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JOHN BEVERE

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THE BAIT  
OF  
SATAN

LIVING FREE  
FROM THE DEADLY TRAP OF OFFENSE

# CONTENTS

[Introduction](#)

[Day 1 Me, Offended?](#)

[Day 2 The Heart's True Condition](#)

[Day 3 Massive Offense](#)

[Day 4 Walls of Protection](#)

[Day 5 How Could This Happen to Me?](#)

[Day 6 Is God in Control?](#)

[Day 7 When Rejected by a Father](#)

[Day 8 Who Will Avenge Me?](#)

[Day 9 How Spiritual Vagabonds Are Born](#)

[Day 10 The Planted Flourish](#)

[Day 11 Hiding From Reality](#)

[Day 12 Self-Preservation](#)

[Day 13 The Sure Foundation](#)

[Day 14 You Have No Other Option Than](#)

[Day 15 All That Can Be Shaken Will Be Shaken](#)

[Day 16 Grace Is Given to the Humble](#)

[Day 17 The Rock of Offense](#)

[Day 18 Lest We Offend Them](#)

[Day 19 Laying Down Our Rights](#)

[Day 20 Forgiveness: You Don't Give—You Don't Get](#)

[Day 21 The Unforgiving Servant](#)

[Day 22 Revenge: The Trap](#)

[Day 23 A Potential King Defiled](#)

[Day 24 Escaping the Trap](#)

[Day 25 Healing in Confrontation](#)

[Day 26 Objective: Reconciliation](#)

[Day 27 Asking Forgiveness of One Who Is Offended](#)

[Day 28 Approaching Someone Who Has Offended You](#)

[Day 29 The Bottom Line](#)

[Day 30 Taking Action](#)

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this devotional supplement, which is a part of this tenth anniversary edition of John Bevere's book *The Bait of Satan*. This devotional guide is written for you to use in your devotional time. It will help you to probe more deeply into Bible truths related to the book, enabling you to resist taking up offense, and to repent of and get rid of offenses that may have impacted you in the past. We want to help you discover God's plan for handling offenses.

Each daily devotional segment is structured to:

- Help you to encounter God's Word.
- Provide you with assigned reading pages in *The Bait of Satan*.
- Reveal life-giving principles for developing healthy, loving, and offense-free relationships.
- Aid you in being set free from the bondage of past offenses.

We pray that this devotional supplement will be an effective tool for equipping you to discover God's truths for resisting the bait of Satan—offenses—in your relationships with God, self, family, church, friends, work associates, and even those who think of themselves as your enemies.

## **ME, OFFENDED?**

***And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare [entrapment] of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.***

—2 Timothy 2:24-26, emphasis added

[Read pages 5-7.]

Anyone who has trapped animals knows that a trap needs two things to be successful: It must be hidden in the hope that an animal will stumble upon it, and it must be baited to lure the animal into the trap's deadly jaws.

Many people are unable to function properly in God's purpose and calling for their lives because of the wounds, hurts, and offenses in their lives.

Satan, the enemy of our souls, incorporates both of these strategies as he lays out his most deceptive and deadly traps. They are both hidden and baited. Along with his cohorts,

Satan is not as blatant as many believe. He is subtle and delights in deception. He is shrewd in his operation, cunning, and crafty.

One of his most deceptive and insidious kinds of bait is something every Christian has encountered—offense. But if we pick it up, consume it, and feed on it in our hearts, then we become offended.

Offended people produce much fruit.

*In the following list of the fruit of offense, circle the feelings you have experienced when offended in the past:*

Hurt Anger Outrage  
Jealousy Envy Resentment  
Strife Bitterness Hatred

Many people are unable to function properly in God's purpose and calling for their lives because of the wounds, hurts, and offenses in their lives. They are handicapped and hindered from fulfilling their potential. Most often, hurt from a fellow believer causes them to say with David, "For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng" (Ps. 55:12-14).

*List (with 1 being the closest, and 5 being the most distant relationship) the names of five people who have offended you:*

1. \_
2. \_
3. \_
4. \_
5. \_

Offended people hurt, and their understanding is darkened. They begin to judge others by assumption, appearance, and hearsay. In this devotional supplement, we will uncover God's way to avoid Satan's bait of offense and overcome any past offenses that still bind us.

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking God for His help and wisdom to avoid the bait of Satan.*

## **THE HEART'S TRUE CONDITION**

***In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.***

—1 Peter 1:6-7

[Read pages 7-11.]

One way the enemy keeps a person in an offended state is to keep the offense hidden and cloaked with pride.

Pride will keep you from admitting your true condition. Pride causes you to view yourself as a victim. Because you believe you were treated unjustly, you hold back forgiveness. Though your heart's true condition is hidden from you, it is not hidden from God. Being mistreated does not give you permission to hold on to an offense. Two wrongs do not make a right.

Pure gold is refined in fire (Rev. 3:18). When gold is mixed with other metals, it becomes hard, less pliable, and more corrosive. As it goes through the fire, the other metals (dross) are burned away, and the gold becomes pure and pliable.

Being mistreated does not give you permission to hold on to an offense. Two wrongs do not make a right.

The same is true of our hearts. The more our hearts are hardened by pride and sin as we hold on to offenses, the more resistant to God we become. God desires to purify our hearts.

*Read 1 Peter 1:6-7, and then summarize how God purifies us:*

God refines us with afflictions, trials, and tribulations, the heat of which separates impurities such as unforgiveness, anger, envy, and jealousy, and allows the character of God (purity and holiness) to grow in our lives.

*Think about your own life. What are the impurities in your heart that are hindering the character of God from growing in your life?*

Jesus said that our ability to see correctly is a key to being freed from deception. Often when we are offended, we see ourselves as victims and blame those who have hurt us. We justify all the negative feelings we have as they surface. Sometimes we even resent those who remind us of others who have hurt us. Jesus counseled, "Anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see" (Rev. 3:18).

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Repenting of blaming others and asking the Lord to give you eyes to see the condition of your heart.*

## MASSIVE OFFENSE

***For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.***

—Galatians 6:8-9

[Read pages 13-16.]

Most agree the return of Jesus will be soon. It is useless to try to pinpoint the actual day of His return. Only the Father knows that. But Jesus said we would know the season, and it is now! Never before have we seen such prophetic fulfillment in the church, in Israel, and in nature. Jesus said that one of the signs of His return was that “many will be offended”—not a few, not some, but many. Are you or the people you know easily offended?

I have come to realize that whenever I give love, I am sowing to the Spirit and will eventually reap a harvest of love.

*Put an x on the line to indicate your level of offense for each statement:* Church people seem to be easily offended.

USUALLY TRUE	seldom true
I offend easily.	
USUALLY TRUE	seldom true
Friends seem to offend easily.	
USUALLY TRUE	seldom true
People at work get offended easily.	
USUALLY TRUE	seldom true
Relatives get easily offended.	
USUALLY TRUE	seldom true

If you found yourself putting *x*'s more often to the left of center, then you too are observing how easily people seem to get offended in this season. But a believer, filled with God's love, sows His love and refuses to take the bait of offense.

