

JOHN BEVERE

THE BAIT OF SATAN
— COURSE GUIDE —



THEBAITOFSATAN.COM

INTRODUCTION

We designed this guide as a resource for you to use with *The Bait of Satan Course*. After each video lesson, you will be able to reflect on what you've learned, meditate on key Scriptures and points from the teaching, and take the necessary steps toward ridding your life of offense.

While each video contains valuable teachings, this guide is the tool that connects those teachings to your life, helping you work with the Holy Spirit to personalize your course experience. If you commit the process outlined in this course, we know that you will experience the freedom you seek.

Our prayer is that you will identify the condition of your heart, release any offenses you may be holding, and experience healing and reconciliation with others. By God's grace, may you be empowered to live free from the trap of offense.

Sincerely,

John Bevere

THE BAIT OF SATAN READING PLAN

If you enjoy reading, then reading *The Bait of Satan* book while going through the course is a brilliant idea. The book is easy to read and full of information that's not covered in these lessons. You can complete the course without the book, but the best course experience involves the book. (You'll find the reading plan below.)

Because the lessons have so much great content, we recommend that you only do one lesson per week. We know that you may want to move at a faster pace, but give yourself time to complete the process outlined in your course guide.

LESSON 1: MASSIVE OFFENSE

Read: Chapters 1–2

LESSON 2: HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN TO ME?

Read: Chapter 3

LESSON 3: MY FATHER, MY FATHER

Read: Chapters 4–6

LESSON 4: HOW TO HANDLE UNFAIR TREATMENT

Read: Chapters 7–10

LESSON 5: ESCAPING THE TRAP

Read: Chapters 11–12

LESSON 6: RECONCILIATION

Read: Chapters 13–14

Please be sure to connect with us if you have any questions. Enjoy!

Massive Offense

LESSON HIGHLIGHTS

The word *offense* is the Greek word *skandalon*, which is the part (or trigger) of a hunter's trap that holds the bait. When we take the bait of offense, we trigger the enemy's trap and (knowingly or unknowingly) become captive to his will.

The people who can hurt us most are those closest to us. The greater our expectations, the greater potential we have to be offended.

Once we're offended, we begin to build walls in our relationships to protect and insulate ourselves from additional wounds. Over time, these walls become mental and emotional strongholds that do us more harm than good.

Holding on to offense activates a progressive chain of pain in our lives. Offense leads to betrayal, betrayal turns into hatred, hatred gives way to deception, and deception opens the door to lawlessness.

In these last days before Christ's return, offense will become widespread, specifically among believers. We must be on guard and careful not to fall into this deadly trap.

STEPS TO FREEDOM

We have created thirty Steps to Freedom that will help you apply the teachings to your personal life (there are five Steps with each lesson). They are an essential part of the course, so please find ways to integrate the Steps into your schedule.

In these Steps you'll find Scriptures to read, prayers to pray, questions to ponder, conversations to have, and actions that will help you move forward in your journey toward freedom.

We recommend that you complete no more than one Step per day. Once you've completed the Steps that accompany a lesson, then you should move onto the next lesson. Each of the Steps will prepare your heart for what's next, so the sequence is important.

Throughout this guide we've provided space for you to capture some of your thoughts and notes, but it might be a good idea for you to use a journal or note-taking tool to capture additional thoughts.

Are you ready? Let's take the first Step.

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.”²

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.”³

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.”⁴

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,

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.

(1) Rick Renner, adapted from *Sparkling Gems from the Greek* (Tulsa, OK: Teach All Nations, 2003) pp. 918-919. (2) David Wilkerson, *The New Covenant Unveiled* (Lindale, TX: Wilkerson Trust Publications, 2000) p. 115. (3) Watchman Nee, *The Body of Christ: A Reality* (New York, Christian Fellowship Publishers, Inc., 1978) p. 47. (4) *Ibid.*, p. 48.

How Could This Happen to Me?

LESSON HIGHLIGHTS

All of us will experience mistreatment in this life. When it happens, we have two options: give in to the temptation to blame others and complain to God, or let go of the offense and leave it in God's hands. If we choose to trust Him and not to be offended, we'll come out of it better, not bitter.

No human on earth and no devil out of hell can ever take you out of God's will! He holds your destiny securely in His hands. The only one who can take you out of His will is *you*.

Our heavenly Father is never surprised, shocked, or shaken by what we go through. His plans for us are solidified—not shattered—by the enemy's schemes.

God has already laid out the master plan for our lives. Before Earth's foundation, He chose us as His secret weapon for this time. He has a specific life mission for each of us to complete, but training always comes before a mission.

Often, what looks like an abortion of God's plan can actually be the road to its fulfillment—if we stay obedient to Him and free of offense.

STEPS TO FREEDOM

STEP 6 - CHOOSE TO TRUST GOD

Trust the Lord completely; don't ever trust yourself. In everything you do, put God first, and He will

direct you and crown your efforts with success. —Proverbs 3:5-6 TLB

Have you ever played “The Blame Game”? Sadly, we all have. It’s a terrible tendency each of us can fall into when things don’t turn out the way we planned. Adam and Eve were the first to play it, and it’s possible Joseph played it while he was in prison. Maybe he wrestled with thoughts like, *If it weren’t for my brothers, I could be home right now, enjoying a great life with my father.* Have you ever thought like that? How would you fill in the blanks to complete this sentence?

“If it weren’t for _____, I’d have a better _____ (job, marriage, family, self-image, social life, bank account, or something else you want but don’t have).”

What long-term effects will likely result from a mindset of blaming others?

What healthy shift in perspective would serve you better?

For help, check out Psalm 34:9-10 and 37:1-9; Proverbs 3:5-8; Isaiah 26:3-4; and Jeremiah 17:7-8.

