

# Are You a Prisoner?



*Room*, an acclaimed 2015 movie, tells the story of a woman held captive for years in a sparse room with only a skylight for a window. To give some sort of normalcy to her young son she tells him that only Room is real and any other people or things are just products of television. As the plot unfolds they escape and her son's world begins to expand as he experiences and learns begins to understand life outside Room.

How horrible it must be to live in that kind of world you may think, but some people actually prefer their reality to be as clearly and precisely defined as Room was. They like things black and white. This person or way of doing things is good; that person or way of doing things is bad. There are few decisions to make and almost everything is clearly spelled out. It feels comfortable and safe to them. Unfortunately, this world is small and they miss out on so much though they do not realize it.

In reality, most of life is not black or white but lived in the gray. People and situations are often complicated and we need to suspend judgement for a while, learn more, and only then weigh options and discern the next right step. That's called an informed conscience and that's hard work. When I was working as a counselor, I had a client who wanted to move beyond her black and white thinking. After several sessions, I asked her how things were going and she replied, "My thinking is charcoal now." She was making progress.

Growth invites us to stretch beyond our comfort zones and try something new. When I was a young mother with three children under five, I met regularly with an older woman for spiritual guidance. After giving her a multitude of reasons why I didn't have time for regular prayer, she challenged me to try just five minutes a day before the children were up. I tried it and that began a pattern that continues today. It was the same way when I decided to exercise

*Growth begins  
at the end  
of my  
Comfort Zone.*

regularly at the gym. I could come up with long lists of reasons not to do it, but when I actually began I found I missed it when I wasn't able to go.

Making these kinds of changes, however, is easier than letting go of judgments and about people and groups, which, in my view, are often more important. There's an old saying attributed to many sources:

There is so much good in the worst of us,  
And so much bad in the best of us,  
That it hardly behooves any of us  
To talk about the rest of us.

Talk about hard work! Finding the good in those we tend to label as bad, reckless, or unlike me takes willingness, determination, and courage. Journalist Terry Anderson who was held captive by Islamic terrorists and regularly beaten and tortured for nearly seven years found that hating his captors would put him into a mental as well as physical prison. Instead, he tried to find the good in them despite their cruelty and eventually he was able to forgive them. What a journey! But one that set him free even though he was still physically imprisoned.



"Am I a prisoner?" That's a question that each of us might want to ask ourselves. "And what am I willing to do to become free?" For each of us the answers will be different, but there will be similarities, like trying to see things from another's point of view, working on snap judgments, and giving others the grace we want for ourselves. As my wise mother used to advise, "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."

This doesn't sound like a plan for world peace, but it is a small step in that direction as we strive to love each other as Jesus has loved us and commanded us to do the same.

--Angela Anno