I have come to realize that whenever I give love, I am sowing to the Spirit and will eventually reap a harvest of love. I did not always know where love would be manifested, but I knew the harvest would come. No longer did I perceive failure when love was not returned from the person I was loving. I was freed up to love that person even more.

If we walk in a selfish love—expecting others to meet our expectations for love—then we will be easily offended when they don't respond as we desire. I set myself up for offense when I require certain behaviors and attitudes from those whom I love. The more I expect, the greater the potential offense.

*On a scale of 1 (very little) to 5 (very much), how would you rate each of the following statements in your own life: (Circle your answers.)*

I expect much of others. 1 2 3 4 5

I am easily disappointed. 1 2 3 4 5

I love conditionally. 1 2 3 4 5

I bless to be blessed. 1 2 3 4 5

*Add together all the numbers you circled. If you scored over ten, you are positioning yourself for potential offenses in your life.*

## **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking God to replace your expectations of others with unconditional love for them.*

## **WALLS OF PROTECTION**

***For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.***

—2 Corinthians 10:4-5

[Read pages 16-21.]

An offended person is harder to win than a fortified city with a strong wall around it. The walls were the city's assurance of protection. They kept out unwelcome inhabitants and invaders.

We must come to the place where we trust God—not our flesh—to protect us from offense.

We often construct walls around ourselves when we are hurt in order to safeguard our hearts and prevent future wounds.

*Check ✓ any attitudes you find in yourself: From within our walls we become...*

- Selective about relationships.
- Less open and vulnerable to others.
- Closed to those we fear will hurt us.
- Reticent to admit those who owe us something.
- Open only to those who we believe are on our side.

In an attempt to protect ourselves from offense, we find ourselves imprisoned within our walls, unable to relate deeply to those around us. Our focus is turned inward and introspective. We guard our rights and personal relationships carefully. Our energy is consumed with making sure no future injuries will occur. Yet if we cannot risk being

hurt, we cannot give unconditional love. Unconditional love gives others the right to hurt us.

*Complete the following lists, listing both those who have the right to hurt you and those you have shut out with walls.*

Those who can hurt me:

Those I have walled out:

Offended people who build walls will always be able to find Scripture passages to support their position and to keep others away, but their interpretations do not correctly divide the Word of God. The knowledge of God's Word, without love, is a destructive force—it puffs us up with pride and legalism (1 Cor. 8:1-3). It causes us to justify ourselves rather than repent of unforgiveness.

Knowledge without the love of God will lead to deception—especially from false prophets. Jesus warns us, “Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many” (Matt. 24:11). The ones whom they deceive are those who dwell inside high walls where love has grown cold (v. 12).

Seeking our own protection or benefit at the expense of someone else—betrayal—occurs in the church between believers. Betrayal is the ultimate abandonment of covenant. When betrayal occurs, the relationship cannot be restored unless genuine repentance follows.

We must come to the place where we trust God—not our flesh—to protect us from offense. The sin of offense is serious. If it is not dealt with, offense will eventually lead to death. But when you resist the temptation to build walls of offense, God brings great victory.

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking God to help you tear down your walls, become vulnerable, and repent of any offenses.*

## HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN TO ME?

*Joseph said to them...*

***“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good.”***

—Genesis 50:19-20

[Read pages 23-26.]

All offended people fall into two categories: those who have been genuinely mistreated, and those who think they have been mistreated but actually were not.

When you have been genuinely mistreated, do you have the right to be offended? Reflect for a few minutes on a time when someone hurt you intentionally. What was your response? Did you become offended at that person because of the hurt? Was that your normal response to offense?

*From the following list, rank your normal responses to offense from 1 (most likely response) to 5 (least likely response):*

- I get mad.
- I immediately forgive.
- I get even.
- I work hard at forgiving the person.
- I get away from the person.
- I seek to be reconciled.

If the negative responses above are the ones you ranked the highest, then you actually feel you have the right to be offended when someone hurts you. But you do not have to respond that way.

Consider the story of Joseph. (Read Genesis 37-48.) How do you evaluate Joseph’s words and actions?

*Put an x on each line to indicate how Joseph responded.*

He became offended.	He forgave.
He blamed others for his circumstances.	He trusted God.
He sought revenge.	He sought to be reconciled.

If you had been Joseph, how would you have responded? Would you have believed that you had the right to be offended?

Satan hopes we will take his bait of offense so that he will have a foothold into our lives.

If the devil could destroy us whenever he wanted to, he would have wiped us out a long time ago. Satan hopes we will take his bait of offense so that he will have a foothold into our lives to destroy both our relationships with God and our relationships with others. Don't take the bait, and Satan cannot touch you!

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking God for the wisdom of Joseph to avoid taking offense and to trust Him instead of blaming others or circumstances for difficulties in life.*

## **IS GOD IN CONTROL?**

***For God sent me before you to preserve life....***

***And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.***

***So now it was not you who sent me here, but God.***

—Genesis 45:5, 7-8

[Read pages 26-31.]

Joseph probably never thought about ruling Egypt while languishing in prison. But through all the circumstances of his life, Joseph was being prepared by God for His plan. God has a plan for the life of every believer. He is in control. The bottom line for Joseph was his responses to his brothers, to Potiphar, and to his circumstances. He could have blamed his brothers or God for his suffering. It is easy to blame everyone else in life for your problems and imagine how much better off we would be if it were not for all the people around us.

No one but God holds your destiny. No man, woman, child, or devil can ever get you out of the will of God!

**No man, woman, child, or devil can ever get you out of the will of God!**

Joseph's brothers thought they had killed the dream God had for him, but they couldn't do it. When Joseph was reunited with his brothers, he reminded them not of their wrong but of what God had done for him.

*Read Genesis 45:5-8 and Psalm 105:16-17. Jot down all the reasons why God sent Joseph through his trials.*

God sent Joseph to\_  
(Gen. 45:5).

God sent Joseph to\_  
(Gen. 45:7).

God sent Joseph to\_  
(Gen. 45:8).

God sent Joseph to\_  
(Ps. 105:16-17).

*Think of the greatest problem you have faced in the last year. Describe it in one sentence.*

*Now complete these sentences:* My response to my problem was

God's plan was

What I learned about myself was

If you stay free from offense, you will stay in the will of God. If you become offended, you will be taken captive by the enemy to fulfill his own purpose and will. So take your pick: *Which will it be?*

Stay submitted to God. Resist the devil by not becoming offended. The dream or vision for your life will probably happen differently than you think it will, but His Word and His promises will not fail. Disobedience is the only thing that can abort God's plan.

## **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Thanking God for having a good plan for your life and for working for good all the circumstances of your life.*

## WHEN REJECTED BY A FATHER

***And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.***

—Malachi 4:6

[Read pages 33-38.]

It is one thing to experience rejection and malice from a brother, but it is entirely different to experience rejection and malice from a father. When I speak of fathers, I am not just referring to a biological father, but to any leader God puts over us. These are the people we trusted to love, train, nurture, and care for us.

Think of the “fathers” in the past from whom you have experienced rejection.