Do all things without grumbling and faultfinding and complaining [against God] and questioning and doubting [among yourselves], that you may show yourselves to be blameless and guileless, innocent and uncontaminated, children of God without blemish . . . —Philippians 2:14-15 AMP

The people of Israel, whom God had miraculously delivered out of Egyptian bondage, were frequently offended with Moses and God because of their hardships. They constantly blamed them and complained about the circumstances they were experiencing.

What happened because they refused to deal with and let go of their offenses?

Check out Numbers 14:20-35; Psalm 95:8-11; and Hebrews 3:16-19.

What can you personally learn from this example and apply to *your* life?

STEP 7 - STAY THE COURSE

God, teach me lessons for living so I can stay the course. Give me insight so I can do what You tell me—my whole life one long, obedient response. —Psalm 119:33-34 MSG

God's Word says, "Many evils confront the [consistently] righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19 AMP). Our lives are held securely in His hands, and *no one* is able to snatch us away from Him (see John 10:28-29).

The only one who can take you out of God's will is *you*. How? One major way is through holding on to offense. The longer we choose not to forgive, the more resentful and bitter we become. The more bitter we are, the more vulnerable we become to the temptation to get even.

Carefully read Romans 12:17-20; 1 Peter 3:8-9; and Hebrews 10:30-31 and explain what God says about getting revenge.

If you take matters into your own hands, what will *not* happen? What will you hinder?

With His strength, how does God want you to respond to the people who hurt you?

“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.” —Victor Frankl¹

Joseph stayed the course! He chose not to harbor hatred or take revenge on his brothers, and he was rewarded. What’s God’s promise to *you* for staying the course? Read Galatians 6:9; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:6 and 10; and Mark 10:29-30. What’s the Holy Spirit showing you in these passages?

... Trust the Lord; and remember that other Christians all around the world are going through these sufferings too. After you have suffered a little while, our God, who is full of kindness through Christ, will give you His eternal glory. He personally will come and pick you up, and set you firmly in place, and make you stronger than ever. —1 Peter 5:9-10 TLB

STEP 8 - BELIEVE GOD IS PRESENT

God doesn't miss a thing—He's alert to good and evil alike. —Proverbs 15:3 MSG

When we go through dark, difficult times, it's encouraging to know that God is with us. He's promised to *never* leave us. Nothing in our lives comes as a surprise or shock to Him.

Many people, both Christian and non-Christian alike, ask questions about God. Here are three common ones. Carefully read the Scriptures for the answers and write what the Lord shows you.

Question: "Is God *involved* in my life?"

God ANSWERS: Psalm 37:23; Proverbs 16:9 and 20:24; and Hebrews 13:5-6.

Question: "Is God *aware* and does He *care* about what concerns me?"

God ANSWERS: Psalm 139:17-18; Isaiah 49:15-16; Matthew 6:25-34; and 1 Peter 5:7

Question: "Does God *love* me and have a *good plan* for my life?"

God ANSWERS: 1 John 3:1; Isaiah 54:10; Jeremiah 29:11; and Psalm 40:1-5

King David ruled Israel for forty years and lived about 1,000 years before Christ. Through many highs and lows of life, he was moved by the Holy Spirit to declare:

“O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I’m far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You go before me and follow me. You place Your hand of blessing on my head. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!

“You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in Your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.” —Psalm 139:1-6 and 13-16 NLT

Slowly reread this eye-opening passage. What aspects of your life is God aware of? How do these verses breathe new life and hope into you?

STEP 9 - COOPERATE WITH GOD’S REFINEMENT

... *God’s correction is always right and for our best good, that we may share His holiness.* —Hebrews 12:10 TLB

God, our heavenly Father, loves us beyond description and wants the absolute best for our lives. So like every good dad, He brings us correction when we need it. In Scripture, correction is sometimes described as troubles, trials, tribulation, hardships, and discipline. Regardless of the name, God has one primary goal in mind—to refine us.

Charles Stanley, seasoned pastor and insightful teacher of over forty-five years, has experienced his share of God's correction. *Adversity*, as he describes it . . .

“. . . is not simply a tool. It is God's most effective tool for the advancement of our spiritual lives. The circumstances and events that we see as setbacks are oftentimes the very things that launch us into periods of intense spiritual growth. Once we begin to understand this, and accept it as a spiritual fact of life, adversity becomes easier to bear.”²

Are you enduring a difficult time in your life right now? It could be that God is correcting your course to ensure you reach the destination He's planned. Take a moment to describe the season of life you're in.

One question often plagues us when we suffer: “Did I do something wrong to deserve this?” Keep in mind Jesus suffered, but *never* sinned. Read and ponder the description of His rejection and suffering in Isaiah 53:2-5. What reason(s) for suffering is God showing you from His example?

Also check out Joseph's response to his brothers after he had suffered in slavery and imprisonment (see Genesis 45:4-8).

What is God's *purpose* in discipline, and what *blessings* can you expect when you surrender to it? Carefully read **Hebrews 12:5-11** and **1 Peter 1:6-7** and write what the Holy Spirit shows you.

Consider also Zechariah 13:9 and Malachi 3:1-3.

. . . Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever. —1 Timothy 4:7-8 MSG

STEP 10 - HOLD TIGHTLY TO YOUR DREAM

Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep His promise.
—Hebrews 10:23 NLT

Joseph had a dream, but it took over twenty years for it to become a reality. In the middle of all his struggles and pain, he didn't know the end of his story any more than we know ours.

What's *your* dream? What ideas and desires has God planted in your heart? How can you harness your gifts and talents to bring the life and love of Jesus to your world? Take time to write it.

Then the Lord answered me, "Write the vision. Make it clear on tablets so that anyone can read it quickly. The vision will still happen at the appointed time. It hurries toward its goal. It won't be a lie. If it's delayed, wait for it. It will certainly happen. It won't be late." —Habakkuk 2:2-3 GW

Carefully read **Habakkuk 2:2-3** above, along with **Numbers 23:19** and **1 Kings 8:56**. What does God remind us of again and again? How do these promises encourage you?

