

Lesson One Massive Offense

STEP 1 - EXAMINE YOUR HEART

. . . For you, the righteous God, look deep within the hearts of men and examine all their motives and their thoughts. —Psalm 7:9 TLB

The condition of our heart is vital to our overall health—both physically and spiritually. When we’ve been hurt and have not released the offense; we’ve put our lives in danger by taking the bait.

The scary part is, many times we’re not even aware of it. Thank God He doesn’t leave us there:

“But I, God, search the heart and examine the mind. I get to the heart of the human. I get to the root of things. I treat them as they really are, not as they pretend to be.” —Jeremiah 17:10 MSG

How does He do this for us? We are clearly told:

“For the Word that God speaks is alive and full of power [making it active, operative, energizing, and effective]; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the dividing line of the breath of life (soul) and [the immortal] spirit . . . exposing and sifting and analyzing and judging the very thoughts and purposes of the heart.” —Hebrews 4:12 AMP

While we, in ourselves, are clueless about what’s going on inside us, God is not. He has the amazing ability to cut straight to our heart. He can go where no man can go and see what no man can see. And He still loves us! What an amazing God we serve!

Take a few moments to pray and chew on this prayer David penned:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you and lead me along the path of everlasting life.” —Psalm 139:23- 24 NLT

Ask God, “Is there any offense in my heart? Am I holding on to unforgiveness toward someone who has hurt or disappointed me? Please show me, Lord. In Jesus’s name, Amen.” Be still and listen. What is God revealing to you? Write down any names and situations that come to mind.

Take a moment now and release these people and situations to the Lord. Ask Him to forgive you for holding on to offense and invite Him into your heart and circumstances. What He reveals, He will heal as you let Him into your life. Jot down anything else God is speaking to you.

Keep in mind that the pain may not leave immediately, and that's okay. This prayer of release is a step of faith.

STEP 2 - ADJUST YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. —Colossians 3:13 NLT Jesus said, "It is impossible that no offenses should come . . ." (Luke 17:1). In other words, if we're breathing, we're going to have opportunities to be offended. People will say and do things that hurt—it's just a part of life.

Our greatest potential to be offended is with people close to us—our spouse, children, siblings, parents, coworkers, fellow church members, our pastors, and even God Himself. We tend to expect the most from those we love most deeply. When our expectations aren't met, disappointment sets in, which quickly turns into offense if it isn't dealt with properly.

Stop and think: Am I truly at peace with those closest to me? Or is there someone I'm having a really hard time liking—much less loving? Who is the Holy Spirit bringing to mind?

What specifically are they doing (or not doing) that is offensive to you?

What are some of your expectations of them?

Are these expectations realistic? Are they demanding? If they are realistic but aren't being met, ask God to give you His perspective of you, them, and the situation (write what He reveals).

Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day's out (MSG). Help carry each other's burdens. In this way you will follow Christ's teachings (GW). —Galatians 6:1-2

STEP 3 - DEMOLISH STRONGHOLDS

I use God's mighty weapons, not those made by men, to knock down the devil's strongholds. These weapons can break down every proud argument against God and every wall that can be built to keep men from finding Him . . . —2 Corinthians 10:4-5 TLB

None of us like to be hurt. Typically, we will avoid pain whenever possible. So when someone offends us, we often begin a subconscious building program, erecting walls in our relationships to protect ourselves. God identifies these walls as strongholds—set patterns of reasoning (thinking) through which we process (or filter) information.

The word stronghold in 2 Corinthians 10:4 is the Greek word ochuroma. It was a term used to describe a castle or fortress that had very thick, impenetrable walls built to keep intruders out. Interestingly, the same word for stronghold here was also used to describe a prison—a place of punishment and torment.¹ Are you getting a glimpse of what strongholds do in your life?

David Wilkerson, noted author, pastor, and prophet to America for over four decades, explains:

“A **stronghold** is an accusation planted firmly in your mind. Satan establishes strongholds in God's people by implanting in their minds lies, falsehoods and misconceptions The devil may try to convince you that you have a right to hold onto bitterness because you've been wronged. He'll try to destroy your marriage by persuading you, 'You can't endure this relationship any longer unless your spouse changes.' If you keep listening to his lies, you'll begin to believe them after a while.”

Think about it. What **walls** have you built to protect yourself from being hurt again? What specific types of thinking regarding your relationships is God reminding you of?