*Circle any who have rejected or hurt you.*

Biological father    Stepfather    Pastor

Church staff    Elder    Deacon

Boss    Teacher    Leader

Close friend who fathered me

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

One biblical example of a father’s rejection was Saul’s rejection of David. Carefully read pages 34-36 of *The Bait of Satan*.

*As you read, jot down all the ways David could have been tempted to take up an offense against Saul.*

*Now complete these sentences:*

David treated Saul\_\_\_\_\_.

Instead of revenge, David\_\_\_\_\_.

When rejected by his king, mentor, and father figure, David chose not to take up an offense. But Saul became jealous and suspicious of his servant David. Today many leaders have become suspicious of individuals under their authority. Like Saul, they are insecure in their calling, and that breeds jealousy and pride. They recognize godly

qualities in other people, but they are willing to use such people in ministry only as long as it benefits them. Saul enjoyed the success of David until he saw David's success as a threat to him. Then he demoted David and watched for a reason to destroy him.

**If your father figure or leader is doing something sinful and wrong, instead of being offended, pray for that person.**

Is there a father in your life who is suspicious of you? If so, what response does God require of you?

*Read 1 Samuel 24:11 and then complete these sentences:*

When someone attacks me, God wants me to\_

When someone rejects me, God wants me to

If your father figure or leader is doing something sinful and wrong, instead of being offended, pray for that person. God will correct him—that's His job, not yours. Refuse to take up an offense.

**WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking God to work in the lives of your father figures and to enable you to pray for them and forgive their faults.*

## WHO WILL AVENGE ME?

***Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.***

—Romans 12:19

[Read pages 38-43.]

Saul acknowledged David's goodness when he realized that David could have killed him and did not. But one of David's men, Abishai, did not possess the grace that David possessed.

When David and Abishai slipped into Saul's camp while he was sleeping, Abishai pleaded with David, "God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at once with the spear right to the earth; and I will not have to strike him a second time!"

Abishai had very good reasons for thinking that David should allow him to kill Saul.

*Look over the following list. Check ✓ whether or not you believe that Saul should have received the death penalty for such a crime.*

1. Saul had murdered eighty-five innocent priests and their families (multiple counts of first-degree murder).

Deserving of death     Allowed to live

2. Saul, along with three thousand men, attempted in every possible way to kill David and his men (multiple counts of attempted murder).

Deserving of death     Allowed to live

3. Saul continued to function as king even when the anointing to rule had been taken from him and given to David.

Deserving of punishment     Allowed to live

4. Saul lied about David, sought to turn everyone against David, and broke his promises to David.

Deserving of punishment     Allowed to live

If these were not good enough reasons for Saul's death, they were at least good enough for punishing Saul and exacting vengeance upon him. Now read David's response to Abishai in 1 Samuel 26:9-11. David would not kill Saul or even seek to punish him, although he had every right in the natural to do so. How many people today would have had a heart like David's?

**Any sowing of discord or separation among brethren is an abomination to God.**

Churches split, families divide, marriages shatter, and love dies, crushed by an onslaught of words launched in hurt and frustration. Friends, family, and leaders offend us using words sharpened by bitterness and anger that aim a deadly blow. Even though the information may be factual and accurate, often our motives are impure. Any sowing of discord or separation among brethren is an abomination to God (Prov. 6:16-19).

**WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking God to teach you to humble yourself before those who offend you and to ask for forgiveness.*

## **HOW SPIRITUAL VAGABONDS ARE BORN**

***“The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.” So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul.***

—1 Samuel 24:6-7

[Read pages 45-51.]

In the relationship between Saul and David, God was testing David’s heart (1 Sam. 24:6-7). God wanted to see whether David would kill to establish his kingdom after the order of Saul, or whether he would allow God to establish His throne forever.

Only God has the right to judge and avenge. In Romans 12:19 we read, “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” We must not take the prerogatives of God into our own hands. It is wrong to do a right thing in the wrong way.

Yes, Saul deserved to be judged and punished—but by God— not by David.

*Think of a time when you took vengeance into your own hands and did not wait upon God. Describe the situation and its outcome or consequences.*

Many people ask, “Why does God put people under leaders who make serious mistakes and even some that are wicked?” (See 1 Samuel 1-5 as an example.) As an innocent child, God put Samuel under the corrupt priesthood of Israel. There Samuel learned to lean upon, trust, and hear directly from God—not man. And God Himself dealt with the corrupt leaders.

God often places us in uncomfortable places and under increasing pressure so that we may be shaped by His love and refining fire. If we take offense and leave, we fail to receive what God has for us; we begin to add offense to offense. Offended people react to the offending situation and do things that appear right even though not inspired by God. We are not called to react to people or situations but to act obediently in response to God.

**God often places us in uncomfortable places and under increasing pressure so that we may be shaped by His love and refining fire.**

Often when we feel pressure, we look for a word from God to bring relief. But God puts us in these very uncomfortable crucibles to mature, refine, and strengthen—not destroy us!

*Give yourself the following test.*

1. Do I run from God's refining pressure?  
 Yes  No
2. Do I complain when under pressure?  
 Yes  No
3. Do I justify my sin and condemn sin in others?  
 Yes  No
4. Do I expect spiritual leaders to be perfect when I am not?  
 Yes  No
5. Am I willing to listen to God and wait on His leading?  
 Yes  No
6. Read Isaiah 55:12. Am I willing to leave in peace?  
 Yes  No

**WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking Jesus to be your perfect Shepherd and to fill you with His love for the human shepherds He has placed in your life.*

# THE PLANTED FLOURISH

***Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing, to declare that the Lord is upright.***

—Psalm 92:13-15

[Read pages 51-55.]

Many people go from church to church, ministry team to ministry team, trying to develop their ministry. If God puts them in a place where they are not recognized and encouraged, they are easily offended. If they don't agree with the way something is done, they are offended and go somewhere else. Offended people uproot themselves, complain, blame the leadership, and never realize their own flaws.

God continues to refine and mature us by increasing pressure in the areas where we need to grow. If we keep changing the place where we are planted, we will never grow spiritually the way God intends.

If we keep changing the place where we are planted, we will never grow spiritually the way God intends.

*List all the churches to which you have belonged in the last ten years:*

*If you have changed churches, why? Check ✓ all the reasons you moved.*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Moved to another town
<input type="checkbox"/>	Changed denominations
<input type="checkbox"/>	Offended at pastor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Offended at a staff person
<input type="checkbox"/>	Offended by lay leader(s)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Offended by doctrine
<input type="checkbox"/>	Offended by style of worship
<input type="checkbox"/>	Offended by
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other reasons:

If offense was the reason for changing churches, then you are carrying the bait of Satan from one place to the next, sowing negative seeds and spiritual barrenness wherever you go.

*Read the following Scriptures, and then jot down what they have to say about the relationship between God's law, offense, spiritual growth, and bearing fruit.*

Psalm 1:1-3

Psalm 119:165

Mark 4:16-17

*List five benefits that come to you when you refuse to take up an offense and are planted in a church fellowship.*

1. \_
2. \_
3. \_
4. \_
5. \_

## **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Thanking God for the church He has planted you in and asking Him to mature and prosper you there.*

## **HIDING FROM REALITY**

***[They are] always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.***

—2 Timothy 3:7

[Read pages 57-60.]