David Jeremiah has served as a pastor, author, and teacher on radio and television. As a survivor of two bouts with cancer, he shares the candid details of his journey in his book *When Your Life Falls Apart*. Here's a bit of his insight on God's timing:

“The same God who has been there for you in the past is the God who is going to be there for you in the future. He will bring resolution in His own time, according to His own purposes. We become preoccupied with our circumstances; God is preoccupied with our *character*. He will allow the tough times for the higher good of our character until He is finished with the great work that is invisible to our earthly eyes.”³

Indeed, character is crucial in God's eyes. That's what was forming in Joseph through all the twists and turns of trouble he faced. How can we tell that he was truly *free* of offense when his dream finally came true? Carefully read how he treated his brothers when he revealed his true identity (Genesis 45:1-15) and after their father died (Genesis 50:15-21). What did he *not* do that he certainly could've done? What did he give his brothers that they didn't deserve? What does his example show you about your own character?

TAKE ACTION

Examine the image below and write down what you see (don't go to the next page yet).⁴



You could have seen an old lady or a young lady, depending on what stood out to you first. *That is the power of perspective.* (Keep looking at the picture until you see both.)

In this lesson, we shared a lot about Joseph. He was sold as a slave—by his brothers nonetheless!—, accused of rape by his boss, and spent over a decade in jail. Yet when looking back on all that took place, Joseph concluded:

But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. —Genesis 50:20-21

Joseph had learned this profound truth: Absolutely no man, no woman, no child or devil can get you out of the will of God. There is only one person who can get you out of the will of God—*you!*

God promises to work all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purposes—that promise includes the pains, disappointments, and betrayals of your past. Yes, God can even give them a beautiful part in your story. The question is, will you allow God to redeem and restore what has been stolen from you? Or will you make yourself lord of your pain?

Today, we challenge you to ask God to reveal the redemptive threads in your pain and disappointment. Ask Him for eyes to see your journey as He sees it. Write down what God reveals to you.

God is not cruel. He will restore and redeem anything that was taken or compromised. But you have to trust in the timing of His judgment and the power of His grace.

FINAL THOUGHTS . . .

Mistreatment always brings us to a crossroads. One trail is paved with blaming and complaining. The other is marked by trusting God and leaving offenses in His hands. When we choose to let go and believe God has our back, we grow better—not bitter—and stay on the path of our divine destiny.

Use this fork in the road to consider what offenses you've encountered on the way here. Which route would you have taken *before* you began this study? How about now? Take this moment and ask God to open your eyes to the truth about your past and present struggles. Pour your heart out on paper, capturing the insight He gives you.

- (1) Quotes by *Victor Frankl* (http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/v/viktor_e_frankl.html, accessed 10/16/16).
(2) Quotes on *Adversity* by *Charles Stanley* (www.christianquotes.info/images/charles-stanley-quote-adversity/, accessed 10/20/16). (3) David Jeremiah, *When Your World Falls Apart* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000) pp. 101-102. (4) <http://www.grand-illusions.com/opticalillusions/woman/>, accessed 3/26/17).

THE BAIT OF SATAN: LESSON 3

My Father, My Father!

LESSON HIGHLIGHTS

The most difficult offenses we face are often not with our peers but with people in authority over us. David, who worked under King Saul, is a prime example.

There will be times when God puts us in a place where we have evidence and opportunity to expose the sin of a leader who has wronged us. He usually does this to test our hearts—to see if we'll trust Him and leave judgment in His hands.

To be a man or woman after God's own heart, we must refuse to take revenge on those who've mistreated us. As we trust that He can and will make the right decision, we'll leave vengeance to Him.

While all authority is from God, not all authority is godly. Many times we have to see beyond the leader's *behavior* and honor their God-given *position*.

David's deep sorrow over Saul's death displayed and confirmed the love of God at work in and through his life. As we keep ourselves in the love of God, we can avoid being offended, even with the harshest of leaders.

STEPS TO FREEDOM

STEP 11 - KNOW YOUR LEADERS

... *Get to know those who labor among you [recognize them for what they are, acknowledge and*

appreciate and respect them all]—*your leaders who are over you in the Lord and those who warn and kindly reprove and exhort you.* —1 Thessalonians 5:12 AMP

From the beginning to the end of our lives, we will always have people in authority over us. God has handpicked leaders to be a part of shaping us into the image of Jesus. Many times our deepest offenses are with these leaders.

Stop and think—who have you worked under that was difficult to serve because of their attitudes, actions, or words? What made it hard for you to submit to their leadership?

David learned many examples of what *not* to do as a result of Saul’s harshness. What have you learned *not* to do as a result of being mistreated and overlooked by those in authority?

Name a few people God has placed in your life who serve (or have served) as a spiritual *father* or *mother*. How have they influenced you? What do you appreciate most about them?

Are you struggling with offense toward one of these leaders? If so, who and why? Briefly explain.

What practical steps do you feel God is asking you to take to make things right?

“You must not lose confidence in God because you lost confidence in your pastor. If our confidence in God had to depend upon our confidence in any human person, we would be on shifting sand.”
—Francis A. Schaeffer¹

STEP 12 - FEAR THE LORD

Fear of the Lord leads to life, bringing security and protection from harm. —Proverbs 19:23 NLT

Saul and David both served as kings. Neither was perfect, but there was one characteristic David had that Saul did not—the *fear of the Lord*. It’s what kept David from avenging himself by killing Saul when he had the opportunity. It is what positions us to depart from evil: “. . . by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil” (Proverbs 16:6).

What is the fear of the Lord? God gives us some insights in Deuteronomy 10:12-13 and Psalm 34:11-14 (see also 1 Peter 3:8-12). Ponder these passages and write down what He shows you.

David had the chance to kill Saul more than once, but he didn’t. Check out 1 Samuel 24:1-15 and 26:7-11. What do these examples say to you about God? About David? About yourself?

Are *you* living in the fear of the Lord? Or has the fear of people kept you from obeying Him?
How can you tell?