What is the cure for destructive strongholds? Seek God! “. . . His name is the Lord. He destroys strongholds and ruins fortresses” (Amos 5:8-9 GW).

As you recognize the enemy's lies and repent to God for believing them (see 1 John 1:9), He will forgive you and tear down the stronghold of offense in your soul. Then, dig into His Word and begin to replace the enemy's lies with truth.

How powerful is God's Word in your life? Take a moment to think on these passages: Hebrews 4:12; James 1:21; and Jeremiah 23:28-29. What's God showing you in these verses that you can apply in your life?

STEP 4 - BREAK THE CHAIN REACTION

Great peace have they who love Your law; nothing shall offend them or make them stumble. — Psalm 119:165 AMP

Holding on to offense and not dealing with it properly results in a tragic chain of pain in our lives and the lives of those around us. Carefully read Jesus’s words in Matthew 24:10-12:

“And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”

How many links in the chain of pain can you identify in this passage?

In your own words, explain what each of these are and how they’re connected.

When we’re offended, self-preservation becomes our focus, making us a prime candidate for betrayal. To betray someone is to seek what benefits us at their expense. Take a moment to ask God, “Have I done this? Has the love in my heart grown cold in any of my relationships? Am I on the verge of betrayal?” Listen. What is God showing you?

Lawlessness is an end product of offense. It’s the Greek word anomia, which essentially means “contempt for and disobedience to the law (God’s Word).” Again, pause and pray, “Lord, am I ignoring what Your Word says regarding certain areas of my life? Do I have contempt or disrespect for truth?” Be still and listen. What’s the Holy Spirit speaking?

In light of your answers and the principles you're hearing in this teaching, what actions do you feel God is asking you to take?

STEP 5 - PURSUE ONENESS

Make it your aim to be at one in the Spirit, and you will inevitably be at peace with one another.
—Ephesians 4:3 Phillips

Jesus said that in the last days before His return, many who once believed in Him would become offended and abandon their faith. "And the love of the great body of people will grow cold . . ." (Matthew 24:12 AMP). He warns us of this so we can avoid falling prey to it.

Watchman Nee, a very insightful and devoted Christian leader and author who served in China and was imprisoned for his faith, aptly stated:

"The work of God is to make us one body, but the work of Satan is to cause us to be torn asunder. Satan uses our corrupted flesh, our stubborn self, and the world which we covet to carry out his work of destruction. . . . If these elements are permitted to remain in our lives, we clearly make room for Satan to work his work of disintegration."

How can we effectively combat Satan's strategy of disintegration? By pursuing oneness. Watchman Nee continues:

"Oneness is when God has His absolute place in us. Oneness is when He alone is in all, when He fills all. When the children of God are filled with God, they harmonize with each other."

What does pursuing oneness look like in God's eyes? Take time to meditate on these passages:

"This is what I have asked of God for you: that you will be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love, and that you will have the rich experience of knowing Christ with real certainty and clear understanding . . ." —Colossians 2:2 TLB

"Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, 11 the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony." —Colossians 3:13-14 NLT

". . . We will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of His body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love." —Ephesians 4:15-16 NLT

“. . . Make me truly happy by loving each other and agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, working together with one heart and mind and purpose. Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. Don't just think about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and in what they are doing." — Philippians 2:2-4 TLB

What qualities of oneness is God showing you that you can cultivate and put into practice?

TAKE ACTION

We're sure God brought some people to mind while you were working through the Steps to Freedom. We challenge you to write each of these people a letter. This could be a physical letter or just a digital file. (Don't worry—we're not going to ask you to send any letters.)

Go ahead and get everything out. Keep writing until there's nothing left to say. After you've finished these letters, just save them for now. We'll revisit them soon. If God brings other people to mind during a later lesson, write them a letter as well.

FINAL THOUGHTS . . .

The enemy's plan to trap and control us is triggered when we pick up an offense. Offenses left unchecked will eventually separate us from God and others and open doors for the enemy to forge a chain of pain in our lives. Seize this moment to be gut-level honest with yourself and God about past and present hurts.

Have you taken up offense with someone in your family, workplace, or church? What walls have become strongholds in your soul? Take time to pray and ask God to guide you into the truth about yourself and the situations you're facing. Pour your heart out on paper, capturing the insight He gives you.