I'm often asked by people how to know when it is time to leave a church or a ministry team. In turn, I ask them, "Who sent you to your present church?"

Most people respond, "God did." I then explain that if God sent them there, it will not be time to leave until God releases them. When God does instruct you to leave, you will go out with peace, no matter the condition of the ministry (Isa. 55:12).

*Describe a time when God released you from a church and allowed you to maintain peaceful relationships since you left.*

In this book I have described the difference between *teknon* ("babies or immature sons") and *huois* ("mature sons"). Romans 8:14 speaks of mature sons: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons [*huois*] of God." How does God mature us as His children? In order to understand the process of spiritual maturity we can observe the perfect example of the mature Son of God—Jesus Christ.

Offense blocks spiritual growth, but suffering and obedience take us to a deeper relationship with the Lord and with others.

Jesus matured through obedience and suffering.

*What are you learning about suffering and obedience right now in the church in which you find yourself? How are you growing in your attitudes, thoughts, and emotions so as*

*to avoid taking up an offense against others or God when you face suffering or are required to fulfill obedience?*

We need to learn that offense blocks spiritual growth, but suffering and obedience take us to a deeper relationship with the Lord and with others.

*Complete the following sentences:*

When I suffer, I respond\_

When I must obey, my attitude is\_

**WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Surrendering all in obedience to God and offering yourself as a vessel willing to suffer for Christ.*

# SELF-PRESERVATION

***For the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands.***

—1 Samuel 17:47

[Read pages 60-65.]

A common excuse for self-preservation through disobedience is offense. Harboring an offense gives one a false sense of self-protection. It keeps you from seeing your own character flaws because the blame is deferred to another. You never have to face your immaturity or your sin because you see only the faults of the offender. Therefore God's desire to develop character in you through opposition is thwarted. The offended person will avoid the source of the offense and eventually flee, becoming a spiritual vagabond.

The Bible has much to say about judging and blaming others.

*Read the following verses and jot down what they say to you about judging and blaming others.*

Matthew 7:1-5

Matthew 5:21-26

Luke 6:36-37

Romans 2:1-2

Romans 12:17-21

Romans 14:10-13

James 4:11-12

Jesus said in John 20:23, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Love forgets wrongs so that there is hope for the future.

We preserve the sins of other people when we pick up an offense and harbor resentment. The key is to refuse to

run from problems, face those who are offensive, and be reconciled. Why? Refusing to deal with an offense will not free us from the problem. The root of the problem remains untouched. God's plan often causes us to face hurts and attitudes we don't want to face. The offenses from which we are tempted to run will bring strength to our lives.

Remember: Love forgets wrongs so that there is hope for the future. If we have truly overcome an offense, we will earnestly seek to make peace. The time may not be right immediately, but in our hearts we will watch for an opportunity for restoration.

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking for God's help to face offenses and not run from them.*

## **THE SURE FOUNDATION**

***Therefore thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily."***

—Isaiah 28:16

[Read pages 67-72.]

Whoever believes will not act hastily. A person who acts hastily is an unstable person because his actions are not properly founded. This person is easily moved and swayed by the storms of persecutions and trials.

The only sure foundation in the midst of persecution and trials is the Word of God. When I preach, I have often admonished congregations and individuals to listen for God's voice within my voice. When we listen to an anointed minister speak, or as we read a book, we should look for the words or phrases that explode in our spirit. This is the word God is revealing to us. It conveys light and spiritual understanding.

The psalmist said, "The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple" (Ps. 119:130). It is the entrance of His Word into our hearts, not minds, that illuminates and clarifies.

*How does the Word illuminate your life weekly? Check ✓ each of the following ways you hear God's voice for your life.*

- Bible study     Bible reading
- Singing Scripture     Preaching
- Teaching     Reading Christian books
- Listening to Scripture choruses
- Other\_

What God reveals by His Spirit cannot be taken from us. We root our decisions in His Word. Without a foundation in

His Word, we will be easily offended by unexpected trials and tribulations. When God's Word is not rooted in us, we may receive it with gladness at first but later become offended (Mark 4:16-17).

Without a foundation in His Word, we will be easily offended by unexpected trials and tribulations.

*When you hear a word from God that contradicts a feeling, thought, or behavior what is your immediate response? Prioritize from most often (1), to least often (7).*

- I get angry.
- I am confused.
- I feel hurt.
- I repent.
- I rejoice in learning what God is saying.
- I get offended.
- I blame others or God.
- Other

Being rooted in God's Word and illuminated by His Spirit will enable us to hear truth from God and from others without becoming offended.

**WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Thanking God for His Word and for the many ways to illuminate it for your life.*

## **YOU HAVE NO OTHER OPTION THAN**

**...**

***Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.***

—1 Peter 2:4-5

[Read pages 72-77.]

The revealed Word of God is the solid rock on which we are to build our lives and ministries. Its commands and laws are not optional; they are mandatory. Just because a command or law in the Word might be offensive, we do not have the options of offense and disobedience. The only option we have is to obey.

*Describe a time in your life when you took offense at the Word and did not obey. What were the consequences?*

In the midst of trials and pressures, we find ourselves, like Peter, becoming as stones—little rocks being built into spiritual houses. Peter (*Petra*) is a rock, a stone confessing that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God.

Trials and testings locate a person. In other words, they determine your spiritual position. They reveal the true condition of your heart.

The Bible refers to a house built on the sand (Matt. 7:26-27). Such a house may be five stories tall and decorated beautifully. As long as the sun is shining, the house looks like a bulwark of strength and beauty. Next to that house may be a plain, single-story house that is almost unnoticeable and unattractive in comparison to the beautiful edifice next to it. But it is built on something you can't see—rock.

**Trials and testings locate a person.**

In other words, they determine your spiritual position.

As long as no storms strike, the five-story house looks much nicer. But when it encounters a severe storm, the five-story house will collapse in ruins. Christians are living stones whose houses are built on the rock of Jesus Christ. When storms come, they do not run, take offense, or blame others. Rather, in the storms of life, they stand firm.

*Have you attempted to build a house on the sandy foundations of this world's system? Check ✓ any of the worldly foundations listed below that you have been tempted to use. Briefly describe the result:*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Money:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Success:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Power:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Possessions:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Security:
<input type="checkbox"/>	People:
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:

Be sure that you build your life on God's revealed Word, not on what others do or say. Keep seeking the Lord and listening to

His voice as He speaks to your heart. Don't do or say things just to please everyone else. Seek Him, and stand on what is illuminated in your heart!

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking God's Spirit to reveal His Word to you and to help you to build your life upon the Rock of Christ.*

# **ALL THAT CAN BE SHAKEN WILL BE SHAKEN**

*He has promised, saying,*

*“Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.” Now this,*

*“Yet once more,” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.*

—Hebrews 12:26-27

[Read pages 79-88.]

Even though Simon Peter was named “Rock” and confessed Jesus as the Son of the living God, toward the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry Peter discovered that he was not yet walking in the character and humility of Christ. He was building his life and ministry with past victories and pride. Paul admonished us to take heed how we build on our foundation in Christ:

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

—1 Corinthians 3:10-11

When any part of our lives is built upon worldly things, that part will be shaken by Christ.