God gives us many promises for living in the fear of the Lord. Carefully read these verses and identify the blessings that are yours:

Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 1:7

Proverbs 9:10-11 and 10:27

Psalm 112:1-3 and 128:1-4

Psalms 34:9-10; Proverbs 14:26-27, 16:6, and 19:23

The fear of the Lord is not to be afraid of God; it's to be terrified to be away from Him.

STEP 13 - CULTIVATE GODLY CHARACTER

May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation—the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to God. —Philippians 1:11 NLT

David was a man after God's own heart. While he was overlooked by his father and looked down upon by some of his brothers, he had an inner strength and character that God was drawn to.

What was Saul like when God *first* called him to be king? How did he see himself? How is he described in Scripture? Carefully read 1 Samuel 9:2, 17-21, and 10:20-24 to find the answers.

According to 1 Samuel 13:1-15 and 15:1-26, what did Saul do that caused God to reject him as king and select David instead? What was he most concerned with?

Henry Blackaby has served as a pastor, church planter, and author for over four decades,

passionately helping people experience God. In his book *Chosen to be God's Prophet*, he states:

“There are no substitutes for obedience Obedience to God is the key to life! It is the key to the kingdom of God (see Matthew 7:21-24). Obedience is like building your house (life) on a rock. It will not be shaken or moved when the storms of life come (see Luke 6:46-49).”²

Is there an area in your life where you know you're *not* obeying God? If so, what is it? What can you learn from Saul's example and personally apply in your life?

God has *good* plans for you! But to live them out, His character has to be developed in you. Carefully read these verses and identify *your part* and *God's part* in the transformation process.

Romans 12:1-2 – Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13 – Thessalonians 5:23-24 – James 1:21-25 – 2 Timothy 3:16-17

My Part

God's Part

STEP 14 - HONOR THOSE IN AUTHORITY

Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. —1 Peter 2:17

According to Scripture, *all* authority is established by God. “For promotion and power come from nowhere on earth, but only from God. He promotes one and deposes another” (Psalm 75:7 TLB). Yet, while all authority is from God, not all authority is godly. Many times we have to see beyond the person’s *behavior* and honor their God-given position.

Carefully read Romans 13:1-7. What insights about leadership is God showing you in this passage? How does it challenge you?

Are there any people in authority in your life that you were *convinced* were not established by God? If so, who? Why did you feel this way? How did you treat them in response?

Under what circumstance are we *not* to obey human authority? Even in this situation, what should be our attitude?

Check out Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s response to King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3:8-18.

God tells us to *honor* our leaders—regardless of their behavior. Take time to read these passages. Name a few practical ways to honor authority. Why does God ask us to do this?

Exodus 22:28 and Ecclesiastes 10:20

1 Timothy 2:1-4

Titus 3:1-2 and 1 Peter 2:13-20

STEP 15 - KEEP YOURSELF IN GOD'S LOVE

Guard and keep yourselves in the love of God . . . —Jude 1:21 AMP

Another way to avoid being offended with those in authority is to live in the love of God. His love gives us strength! It casts out all fear, empowers us to forgive, and enables us to release and bless those who've mistreated us.

According to **Romans 5:8** and **1 John 4:9-10**, how does God *demonstrate* His love for us?

Also consider Ephesians 2:4-5.

“The springs of love are in God, not in us. It is absurd to look for the love of God in our hearts naturally; it is only there when it has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” —Oswald Chambers³

God’s love also enables us to see people the way He sees them and not to judge based on outward appearances or behavior. Take time to contemplate God’s detailed description of love in **1 Corinthians 13:4-8**. What is He showing you in this passage about His love *for you* and His love *in you* for others?

Consider reading this passage in the Amplified Bible.

Romans 5:5 tells us that “. . . God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us” (AMP). He wants His love to grow in us more and more. In your own words, describe what **1 John 4:12** and **16-17** says about how God’s love matures in us.

Consider David’s reaction when he heard of Saul’s death. How does his response challenge you to walk in God’s love and change your response toward the leadership that has mistreated you?

Out of His glorious, unlimited resources He will give you the mighty inner strengthening of His Holy Spirit. And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts, living within you as you trust in Him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love; and may you be able to feel and understand, as all God's children should, how long, how wide, how deep, and how high His love really is; and to experience this love for yourselves —Ephesians 3:16-19 TLB

TAKE ACTION

Instead of focusing on their shortcomings, take some time to identify positive and encouraging things about this person. Thank them for the good that they do. Highlight their strengths and accomplishments. Applaud the character traits that you admire about them.

This action is designed to help you overcome criticalness of your leaders. Hopefully, your thoughts will begin to shift from the negatives things your leader has done to the positive things they do or could do. This will help keep your heart clean and pure toward your leader.

Once you've finished the card, seal it in an envelope and either send it to your leader or leave it in a place where they will find it. Consider whether it would be best for you to remain anonymous.

FINAL THOUGHTS . . .

All of us will have opportunities to be offended with and expose leaders who've hurt us and made mistakes. God allows this test—to see if we'll take matters into our own hands or trust Him to bring vengeance.

Seize this opportunity to identify the leaders in your life who've treated you like Saul treated David—attacking and falsely accusing you at every turn. How have you thought and spoken of them? What changes do you feel God is asking you to make in your thoughts, words, and attitudes? Pour your heart out on paper, capturing the insight He gives you.

(1) Quotes by *Francis A. Schaeffer* (http://www.azquotes.com/author/13063-Francis_Schaeffer/tag/god, accessed 10/27/16).

(2) Henry Blackaby, *Chosen to be God's Prophet* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003) pp. 167, 178. (3) Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 1997) p. 121.

THE BAIT OF SATAN: LESSON 4

How to Handle Unfair Treatment

LESSON HIGHLIGHTS

God's instruction to not avenge ourselves is a command, not a suggestion. We can trust Him to make things right in His time and His way. This confidence is a righteous thing in His eyes.

When we're falsely accused, God Himself will defend us if we let Him. He's the greatest Attorney the universe has ever known—and He's never lost a case.

