to receive this gift, we need to accept His forgiving grace.

– Nan Brown Self, Author of *Forgiveness: Making Space for Grace*

There are many people who may not understand the importance of forgiveness. Why is it such a big deal?

Forgiveness is the key to healthy relationships with God and with each other. Our failure to accept the grace of forgiveness for our own lives and then give that very same gift to others prevents us from experiencing a vibrant relationship with God and with other people. When we don't forgive, we can become prisoners of unforgiveness, judgment and bitterness. We may be physically alive, but we are held captive by our past and unable to walk in the freedom Jesus died to give us.

You've dedicated a chapter to "bitter-root judgment." What is it, and what does it have to do with forgiveness?

The Scripture refers to a "root of bitterness" in the book of Hebrews (see Heb. 12:15). We are warned to watch out for it, to be sure that we do not lose our grip on grace and allow bitterness to overtake us. Bitterness poisons us and can ruin

every relationship we have. It is the result of judgments we have made of others, especially the judgments we have made against our parents. When we judge one or both parents, we set in motion a bitter-root judgment and an expectation that we will do the same thing that we have judged them for. It is vitally important to uproot our bitter-root judgments by confessing them and repenting of them so that we can be set free to honor our parents and live a long life (Deut. 5:16).

You describe unforgiveness as a prison. What does it mean to be a captive and what is the first step to making space for grace?

A captive is someone who is taken by an enemy and put into prison. Unforgiveness, refusing to forgive your offender, is an enemy because it is a sin and a bondage. When a person will not forgive, they go into the prison of unforgiveness. This prison isolates and separates them from others because they are holding onto the offenses of another person from their present or their past.

God requires everyone to forgive. It is not an option. Some of the consequences of unforgiveness are fear, anger, bitterness, resentment and rage. A few of the gifts of forgiveness are love, gratefulness, joy, mercy and faith. Forgiveness brings peace, freedom and healing.

Our first step to making space for grace occurs when anyone offends us. God offers us the grace to forgive them. We have a choice to make as soon as the offense occurs. We can choose forgiveness or unforgiveness. If we choose to forgive the offender and release their offenses to God, then we have extended God's grace to them. That is the first step to making space for grace. We are free and they are freely released. We received the gift of God's forgiving grace from Him and we share that grace with them.

If we do not choose to forgive the offender, then the first

step to make space for grace is to confess our sin of unforgiveness and repent of it.

When did you create the steps of forgiveness for restoring relationships?

The steps of forgiveness for restoring relationships are really a compilation of years of my personal journey of walking in forgiveness, teaching and counseling. After teaching on a variety of different subjects related to forgiveness for many years, I realized I had a list of steps that fit together.

Briefly describe the steps of forgiveness for restoring relationships with others.

1. No matter how big or small your relationship wound, God is always waiting for you in expectation and patience. All you have to do is say His name and He is there with you. He heals your wounds and meets your needs.
2. Allow yourself to experience any feelings surrounding the offense toward you. Take an honest look at how the offense has impacted your soul and spirit.
3. Give yourself permission to grieve over the offenses. Release your wounded feelings to God.
4. Extend grace to yourself and give yourself time to heal.
5. Allow grace to bring you to a place where you confess, repent and release yourself and your sins to God. Ask God to forgive your sin of unforgiveness.
6. Receive God's forgiveness by faith for yourself and others.
7. Pray for yourself. Ask God to show you what your needs are. Ask Him to meet them.
8. Choose to actively forget the offense as the wound heals.

If the memory of the wound tries to come back to your mind, refuse it and verbally choose forgiveness.

You state that the prison of unforgiveness and the prison of passivity are similar, yet very different at the same time. How so?

The two are similar structures because they are both prisons. We place ourselves in the prison of unforgiveness when we are unwilling to forgive. We can release ourselves from the prison the moment we offer forgiveness to those who offended us. The prison of passivity is different because we become incarcerated over a period of time through our unwillingness to make choices and act on them. We become passive and stuck. To be set free from the prison of passivity, stand against passivity in yourself. Accept responsibility for making decisions. Each decision that you make and act on removes a bar from the prison of passivity. Coming out of the prison structure of passivity is a deliberate process that requires diligence and perseverance. Freedom from the prison of passivity is a gradual process, while freedom from the prison of unforgiveness can happen quickly. If you choose to forgive someone, you make space for God's grace in your heart and you are released from the prison of unforgiveness.

Even though you had personally practiced the principles of forgiveness for years, you found that there had been a "missing ingredient" that prevented you from consistently walking in forgiveness. What was the "missing ingredient"?

Placing my faith in God was the missing ingredient that kept me from consistently walking in forgiveness. For years, I realized that I had tried to leave the dark place of my sin and my past, which I thought I had taken care of through confession and repentance. I kept going through the steps of forgiveness, but I still felt as though I was dragging my past with me. I never realized that in order to leave the past, I had to have faith in God and His provision for freedom in my

future. I told God I was ready to leave my past behind me. As I put my faith in Him, I felt as if a very powerful, heavy weight had been lifted from my spirit. I was no longer in bondage to the past. My struggle to find what I was missing was over. {eoa}

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