*Read 1 John 2:15-17. Below is a list of worldly things that God will shake from our lives. Put an x on the line representing where you are.*

The lust of the flesh	
ALREADY SHAKEN	NEEDS TO BE SHAKEN
The lust of the eyes	
ALREADY SHAKEN	NEEDS TO BE SHAKEN

The pride of life	
ALREADY SHAKEN	NEEDS TO BE SHAKEN

Because of Peter's pride at the end of Jesus' ministry, Jesus told him, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31).

Jesus did not pray that Simon Peter would escape the intense shaking—He prayed that Peter's faith would not fail in the process.

Pride opened the door for the enemy to come in and sift Simon Peter. Now if Jesus had had the mentality of many within the church, He might have said, "Let's pray, guys, and bind this attack of the devil. We are not going to let Satan do this to our beloved Simon!" But look at what He said: "I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:32).

Jesus did not pray that Simon Peter would escape the intense shaking—He prayed that Peter's faith would not fail in the process. Jesus knew that out of this trial would emerge a new character, the one Simon Peter needed to fulfill his destiny and strengthen his brethren.

Satan had requested permission to shake Simon Peter so severely that he would lose his faith. The enemy's intent was to destroy this man of great potential who had received so much revelation. But God had a different purpose for the shaking, and, as always, God is way ahead of the devil.

*God may shake our lives for one of the following purposes. If He is shaking your life, which of these reasons could be His purpose for you? (Check ✓ all that apply.)*

- To bring your life closer to its foundation.
- To remove what is dead, such as pride, from your life.
- To harvest what is ripe within you.
- To awaken a dormant area of your spiritual life.

□ To solidify your life so that the truth in your spirit man can no longer be separated from your soul and body.

Any thought process or heart attitude that is rooted in selfishness or pride will be shaken and purged.

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking the Lord to sift the pride, selfishness, and lust from your life.*

## **GRACE IS GIVEN TO THE HUMBLE**

***Be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble***

—1 Peter 5:5

[Read pages 88-92.]

Trials in this life will expose what is in your heart—whether the offense is toward God or others. Tests either make you bitter toward God and your peers, or they make you stronger. If you pass the test of humility, your roots will shoot down deeper, stabilizing you and your future. If you fail, you become offended, which can lead to defilement with bitterness.

Simon Peter was shaken to the point that he could no longer boast of being great. He had lost his natural confidence. He saw all too clearly the futility of his own strong will. He had been humbled. He was now a perfect candidate for the grace of God. God gives His grace to the humble. Humility is a prerequisite. Have you ever said to Christ, “Lord, I’ve served You and laid many things down to follow You, so why is this difficult or terrible thing happening to me now?”

Tests either make you bitter toward God and your peers, or they make you stronger.

Christians who experience hurts and disappointments often become offended with the Lord because they believe He should give them special considerations for all that they have done for Him.

They are serving Him for the wrong reasons. We should not serve the Lord for *what He can do*, but rather for *who He is* and *what He has already done* for us. Those who become offended do not fully realize how great a debt He has

already paid for their freedom. They have forgotten from what manner of death they were delivered. They see through natural eyes rather than eternal.

Are you serving the Lord out of pride, self-confidence, or the hope that He will reward you for your service with material things or an easy life?

*Complete the following sentences:*

My motivation for serving Christ is\_

My confidence rests in

The reward I expect from Him is

We can do nothing of eternal value in our own ability.

**WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking the Lord to purify your heart and to take away all confidence in your flesh.*

## **THE ROCK OF OFFENSE**

***“Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,” and “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.***

—1 Peter 2:6-8

[Read pages 95-108.]

Today the meaning of the word *believe* has been weakened. In the eyes of most it has become a mere acknowledgment of a certain fact. To many it has nothing to do with obedience. But in the passage above, the words *believe* and *disobedient* are represented as opposites.

The Scriptures exhort “that whoever believes in Him [Jesus Christ] should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

As a result of the way we view the word *believe*, many think that all they are required to do is believe that Jesus existed and died on Calvary to be in good standing with God. If this were the only requirement, the demons would be in good standing with Him, for the Scriptures also say, “You believe that there is one

God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19). Yet, there is no salvation for them.

*Complete these sentences:*

For me, faith is\_

For me, obedience is\_

If I say I believe and do not obey, then

The word *believe* has more meaning in the Scriptures than that of merely acknowledging the existence of or mentally assenting to a fact. Remaining true to the context of the verse above, we can say that the main element of believing is obedience. We could read it this way: "Therefore, to you who obey, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone,' and 'a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.'"

Love is the bottom line in our relationship with the Lord—not love of principles or teachings, but love for the Person of Jesus Christ.

It is not difficult to obey when you know the character and love of the one to whom you are submitting. Love is the bottom line in our relationship with the Lord—not love of principles or teachings, but love for the Person of Jesus Christ. If that love is not firmly in place, we are susceptible to offense and to stumbling.

When you live in obedience to the will of God, you will not fulfill the desires of men. As a result, you will suffer in the flesh. Jesus suffered His greatest opposition from the religious leaders. Religious people believe God operates only within the confines of their parameters. If the Master offended religious people as He was led by the Spirit two thousand years ago, those who follow Him today will surely offend them also.

*Remember, your response determines your future. Complete this sentence:*

When others are offended with me living for Christ, I will\_

Paul wrote: "The fact that the cross is the only way to salvation offends people, but that is the truth, and there's no way I'm going to preach anything else!" (See Galatians 5:11.)

If anyone challenges the truth of the gospel, it is time to be offensive without apology. We must determine in our hearts that we *will* obey the Spirit of God no matter the cost.

## **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Telling Christ that you will trust, love, and obey Him.*

## **LEST WE OFFEND THEM**

***Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way.***

—Romans 14:13

[Read pages 111-116.]

Though many people were offended at Jesus, He never caused an offense by asserting His personal rights or benefits. Jesus urged, “Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:4). The key phrase here is “whoever humbles himself.” A little later Jesus amplified this:

Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

—Matthew 20:26-28

What a statement! Jesus did not come to be served but to serve. He was the Son of God. He was free. He owed no one anything. He was subject to no man. Yet He chose to use His liberty and freedom to serve.

**Jesus chose to use His liberty and freedom to serve.**

*Read the following passages, and jot down what each Scripture teaches about serving and being a servant.*

Luke 16:13

Luke 22:26

John 12:26

Romans 7:6

Galatians 5:13

Philippians 2:5-11

Notice that Paul emphasizes in Galatians 5:13 that we have been given the privilege or the opportunity to serve one another. We are not to use our liberty or privileges as children of the living God to serve ourselves. Liberty is to be used to serve others. There is freedom in serving but bondage in slavery. A slave is one who has to serve, while a servant is one who lives to serve.

I have seen many Christians serve with a resentful attitude. They give grudgingly and complain as they pay their taxes. They still live as slaves to a law from which they have been set free. They remain slaves in their hearts.