We are called to submit to all our leaders, whether they're good and gentle or harsh and unreasonable. To fulfill this calling, we need Christ's supernatural strength living in and through us.

God's way for us to deal with a leader's unjust treatment is to humble ourselves and bless them. By praying a blessing on them, we will receive a blessing.

What we plant, we will harvest. As we continue to plant seeds of love, mercy, peace, and forgiveness, we'll eventually reap a harvest of the same. Good seed produces a good harvest.

STEPS TO FREEDOM

STEP 16 - BE CONFIDENT IN GOD'S ABILITY

In God have I put my trust and confident reliance; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? —

Psalm 56:11 AMP

When we're mistreated, we're tempted many times to get even. Again and again God reminds us in His Word that He will repay, as long as we don't take matters into our own hands.

Carefully read **Romans 12:17-19**; **Proverbs 20:22**; **24:19-20, 29**; and **Deuteronomy 32:35-36**. What promise(s) does God make to us, His people? What conditions does He ask us to meet?

Hannah Whitall Smith was an author and lay speaker from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s. Having lived through the turbulence of the Civil War and having mourned the loss of four of her seven children, she was no stranger to hard times. She stated:

“We are not to avenge ourselves, because our Father has charged Himself with our defense. We are not to fear, for the Lord is on our side. No one can be against us, because He is for us. . . . No man or company of men, no power in earth or heaven, can touch that soul which is abiding in Christ, without first passing through Him, and receiving the seal of His permission. If God is for us, it matters not who may be against us.”¹

Take a few minutes to contemplate the *supreme strength* of God in these Scriptures. As you read through them, identify the facets of His power and share how they encourage you to trust Him.

2 Samuel 22:3; **Psalm 28:6-8**; and **Proverbs 30:5**

Daniel 6:26-27; **2 Chronicles 20:6**; **Isaiah 43:13**; and **Psalm 135:5-13**

Isaiah 40:10-12 and 25-31; Psalm 95:3-5; and Jeremiah 32:17

Also consider God's response to Job in Job 38.

These passages encourage me to trust God by . . .

The Lord God is my Strength, my personal bravery, and my invincible army; He makes my feet like hinds' feet and will make me to walk [not to stand still in terror, but to walk] and make [spiritual] progress upon my high places [of trouble, suffering, or responsibility]! —Habakkuk 3:19 AMP

STEP 17 - LET GOD BE YOUR DEFENDER

With dread deeds and awesome power You will defend us from our enemies, O God who saves us. You are the only hope of all mankind throughout the world and far away upon the sea. —Psalm 65:5 TLB

God is our Defender! He loves us more than we can ever comprehend and wants us to trust Him to meet every need, especially His unmatched ability to be our Advocate.

A.W. Tozer strengthened countless hungry souls and pierced hearts with his dynamic insights in the early twentieth century. In his classic book *Born after Midnight*, he urges:

“It is vitally important that we move up into the Spirit and cease to defend ourselves. I have never met a victorious Christian who was on the defensive, but I have met, I cannot tell how many jumpy, skittish and thoroughly unhappy Christians who were burning up their energies in a vain endeavor to protect themselves. . . . My earnest advice to all such nervous souls is to turn everything over to God and relax. A real Christian need not defend his possession nor his position. God will take care of both.”²

Has your job ever been in jeopardy because you stood for truth and did the right thing? Have you been harshly treated for refusing to compromise or sin? If so, explain the situation.

Has God ever asked you to go and apologize to a harsh leader? If yes, who was it? Have you done it? If you have, what was the leader’s response? How did you feel afterward?

If you haven’t apologized, what’s holding you back? What is God saying to you in this chapter?

Be careful not to jump to conclusions before the Lord returns as to whether someone is a good servant or not. When the Lord comes, He will turn on the light so that everyone can see exactly what each one of us is really like, deep down in our hearts. Then everyone will know why we have been doing the Lord’s work. At that time God will give to each one whatever praise is coming to him. —1 Corinthians 4:5

TLB

When we're falsely accused and treated unfairly, our natural response is often to begin judging. Carefully read Jesus's words of warning in **Matthew 7:1-5** and **Luke 6:37-42**. What can we expect to happen if we judge? What do we need to be careful of? What else is God showing you?

Also consider God's caution signs in Romans 14:10-13 and James 4:11-12.

STEP 18 - SUBMIT TO YOUR LEADERS

Servants [employees, students, team members, etc.], *be submissive to your masters* [employers, teachers, managers, supervisors, etc.] *with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.* —1 Peter 2:18 [Words in brackets added for clarity and emphasis.]

God wants us to submit to those in authority over us. Even Jesus Himself, who was fully God, submitted to the will of the Father by giving His life so that we could have new life in Him.

In your own words and in practical terms, describe what *submitting* to people in authority may look like. What might *resisting* authority look like?

Consider Ephesians 4:1-7, 23-32 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12-15.

Imagine *you* are the one in charge at work, church, etc. How would you want people to submit to and honor you as their leader? Are you doing these things? If not, why?

By definition, a *harsh* leader is one who is “crooked, cruel, perverse, dishonest, unjust, and tyrannical.” Submitting to a leader like this will take more than willpower. It takes Christ’s power—the supernatural strength of His Spirit. Take time to pray through these passages:

He gives power to the faint and weary, and to him who has no might He increases strength [causing it to multiply and making it to abound]. —Isaiah 40:29 AMP

I have strength for all things in Christ Who empowers me [I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him Who infuses inner strength into me; I am self-sufficient in Christ’s sufficiency]. —Philippians 4:13 AMP

He gives us more and more grace (power of the Holy Spirit, to meet this evil tendency and all others fully). That is why He says, God sets Himself against the proud and haughty, but gives grace [continually] to the lowly (those who are humble enough to receive it). —James 4:6 AMP

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do His work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve Him. —1 Timothy 1:12 NLT

What is God showing you in these verses about the strength He’s made available to you?

