

The Strategy of Isolation

The apostle Peter wrote in I Peter 5:5-9 "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Humble yourselves therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

Be self-controlled and alert.

Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Resist him standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

I am convinced that when Satan tries to bring believers down, he doesn't use the most clever disguises he can find, but he goes back to the same simple strategies over and over again. One strategy that I have seen used with particular effectiveness is the strategy of isolation. I don't mean physical isolation, because a person may be in the middle of a crowd and still feel they are all alone. ***Isolation is a feeling of disconnectedness either from God or from someone who knows what is 'really' going on inside our heart.***

A person can feel isolated from God's grace because of

- lack of connecting with people who communicate grace
- personal shame
- being removed from consistent interaction with God's truth

At that point, Satan moves in to destroy on four fronts.

through accusations.

through destructive patterns.

through hopelessness.

through false promises.

Through accusations. These are usually "taped messages" that we hear in our minds after there has been an incident or time of defeat. "How can you even call yourself a Christian?" "You say you want to love God and yet you (fill in the blank). Ha! He sees what a hypocrite you are. If you really loved him you would just stop (fill in the blank)." "You think God wants to see your face right now? You're dirty. Why don't you go clean yourself up and show God you're serious?" "When are you going to get over this? You keep making empty promises..." and so forth. We are told that Satan accuses us to God night and day. He is relentless in trying to take us down with our guilt and shame. He uses the half-truth of our failed performance, but notice, those "voices" (which never really sounds like Satan, it usually sounds more like our own thoughts) never get to the SECOND half of the truth, "...there has been a sacrifice made for you that Covers ALL your sins. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he REMOVED your transgressions from you."

Through destructive patterns. Dealing with "a sin" would be much easier than dealing with a bondage to a particular area. Being a prodigal and coming back in a one-time event would be easier than having to deal with the same thing over and over and feeling that we are outgrowing our welcome with God. That He could be as happy to welcome us back after the 10,000th time as He was the first time we turned to Him just seems beyond our comprehension. When we feel isolated, and the lie comes "I can't go back to God about this AGAIN" then what is the only thing left to turn to? The destructive pattern that put us in that position in the first place. Isolation from grace feeds destructive choices. This is why bringing those "shameful" practices into the light breaks the power of them. Satan holds them like a ball and chain on us when we are trying to do it on our own.

Through hopelessness. When we feel isolated, we lose sight of the fact that LOTS of others are going through or have gone through the same battles that we are going through. We lose sight of the fact that we are in process, and not at the final product. We feel that we are "the worst person" because that's all we can see. And in the end, we feel, "This will never change. My life will never be any different. It will continue in this pattern just like it has for the last ____ years." The truth is, a person who can still feel the pain of sin and is sensitive to God's Spirit to the point of wanting to be free from sin is ripe for change, and it is isolation that Satan uses as a last ditch attempt to keep them in hopelessness and from moving into the right choices. Undoubtedly, those choices will probably be among the hardest a person makes, so feeling isolated can also make a person feel there is absolutely no way they can make those choices 'alone.'

Through false promises. I remember visiting a concentration camp when we lived in Germany. On the gates were the words, "Work makes free." Of course, this was a lie because no matter how the prisoners worked, their captors had no intention of setting them free. It took the allied forces storming the gates and taking out the captors in order to set the prisoners free. This "work and you will be free" message is usually is disguised in churches by having to keep a particular set of do's and don't's in order to feel that everyone thinks you are "ok with God". But there is an ever elusive promise you hear, "If I could just ___ (fill in the blank with an activity) pray more/be more devoted in reading/share with others/give to those in need/etc. etc.--then I could rid myself of this bondage I find around my neck. Then I would know that all is right between me and God. I'm not working hard enough. I'm not keeping my part of the bargain." This is a false promise. Like the fish thrashing against the hook only embeds it deeper into its flesh, our thrashing against certain bondages in efforts to rid ourselves of them only seems to dig us deeper into the hole of indebtedness with God. When we fail 'again,' we 'try harder' and that makes the next failure seem even BIGGER in our minds. But the whole premise is a false one. When we stop thrashing, there is a God who is so overwhelmed in compassion for us that He comes to remove the hook from our scarred up flesh of self-effort.

He really has paid for ALL of us. Accepting that is the first step through His door to freedom.