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Renouncing slavery to the world and surrendering yourself to be Christ's servant.*

## LAYING DOWN OUR RIGHTS

***But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.***

—1 Corinthians 8:9

[Read pages 116-119.]

Our liberty has been given to us for serving and laying down our lives. We are to build and not destroy, to edify and not tear down. This liberty was not given to enable us to heap gain upon ourselves. Because we have used it in this manner, many today are offended by the lifestyles of Christians. We may have the freedom in Christ to do many things, but if something will offend another person, then we must carefully consider voluntarily limiting ourselves in order to witness to others.

**Do the things I do seek the edification of another or myself?**

*Below make a list of things that you have voluntarily stopped doing so that you will not offend or be a stumbling block to others.*

I have given up the right to:    So as not to offend:

How do we know what freedoms and rights we need to set aside in order to win others to Christ? I suggest applying what I call the “edification test.”

The apostle Paul, in writing to the Romans, summed up the heart of God in the matter: “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another” (Rom. 14:19).

What we do may even be permissible according to the Scriptures. But ask yourself: Does it seek the edification of another or myself?

*Read the following passage slowly. Underline every part that is hard for you to do. Circle the part that you need to start doing immediately.*

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being\_\_\_\_Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

—1 Corinthians 10:23-24, 31-33

Allow the Holy Spirit to funnel every area of your life through this Scripture passage. Allow Him to show you any hidden motives or agendas that are for your profit and not for the profit of others. No matter what area of life you might embrace, accept His challenge to live as a servant of all.

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking the Lord to show you anything in your life that may be a stumbling block to others, and then remove it.*

## **FORGIVENESS: YOU DON'T GIVE— YOU DON'T GET**

***Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.***

—Mark 11:24-26

[Read pages 121-126.]

Let's turn our attention to the consequences of refusing to let go of offense and how to get free from offense. Jesus meant what He said: "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

We live in a culture where we don't always mean what we say. Consequently we do not believe others mean what they say to us. A person's word is not taken seriously.

It begins in childhood. A parent tells a child, "If you do that again, you'll get a spanking." The child not only does it again but several times more after that. Following each episode the child receives the same warning from his parent. Usually no corrective action is taken. If correction does take place, it is either lighter than what was promised or more severe because the parent is frustrated.

### **Are you forgiving others so that you might receive forgiveness?**

But when Jesus speaks, He wants us to take Him seriously. We cannot view what He says the way we view the other authorities or relations in our lives. When He says something, He means it. He is faithful even when we are faithless. He walks at a level of truth and integrity that

transcends our culture or society. So when Jesus said, "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses," He meant it.

*Jot down what Jesus had to say about forgiveness in the Gospels. Matthew 6:14-15*

Luke 6:37

Matthew 6:12

Are you taking Jesus seriously? Are you forgiving others so that you might receive forgiveness? When your heart is filled with unforgiveness, then there is no room in it to receive God's forgiveness.

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking God to enable you to truly forgive the people who have offended you so that you will be able to receive God's forgiveness.*

## THE UNFORGIVING SERVANT

*Then Peter came to Him and said,  
“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me,  
and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”*

*Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”*

—Matthew 18:21-22

[Read pages 126-132.]

Jesus taught Peter and the disciples that forgiving others is based on God’s unlimited forgiveness. To emphasize this, Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving servant.

*Read again this parable in Matthew 18:23-35. Then complete these sentences:*

For me, the main point of the parable is\_

What I hear God saying to me through this parable is

The offenses we hold against each other, compared to our offenses against God, are like \$4,000 compared to \$4.5 billion. We may have been treated badly by someone else, but it does not compare with our transgressions against God. When we realize that Jesus delivered us from eternal death and torment, we will release others unconditionally.

*Rank the following offenses that are the most difficult (1) to the least difficult (7) for you to forgive.*

\_\_Gossip against me

\_\_Someone physically or emotionally abusing me

\_\_Someone physically or emotionally abusing someone I love

\_\_Someone lying to me

\_\_Someone stealing from me

\_\_Someone manipulating me

\_\_Other\_

**WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking God to remove the blockage in your heart that has been caused by unforgiveness. Pray specifically for the individuals whose offenses caused the blockage.*

## **REVENGE: THE TRAP**

***Repay no one evil for evil.***

***Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.***

—Romans 12:17

[Read pages 135-139.]

Holding on to an offense of unforgiveness is like holding a debt against someone. When one person is wronged by another, he believes a debt is owed him. He expects payment of some sort, whether monetary or not. However, it is unrighteous for us as children of God to avenge ourselves.

*Read the following scriptures, and then, in a phrase, summarize what they teach about revenge.*

Romans 12:19

James 4:12; 5:9

Matthew 5:38-42

Jesus eliminates any gray areas for grudges. In fact, He says that our attitude is to be so far removed from avenging ourselves that we are willing to open ourselves to the possibility of being taken advantage of again.

**We are admonished to be rooted and grounded in the love of God.**

Jesus likened the condition of our hearts to that of soil. We are admonished to be rooted and grounded in the love of God. The seed of God's Word will then take root in our hearts, will grow, and will eventually produce the fruit of righteousness— love, joy, long-suffering, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (See Galatians 5:22-23.)

However, ground will produce only what is planted in it. If we plant seeds of debt, unforgiveness, and offense, another root will spring up in place of the love of God. It is

called the root of bitterness (Heb. 12:14-15). Bitterness is a root. If roots are nursed, watered, protected, fed, and given attention, they increase in depth and strength. If not dealt with quickly, roots are hard to pull up. The strength of the offense will continue to grow. Soon, instead of the fruit of righteousness being produced, we will see a harvest of anger, resentment, jealousy, hatred, strife, and discord. Jesus called these evil fruits worthless. (See Matthew 7:19-20.)

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Thanking God that His peace has come into your life as a result of releasing the offenses that had blocked your heart.*

## **A POTENTIAL KING DEFILED**

***And Absalom spoke to his brother Amnon neither good nor bad. For Absalom hated Amnon, because he had forced his sister Tamar.***

—2 Samuel 13:22

[Read pages 139-143.]

Absalom avenged Tamar's rape by murdering Amnon. He also held bitterness in his heart against David for not punishing Amnon for the rape of Absalom's sister. Absalom's thoughts were poisoned with bitterness. He became an expert critic of David's weaknesses. Yet he hoped his father would call for him. When David did not, this fueled Absalom's resentment.

Out of this offended critical attitude, Absalom began to draw to himself anyone who was discontented. He made himself available to all Israel, taking time to listen to their complaints. He lamented that things would be different if only he were king. He judged their cases, since it appeared the king had no time for them. Perhaps Absalom judged their cases because he felt he had not been served justice in his own.

He seemed to be concerned for the people. The Bible says Absalom stole the hearts of Israel from his father, David. But was he genuinely concerned for them, or was he seeking a way to overthrow David, the one who had offended him?

**The Holy Spirit convicts as He speaks through one's conscience.**

Assistants to leaders in a church often become offended by the person they serve. They soon become critical, experts at all that is wrong with their leader, or those he or she appoints. They become offended. Their sight is

distorted. They see from a totally different perspective than God's.