Also consider Psalm 28:8, 46:1-2, and 73:25-26.

How do you receive His strength? Read **John 14:13-14; 15:7;** and **1 John 5:14-15** for the answer.

STEP 19 - BLESS YOUR ENEMIES

“But I say to all of you who will listen to me: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who treat you badly.”—Luke 6:27-28 Phillips

There are several steps in the forgiveness process. The first is *recognizing and admitting* to God and yourself that you’ve been hurt. *Asking Him to forgive you* for holding on to offense and unforgiveness toward the person is the next step, which is followed by *releasing the offender* into God’s hands. The crucial step that we often forget or omit is to *pray for and bless our enemy*.

Our natural reaction when we’re badly treated is to pay back insult for insult, hurt for hurt. The *supernatural* response—the one we’re *called* to—is different. Read **1 Peter 3:8-9** and explain it.

What has God promised us in return for obeying this calling? What are we to guard against? [Hint: Our choice to do this confirms we fear God (see **1 Peter 3:10-12** and **Psalm 34:11-15**)].

God is clear in **Proverbs 25:21-22** and **Romans 12:14, 17-21** about how He wants us to treat to our enemies. What is He saying in these verses, and what new insights is He showing you?

In what practical ways is God encouraging you to fulfill this calling with your leaders?

Blessed are you when people hate you, avoid you, insult you, and slander you because you are committed to the Son of Man (GW). When that happens, rejoice! Yes, leap for joy! For you will have a great reward awaiting you in heaven. And you will be in good company—the ancient prophets were treated that way too! —Luke 6:22-23 TLB

It's crucial to keep in mind who the *real* enemy is. **Ephesians 6:12** and **1 Peter 5:8-9** identify them. How do these truths help you see your situation in a different light and temper your response?

STEP 20 - PLANT GOOD SEED

“Plant the good seeds of righteousness, and you will reap a crop of My love; plow the hard ground of your hearts, for now is the time to seek the Lord, that He may come and shower salvation upon you.” —Hosea 10:12 TLB

Seeds are amazing! They produce, after their kind, an entirely mature plant from a tiny kernel. Just like physical seeds, there are invisible, intangible seeds we're planting all the time. Our attitudes, actions, and words are all seeds we sow into the souls of others that will produce fruit—either good or bad.

One of the most important principles to understand about seeds is in **Galatians 6:7-8**. Reflect on this passage and in your own words, describe the Law of Sowing and Reaping as it relates to

spiritual issues and life in general.

The Golden Rule was given to us by Jesus in **Matthew 7:12** and **Luke 6:31**. Take a moment to write out this treasured truth. What connection can you see between it and the Law of Sowing and Reaping?

And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness. —James 3:18 NLT

Stop and think: *What kinds of seeds am I sowing? What attitudes, actions, and words am I planting in others—especially my family, closest friends, and most frustrating enemies?*

In light of your previous answer, what kind of harvest can you expect? Do you need to pray for a “crop failure”? What changes do you feel God is asking you to make in your planting?

Offense is also a seed. If nurtured, it puts down *roots* of bitterness in our hearts and begins to grow. Carefully read **Hebrews 12:14-15** and **James 3:14-16**. Why is bitterness so dangerous? What can happen if it's left unchecked? What steps can you take to stop it from growing in you?

TAKE ACTION

Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will grant you his blessing. —1 Peter 3:9
NLT

We challenge you to invest some effort into figuring out what your offender(s) likes. Find out what their favorite restaurant or coffee shop is. Discover which activities they enjoy or stores they shop at. Once you've got your information, purchase a gift card for them. You can give it to them in person or leave it where they will find it. Consider whether it would be best for you to remain anonymous.

Remember, this action is all about being a blessing, regardless of whether the person deserves it or not. You don't have to spend a lot of money either.

Yes, you could make a strong case for why this person doesn't deserve your kindness. And, frankly, you'd probably win the case. But you would miss an opportunity to watch God do what only He can do.

FINAL THOUGHTS . . .

God has made it extremely clear that the only right path to take when we've been attacked is to wait for Him to avenge us. Unfair treatment is an opportunity to pay back with a blessing, knowing that it's our calling which enables us to inherit a blessing.

At this point in the study, what's God shining His searchlight on? What areas of your character is He renovating? How's He setting you up to get blessed if you handle things right? Take time now and ask God to open your eyes to the truth about Him, your situations, and yourself. Pour your heart out on paper, capturing the insight He gives you.

(1) Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian's Secret to a Happy Life* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos, 1998) pp. 120, 122. (2) A.W. Tozer, *Born after Midnight* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1989) pp. 98-99.

THE BAIT OF SATAN: LESSON 5

Escaping the Trap

LESSON HIGHLIGHTS

A person who cannot forgive is one who has forgotten what they've been forgiven of. We've each been forgiven an unpayable debt and rescued from eternal punishment by the mercy of God.

In order to experience the grandness of God's forgiveness, we have to extend forgiveness to others. He reminds us of this again and again in His Word.

No matter how we categorize it, sin is sin. This applies to unforgiveness too—it is sin, not just a *weakness*. Guarding ourselves from this trap is vital.

Whenever we encounter offense, we'll come out of it changed; what we do with it will determine our future. Our options are either bitter or better—there's no in between.

You *do* have the ability to forgive any offense because the love of God has been poured into your heart. As you continue to receive His forgiveness, know that you can extend that same forgiveness and grace to others.

STEPS TO FREEDOM

STEP 21 - REMEMBER THE PRICE OF FORGIVENESS

For God sent Christ Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to end all God's anger against us. He used Christ's blood and our faith as the means of saving us from His wrath . . . —Romans 3:25 TLB

To *forgive* means “to send forth, send away; to completely cancel debts or sins.” To receive forgiveness “indicates the remission—the release or dismissal—of sin and the punishment due to the sinful conduct; the deliverance of the sinner from the divine penalty.”¹

How do we receive forgiveness for things we’ve done wrong? Can we be sure we’re forgiven?

