

A close-up photograph of a woman's face, looking upwards and to the right. She has dark hair and light-colored eyes. The background is a soft, abstract composition of a teal circle and a tan area with fine, parallel lines. A dark teal horizontal bar is overlaid across the top of the image, containing the title text in white.

Could I Have Unforgiveness?

Priscilla Yamin

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FIRST EDITION

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“What's wrong with you? You're not your bubbly self lately,” came the question from a close friend. “Oh, nothing,” I replied, as I thought to myself, “If one more person asks me what’s wrong, I think I'll scream.” But I had to wonder, “Was there something wrong with me? Had I really lost my joy?” It seemed liked everyone could see it but me. I finally realized something was very wrong when I woke up one morning and found myself wanting to quit everything. I went to my husband and told him what I was feeling. I wanted to withdraw from everything and everyone. “We can still go to church,” I told him, “but I don’t want to be around people or minister to anyone anymore. Do you think I need help?”

John and I went out for dinner and discussed everything we could think of to help us figure out what was going on with me. On our way back home, we realized only a word from God could give us the answer we were looking for. That night we prayed and as we were seeking the Lord, I heard John’s voice in the silence, “You have unforgiveness for three people,” and he listed them. As he spoke, I knew he was right. The word of the Lord had broken the blindness, but I suddenly felt paralyzed. I thought to myself, “He’s going to have to take authority over this.” Just then, John began to take authority over the spirit of unforgiveness. I was then able to face the hurts I had buried in my heart and I forgave each one by the grace of God.

Over a nine-month period, unforgiveness had robbed my joy and choked the Word of God in my heart. I felt like I was spiritually starting all over again. Although my joy had returned, I wondered how I had been so totally blind-sided. How could this have gained such a hold on me without my knowledge? I asked the Lord to show me what had happened and to teach me how to recognize unforgiveness. He revealed to me that I had set up a standard of performance for these people, and when they did not live up to my expectation, I was offended and hurt. In my case, they were all people in authority so all the more I thought I had a right to expect a higher standard of performance from them. The Lord began to show me how to extend mercy instead of judgment.

The one person I have learned to forgive the most over the years is me. We often place unreasonable expectations not only on others but also on ourselves, and by doing so, we open the door of our heart for depression, guilt, condemnation, and self loathing. You may recognize it as just a general feeling of yuckiness. We are saved by faith through grace, not of ourselves, but it is a gift of God. By faith we are made the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, and by faith we are sanctified. By faith we receive the finished work of the cross in our life, and by faith we extend mercy and grace to ourselves and to others. We cannot fix ourselves through our own self efforts. Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith, not us. Apart from Him, we can do nothing.

In 2 Corinthians 2:11, Paul stresses the importance of forgiveness, "...lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." The Lord revealed to me four specific devices that Satan frequently uses to trap us and keep us in unforgiveness.

1. Complaining

Colossians 3:13 says, "Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*."

Complaints come in many forms: fault finding, murmuring, indignation, grievances, dissatisfaction, resentment, placing blame, and so on. I have learned when I hear myself complaining, it's time to forgive. In many ways I have fallen short of the glory of God, but through Jesus and the finished work of the cross, I stand righteous and forgiven of all in Him. Knowing this enables me to extend that same mercy and grace to others.

2. Denial

Many people deal with unforgiveness by trying to convince themselves that they were never really hurt or wronged, so therefore, they have nothing to forgive. When you hear yourself saying statements like, "I don't care what they think, it doesn't matter to me;" or "I understand why they did that, they have their own problems;" look out! These

statements might not be so bad if they were followed by, “So I forgive them,” but when they are used to deny the need to forgive, they are dangerously deceptive. Pride hates to admit that we have been hurt, that we are that vulnerable. We often like to think we are a rock, an island unto ourselves, and no one can hurt us. But the fact is the actions of others often do affect us whether we want to admit to it or not. Understanding why your parents got divorced does not make it any less painful. Understanding why your father was too busy to come to any of your school events does not make it any less disappointing.

We generally don’t want to face up to our hurts and disappointments. We often try to bury them by making excuses and hardening our heart, but burying things in our heart is like trying to hold a beach ball under water, no matter how hard you try, at some point it is going to pop out. The things we hold in our heart affect everything we say and do whether we are aware of them or not. When I find myself reasoning to convince myself that I’m not really hurt, it’s time to face the fact that I am and forgive.

Proverbs tells us to “keep our heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life.” I enjoy having a soft and pliable heart before God and I am determined to keep it that way. A simple, “I forgive so and so by faith for exactly what they did or even what ‘I think they did’ in the Name of Jesus,” takes care of the seeds of unforgiveness before they become giant oak trees.

3. Anger

Anger does not see a need to forgive. Anger says, “If I forgive, it’s like saying it was okay that you did that to me.” Forgiveness is NOT saying it is okay. If it were okay, there really would be nothing to forgive. Forgiveness is saying “You did me wrong, you owe me, but I release you from the debt, I forgive you and I do not hold this against you any longer.”

Jesus said, “...if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.” Jesus did not say when your brother has been nice to you. Jesus did not say complain to the pastor or tell your best friend, but go to your brother. Many times, within the church, I have found that there were a lot more misunderstandings going on than actual sinning against one another. I do not say this to minimize times when we actually have been wronged, but whether or not your brother has actually sinned against you, or there is just a simple misunderstanding, it is in both of your highest good to get it out and be given an opportunity to restore the relationship.

4. Withdrawal

Some people withdraw when they are hurt. They believe if they don’t get too close to anyone, they won’t get hurt again. That used to be the way I dealt with most of my hurts. I can tell you from experience, it does not work. Relationships are the conductors of life. Ephesians 4:16

tells us, "...we are joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." If you have had a bad experience with some people, do not cut yourself off from the body of Christ. Forgive and pray for those who have despitely used you, bless those who persecute you, and ask the Lord to guide you into the relationships He has ordained for you. We need one another!

Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" Peter probably thought he was being quite generous when he asked, "Up to seven times?" Jesus answered him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." Jesus was teaching the disciples forgiveness is something we walk in continually. In Matthew 6:11-12, Jesus teaches us to forgive and receive forgiveness daily when we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

Years ago, my sister worked with someone who would regularly try to undermine her confidence and was generally obnoxious to her. Every day she would forgive him. This went on for several weeks, and one day she noticed she no longer needed to forgive him because she had begun to walk in forgiveness for this young man. Praise God!

Jesus said, "...if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." I do not believe this is because God stops loving us when we refuse to forgive, but rather we have shut the door of our heart to receive from Him. God will not, based on His Word, force us to open our heart.

Forgiveness is one of the foundational principles of our faith. By faith we believe the Father through Jesus Christ has forgiven us all our sins, and by faith we forgive one another. Webster defines forgiveness as a willingness to pardon an offense or a debt and a willingness to treat the offender as not guilty. It is our choice to be willing to forgive and allow the mercy and grace of God to flow through us. Once you begin to freely receive the Father's love and forgiveness toward us based on what Jesus has done, you can then freely extend that same love and forgiveness to others.

Let the river flow!