*Complete the following sentences:*

When people come to me with criticisms of church leadership, I\_

When I am critical of church leadership, I

The most effective way to handle offenses in the body of Christ is

*Make a list of any people in the church who offend you, including the leadership. Write down their names, and then write down the date when you will go to them and ask forgiveness for your offense.*

Name    When you will ask forgiveness

Sometimes your observations about the weaknesses of church leadership are correct. Perhaps David should have taken action against Amnon. Perhaps a leader has areas of error. But who is the judge—you or the Lord? Remember that if you sow strife, you will reap it.

The Holy Spirit convicts as He speaks through one's conscience. We must not ignore His conviction or quench His voice. If you have done this, repent before God and open your heart to His correction.

**WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking God to remove a critical spirit from you.*

## **ESCAPING THE TRAP**

***This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.***

—Acts 24:16

[Read pages 145-149.]

It takes effort to stay free from offense. Paul compares it to exercising. If we exercise our bodies, we are less prone to injury. When we exercise forgiveness and refuse to take up offenses, then we keep our consciences fit and clean.

It takes **effort to stay free from offense.**

Sometimes others offend us, and it is not hard to forgive. We have exercised our hearts so they are in condition to handle offense; therefore, no injury or permanent damage results. But some offenses will be more challenging than those for which we've been trained to handle. This extra strain may cause a wound or injury, after which we will have to exercise spiritually to be healed again. But the result will be worth the effort. Are you facing a hurtful, serious wound? The exercise needed for recovery is listed below.

*After reading each step, write down the specific response you will make in order to achieve recovery.*

*1. Recognize that you are hurt.*

I have been hurt by\_

*2. Confess your hurt to the Lord.*

Lord, I confess that I was hurt when

*3. Be open to His correction and direction.* Lord, I understand that You desire me to

*4. Finally, we must forgive the person(s) who hurt us.*

Jesus, I forgive\_

for\_.

The next exercise we face after we have forgiven someone is to avoid relapsing. Occasionally, we may find

ourselves having to fight off some of the same thoughts we had about that person before we forgave him or her. The way we do this is to remember to pray for that person. These scriptures will help you know how to pray.

*Read each scripture, and jot down the attitude God desires us to have in our hearts for those who hurt us.*

Matthew 5:44

Psalm 35:11-14

2 Corinthians 10:5

## **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Praying for the deepest needs of someone who has hurt you.*

## **HEALING IN CONFRONTATION**

***And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.”***

—1 Peter 4:8

[Read pages 149-152.]

There are times when the only path to healing leads through confrontation. It is easy to love those who can do no wrong in our eyes—that’s honeymoon love. It is another thing to love someone when we can see their faults, especially when we’ve been their victims.

Hard places and difficult challenges will always be a part of our journey with the Lord. We cannot escape them. We need to face them, for they are part of the process of being perfected in Him. If you choose to run from them, you will seriously hinder your growth.

As you overcome different obstacles, you will be stronger and more compassionate. You will fall more in love with Jesus. If you have come out of hardships and do not feel this way, you have probably not recovered from the offense. You must make the choice to recover. Some people get hurt and never recover because they have not chosen to do so.

- If you are still hurting from a past offense, it is because you choose to hurt.

- The only way to be healed is to forgive. Release the offense and offending person to God.

- A lack of compassion for others arises from an unwillingness to forgive their weaknesses.

- Your spiritual maturity depends on your willingness to face, forgive, and forget past offenses.

Jesus learned obedience by the things He suffered. Peter learned obedience by the things he suffered. Paul learned obedience by the things he suffered.

Your spiritual maturity depends on your willingness to face, forgive, and forget past offenses.

What about you? Have you learned? As a result of past offenses, how are you now feeling?

*In each of the columns below, check ✓ the appropriate boxes to indicate your feelings right now.*

Healed Feelings		Hurt Feelings
<input type="checkbox"/> Free	<input type="checkbox"/>	Burdened
<input type="checkbox"/> Forgiving	<input type="checkbox"/>	Unforgiving
<input type="checkbox"/> Loving	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vengeful
<input type="checkbox"/> Gentle	<input type="checkbox"/>	Calloused
<input type="checkbox"/> Compassionate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Judgmental
<input type="checkbox"/> Accepting	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rejecting
<input type="checkbox"/> Humble	<input type="checkbox"/>	Proud
<input type="checkbox"/> Warm-hearted	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cold-hearted
<input type="checkbox"/> Peaceful	<input type="checkbox"/>	Angry
<input type="checkbox"/> Joyful	<input type="checkbox"/>	Depressed
<input type="checkbox"/> Healed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Broken
<input type="checkbox"/> Refreshed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bitter

If you find yourself checking more hurt feelings than healed feelings, then the process of your healing has stopped; you will not obey God’s leading and mature spiritually.

Maturity does not come easily. If it did, all would attain it. Few reach this level of life because of the resistance they face. The world is dominated by the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). The course of our society is not godly but selfish. As a result, to enter into the maturity of Christ there will be hardships that come from standing against the flow of selfishness.

Remember that when we lose our life for the sake of Jesus, we will find His life. Learn to fix your focus on the end result, not the struggle. (See 1 Peter 4:12-13.)

**WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Thanking God for the trials and tribulations you have faced. Thank Him for the results that have come as a result of these struggles.*

## **OBJECTIVE: RECONCILIATION**

***You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.” But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.***

—Matthew 5:21-22, 24

[Read pages 155-157.]

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus first quotes the law regulating our outward actions. Then He shows its fulfillment by bringing it into the heart. (See Matthew 5:21-22, 24.) In God’s eyes a murderer is not limited to one who commits murder—he is also the one who hates his brother. What you are in your heart is who you really are!

Jesus clearly delineates the consequences of offense in this portion of His sermon. He illustrates the severity of holding anger or bitter offense. If one is angry with his brother without a cause, he is in danger of judgment. Jesus was showing them that not dealing with anger can lead to hatred. Hatred not dealt with would put them in danger of hell. Jesus admonished His followers to seek reconciliation as a top priority in response to offense.

We seek to be reconciled with such urgency, not for our own sakes alone, but for our brother’s sake. We can become a catalyst to help him out of the offense. The love of God does not permit us to allow him to remain angry without attempting to reach out to him in restoration. We may have done nothing wrong. Right or wrong doesn’t matter. It is more important for us to help this stumbling brother than to prove ourselves correct.

Often we judge ourselves by our ***intentions*** and judge everyone else by their ***actions***.

*Make a list of any persons with whom you have an offense. By each name write down the time and date when you will go to that person, seeking to be reconciled.*

Name    Date    Time

Often we judge ourselves by our *intentions* and judge everyone else by their *actions*. It is possible to intend one thing while communicating something totally different. Sometimes our true motives are cleverly hidden, even from us. We want to believe they are pure. But as we filter them through the Word of God we see them differently. If you need to be reconciled, good motives are not enough. It's time to go immediately and be reconciled. Will you go?

**WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking God to empower you with love and boldness to go and be reconciled to anyone with whom you have experienced offense.*

## **ASKING FORGIVENESS OF ONE WHO IS OFFENDED**

***Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.***

—Romans 14:19

[Read pages 157-158.]