Check out 1 John 1:8-9 and 2:1-2; 1 Peter 2:24; Titus 3:3-7; Psalm 103:8-12; and Isaiah 43:25.

Look back over your life. Can you remember any *habits* or *ways of thinking* you’re no longer chained to—things God has forgiven and set you free from? What are they?

“Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hatred. It is a power that breaks the chains of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness.” —Corrie Ten Boom²

What was the *cost* of our forgiveness? Carefully read **Ephesians 1:6-8**; **1 Peter 1:18-22**; and **Revelation 1:5** for the answer.

How does remembering your past mistakes and the price paid for your forgiveness help you let go of offenses more willingly?

Jesus gave His life to save us from what we deserved—separation from God forever. While the subject isn't popular, it's one God talks about extensively. What is hell like? Check out these verses:

Matthew 8:12, 13:42, 13:50, 22:13; 25:30; 25:41, and 25:46 – Mark 9:44 – Luke 16:23-24 – 2 Thessalonians 1:9 – Jude 6 and 13 – Revelation 14:10-11 and 20:10

How do these passages give you a greater sense of gratitude for what Jesus did? How do they motivate you to pray and help others?

STEP 22 - FORGIVE AND YOU'LL BE FORGIVEN

... Freely you have received, freely give. —Matthew 10:8

God says that we've all been contaminated by sin and fallen short of His perfect standard (see Isaiah 64:6 and Romans 3:23). Thankfully, He's ready and willing to forgive us of every sin, every time we come to Him. There's only one condition to His forgiveness.

Take time to think on these verses about *receiving* and *giving* forgiveness.

For if you forgive people their trespasses [their reckless and willful sins, leaving them, letting them go, and giving up resentment], your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses [their reckless and willful sins, leaving them, letting them go, and giving up resentment], neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses. —Matthew 6:14-15 AMP

“And when you assume the posture of prayer, remember that it’s not all *asking*. If you have anything against someone, *forgive*—only then will your heavenly Father be inclined to also wipe your slate clean of sins.” —Mark 11:24-25 MSG

“. . . For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” —Luke 6:35-37

Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you. —Ephesians 4:32 MSG

What is God speaking to you about forgiveness and the consequences of holding on to offense?

If God doesn’t forgive us, our sins remain on us—a dangerous condition to be in. What are the side effects of this condition? Read Isaiah 59:1-3 and Psalm 32:3-7 and explain what happens.

“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those that sin against us.” There is no slightest suggestion that we are offered forgiveness on any other terms. It is made perfectly clear that if we do not forgive we shall not be

forgiven. There are no two ways about it.” —C.S. Lewis³

Have you forgiven *yourself*? God wants you to—no matter what your past might be. Write down anything you’ve done that’s been hard to let go of and give it to Him. Ask for and receive His forgiveness, trust Him, and go on.

STEP 23 - GUARD YOUR MOUTH

Words kill, words give life; they’re either poison or fruit—you choose. —Proverbs 18:21 MSG

There are seven things that God says He *hates* in Proverbs 6:16-19. Interestingly, three of them involve one of our most underrated forces: our words. While many Christians today consider adultery and murder as major issues, they see things like gossip and slander as minor—even justifiable. To break free and stay free of offense, we must learn to carefully steward our words.

Sin is *sin*—no matter how we classify it. What kinds of sin have been easier for you to dismiss as simply a *weakness*? Which ones have you classified as *bigger* or *worse*? Why is this?

When someone’s flaws are painfully obvious, it’s often difficult to keep quiet. Thank God His love covers all our sin (see 1 Peter 4:8)! Carefully read these verses and explain the value in refusing to verbally spotlight other people’s faults. What else is God speaking to you?

Proverbs 10:18-21, 17:27-28, and 26:20

Ephesians 4:29-30; Titus 3:1-2; James 4:11-12; and 1 Peter 2:1-3

Psalm 34:12-14 and Proverbs 13:3, 17:9, and 21:23

Reflect on Psalm 141:1-4 and make it a prayer from your heart to God.

Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.
—Proverbs 11:13 ESV

Guarding our mouth against destructive speech is a key part of forgiveness. What would it look like to begin covering offenses instead of highlighting them? How might your life and relationships improve?

Take another look at today's verse. How does knowing the power of your words encourage you to

think twice before letting whatever comes to mind pop out of your mouth?

“Words are seeds. What we speak, we sow, and what we sow, we reap! . . . Keep yourself happy by being careful about what comes out of your mouth.” —Joyce Meyer⁴

STEP 24 - TAKE THE HIGH ROAD

Good sense makes a man restrain his anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression or an offense.
—Proverbs 19:11 AMP

When someone offends us, we will take one of two roads: the low road, which leads to pain and bitterness, or the high road, which leads to a better, healthier life. For over twenty-five years, family physician and nutritionist Don Colbert, M.D. has personally observed this. He states:

*“I consider *bitterness, resentment* and *unforgiveness* to be among the *deadliest* emotions a person can have. They can actually prevent the body from releasing toxic material—generally creating an acidic condition in the tissues. This buildup of toxins in the system can eventually lead to *disease*.”⁵*

Have you ever been angry with someone for a long time? If so, how did it eventually affect you (*physically, mentally, and emotionally*)? What effects did it have on your relationship with God?

Michal, David’s wife, was offended and bitter with him over the way he worshipped God when the Ark of the Lord came back to Israel. Read the story in 2 Samuel 6:12-23. What happened to

Michal as a result of bitterness? What does this say to you personally?

Consider also Cain and what happened to him when he became offended and bitter with Abel and God (see Genesis 4:1-16).