Romans 14:19 shows us how to approach a person we have offended. If we go with an attitude of frustration, we will not promote peace. We will only make it difficult for the one who is hurt. We should pursue peace through humility at the expense of our pride. It is the only way to see true reconciliation.

On certain occasions I have approached people I have hurt or who were angry with me, and they have lashed out at me. I have been told I was selfish, inconsiderate, proud, rude, harsh, and more.

My natural response has been to say, “No, I’m not. You just don’t understand me!” But when I defend myself, it only fuels their fire of offense. This is not pursuing peace. Standing up for ourselves and “our rights” will never bring true peace.

Instead I have learned to listen and keep my mouth shut until they have said what they need to say. If I don’t agree, I let them know I respect what they have said and will search my attitude and intentions. Then I tell them I am sorry I have hurt them.

**Godly wisdom is having a willingness to yield.**

Other times they are accurate in their assessment of me, and I admit, “You are right. I ask your forgiveness.”

*Recall a recent time when you asked someone to forgive you. Briefly indicate the approach you used with them. Circle anything prideful that you said or did.*

Humbling ourselves will promote reconciliation. Pride defends, but humility agrees and says, "You are right. I have acted this way. Please forgive me."

*Read James 3:17 and rewrite it in your own words.*

Godly wisdom is having a willingness to yield. Godly wisdom is not stiff-necked or stubborn when it comes to personal conflicts. A person submitted to godly wisdom is not afraid to yield or defer to the other person's viewpoint as long as it does not violate truth.

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking God to reveal offenses in your heart and to give you wisdom to approach those you have offended.*

## **APPROACHING SOMEONE WHO HAS OFFENDED YOU**

***Moreover 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.***

—Matthew 18:15

[Read pages 158-161.]

Many people apply Matthew 18:15 in a different spirit than the one Jesus intended. If hurt, they confront the offender in a spirit of revenge and anger, using the verse to justify their condemnation of the one who has hurt them. But they have misunderstood the reason Jesus instructed us to go to one another. It is not for *condemnation* but for *reconciliation*. Jesus does not want us to tell our brother how rotten he has been to us. We are to repair the breach that prevents the restoration of our relationship.

This is the way God uses to restore us to Himself. Though we have sinned against God, He “demonstrates His own love toward [and for] us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Are we willing to lay down our self-protection and die to pride in order to be restored to the one who has offended us? God reached out to us before we asked for forgiveness. Jesus decided to forgive us before we even acknowledged our offense.

*Carefully read Romans 5:6-11, and then respond to the following statements:*

My condition when God reached out to me was\_

God’s reaching out to me demonstrated

The reason He reached out to me was

What God accomplished in reaching out to me was

Even though He reached out to us, we could not be reconciled to the Father until we received His word of reconciliation.

We are to repair the breach that prevents the restoration of our relationship.

In the New Testament, the disciples preached that the people had sinned against God. But why tell people they have sinned? To condemn them? God does not condemn. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). Rather it is to bring them to a place where they realize their condition, repent of their sins, and ask forgiveness.

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Repenting and asking God to help you reconcile with anyone you have offended or who has offended you.*

## THE BOTTOM LINE

***If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.***

—Romans 12:18

[Read pages 162-163.]

If we keep the love of God as our motivation, we will not fail. Love never fails. When we love others the way Jesus loves us, we will be free even if the other person chooses not to be reconciled to us.

Jesus says, “If it is possible,” because there are times when others will refuse to be at peace with us. Or, there may be those who demand conditions for reconciliation that would compromise our relationship with the Lord. In either case, it is not possible to restore that relationship.

God says, “...as much as depends on you.” We are to do everything we can to be reconciled with another person as long as we remain loyal to truth. We often give up on relationships too soon.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the *peacemakers*, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9, emphasis added). He did not say, “Blessed are the *peacekeepers*.” A peacekeeper avoids confrontation at all costs to maintain peace, even at the risk of compromising truth. The peace he maintains is not true peace. It is a touchy, superficial peace that will not last.

**Love never fails, never fades, and never comes to an end.**

A peacemaker will confront in love, bringing truth so that the resulting reconciliation will endure. He will not maintain an artificial, superficial relationship. He desires openness, truth, and love. He refuses to hide offense with a political smile. He makes peace with a bold love that cannot fail.

*How effective a peacemaker are you? Below are some qualities of peacemakers. Put yourself on the line with an x.*

Peacemakers are...

*Loving Quick to listen*

<input type="checkbox"/> I am	<input type="checkbox"/>	I need to be	<input type="checkbox"/> I am <input type="checkbox"/>	I need to be
<i>Patient</i>			<i>Slow to anger</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> I am	<input type="checkbox"/>	I need to be	<input type="checkbox"/> I am <input type="checkbox"/>	I need to be
<i>Forgiving</i>			<i>Slow to speak</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> I am	<input type="checkbox"/>	I need to be	<input type="checkbox"/> I am <input type="checkbox"/>	I need to be
<i>Open</i>			<i>Obedient</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> I am	<input type="checkbox"/>	I need to be	<input type="checkbox"/> I am <input type="checkbox"/>	I need to be
<i>Vulnerable</i>			<i>Hearing God</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/> I am	<input type="checkbox"/>	I need to be	<input type="checkbox"/> I am <input type="checkbox"/>	I need to be
<i>Truthful</i>			<i>Humble</i>	

I am  I need to be  I am  I need to be

Jesus demonstrated all these qualities. When the Spirit of the Prince of Peace indwells us, we have the power to be all of these things. He is not willing that any should perish. But He will not compromise truth for a relationship. He seeks reconciliation with true commitment, not on superficial terms. This develops a bond of love that no evil can sever. He has laid down His life for us. We can only do likewise.

Love never fails, never fades, and never comes to an end. It seeks not its own. It is not easily offended. (See 1 Corinthians 13.)

### **WRITE A PRAYER...**

*Asking God to fill you with His love for others—especially for your enemies and for those who could offend you.*

## **TAKING ACTION**

***Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.***

—James 4:17

[Read pages 165-167.]

Now is the time to act! Ask the Lord to remind you of offenses you have hidden, forgotten, or denied. Ask the Holy Spirit to walk you through your past, bringing to mind the people with whom you have an offense.

When you know that your heart has been cleansed of past offenses and is strong and settled, stand firm and resist Satan's bait in the future.

Be ready to pray and ask forgiveness. Prepare to go to them in humility to ask forgiveness and to be reconciled. Use the prayer on page 166 as a guideline for your prayer.

*As you prepare to pray, jot down your responses to the following statements:*

During this thirty-day devotional program, the most important thing I have learned is\_

When tempted by the bait of Satan, I will\_

The next step I need to take personally in order to resist offense with people is\_

One person I need to immediately ask for forgiveness is\_

One reason I need to keep a spiritual journal is\_

In regard to offenses, I need to pray daily that\_

When you know that your heart has been cleansed of past offenses and is strong and settled, stand firm and resist Satan's bait in the future. Read about the whole armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-18. You will be an overcomer and will defeat the enemy!

## WRITE A PRAYER...

*Thanking God for the specific protection He gives with each piece of spiritual armor He has provided for you.*