The *high road* is the one of forgiveness. Its effects are life-giving. Dr. Colbert confirms this:

“Forgiveness releases layers of hurt and heals the raw, jagged edges of emotional pain. It enables a person to release buried anger, resentment, bitterness, shame, grief, regret, guilt, hate, and other *toxic* emotions that hide deep in the soul, making a person ill—both emotionally and physically.”⁶

The high road is paved with kindness, compassion, and mercy—it’s the path God takes when dealing with us (see Lamentations 3:22-23). Carefully read **Micah 6:8**; **Matthew 5:7**; **James 2:13**; **Luke 6:35-38**; and **Proverbs 3:1-4**. What wisdom is God showing you?

His compassion never ends. It is only the Lord’s mercies that have kept us from complete destruction. Great is His faithfulness; His loving-kindness begins afresh each day. —Lamentations 3:22-23 TLB

STEP 25 - GET ROOTED AND GROW IN GRACE

Grow in grace (undeserved favor, spiritual strength) and recognition and knowledge and understanding of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (the Messiah) . . . —2 Peter 3:18 AMP

Grace. It is God’s undeserved favor and power to do what we could never do on our own. It’s His

ability to forgive the unforgivable offenses of others and escape the trap of offense. All of us have received God's grace through faith in Jesus, and we *grow* in grace by abiding in Him.

Take a few moments to reflect on these verses.

And now just as you trusted Christ to save you, trust Him, too, for each day's problems; live in vital union with Him. Let your roots grow down into Him and draw up nourishment from Him. See that you go on growing in the Lord, and become strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with joy and thanksgiving for all He has done. —Colossians 2:6-7 TLB

Out of His glorious, unlimited resources He will give you the mighty inner strengthening of His Holy Spirit. And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts, living within you as you trust in Him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love; and may you be able to feel and understand, as all God's children should, how long, how wide, how deep, and how high His love really is; and to experience this love for yourselves, though it is so great that you will never see the end of it or fully know or understand it. And so at last you will be filled up with God Himself. —Ephesians 3:16-19 TLB

What is God revealing to you about *Himself* and about *you* in these passages? What practical steps can you take to experience more quality time with Him and deepen your roots?

Galatians 5:22-23 reveals nine fruits of God's character that grow in us as we live in Him. Which of these fruits are most evident in your life? Which ones need more development?

According to **Hebrews 12:14-15**, **Galatians 2:19-21**, and **2 Corinthians 6:1-2**, we can *miss* or *fall short* of God's grace. In your own words, what does this mean? How does it happen and how can it be avoided?

But He gives us more and more grace (power of the Holy Spirit, to meet this evil tendency and all others fully). That is why He says, God sets Himself against the proud and haughty, but gives grace [continually] to the lowly (those who are humble enough to receive it). —James 4:6 AMP

TAKE ACTION

Taking the high road is never easy. It's a way of life that requires intentionality. For that reason, we challenge you to diligently describe what taking the high road looks like for you. Identify some of the hardships that you'll need to navigate. Make note of what could shipwreck your efforts to do this God's way.

The idea is for you to create values and a framework that will protect your desired course of action. Continue to revisit your description. Add new best practices as you identify things to do or things not to do. Eventually, taking the high road will become second nature, and you'll rise above the trap of offense.

FINAL THOUGHTS . . .

Refusing to forgive means we've forgotten the unpayable debt Jesus forgave us. This blocks His forgiveness from flowing into our lives and locks us in a state of misery. The good news is there's a way out! In Christ, you have the *power* and *desire* to forgive.

Reflect for a moment on the biggest battles you've fought with unforgiveness. Are you ready to win? Get quiet with God. Ask Him to give you the strength you need to release any grudges

you've been holding. Pour your heart out on paper, capturing the insight He gives you.

(1) Adapted from *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, W.E. Vine (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1996). (2) Corrie Ten Boom. AZQuotes.com, (Wind and Fly LTD, 2016. www.azquotes.com/quote/450732, accessed 11/15/16). (3) C.S. Lewis, *The Joyful Christian* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1977) p. 142. (4) Joyce Meyer, *Enjoying Where You Are on The Way to Where You Are Going* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, Inc., 1996) pp. 203, 206. (5) *The Cleansing Power of Forgiveness*, Don Colbert, M.D. (*Enjoying Everyday Life magazine*, May 2006, Joyce Meyer Ministries, Inc., Fenton, MO) pp. 29-30. (6) Ibid.

THE BAIT OF SATAN: LESSON 6

Reconciliation

LESSON HIGHLIGHTS

Pride is a major obstacle to finding freedom from offense. Admitting when we're offended is not a weakness. It is an act of humility that positions us to be rescued from the enemy's trap and restored to a healthy life.

While some offenses are less impactful and can be dealt with quickly, others wound us deeply. Wounds don't heal overnight and if they're not properly treated, they never heal. The key to our recovery and protection from further injury is exercising our spirit.

There are certain signs that indicate we've taken the bait and fallen into the trap of offense. There are also signs that confirm we're being healed from its effects. We need to be wise enough to recognize these in our lives and the lives of others.

God wants us to be reconciled to Him and to our brothers and sisters in Christ. He's given us the gift of reconciliation to reconnect these relationships. Humble repentance is the key to unlock this restoration.

To truly walk in agreement with God, we have to surrender our right to be offended. As much as possible, our aim should be to live at peace with everyone.

STEPS TO FREEDOM

STEP 26 - DRESS YOURSELF IN HUMILITY

... *And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* —1 Peter 5:5 NLT

Pride is a major obstacle to admitting we're offended. It says things like, "I'm tough. I can make it through this. I'm not hurt. I don't need them anyway." *Pride* keeps us focused and relying on our own strength to handle painful situations instead of trusting in and leaning on God.

According to **Proverbs 11:2; 16:5, 18-19; 21:4;** and **1 Peter 5:5**, what does God think of pride? How does He see and respond to us when we're prideful?

If we're full of pride, our confidence is in something other than God. Be honest with yourself: What is your confidence in?

What does God say about trusting in our own ability? Check out **John 6:63; Romans 7:18; Philippians 3:3;** and **John 15:4-5.**

Humility is the antidote for pride. How does God feel about it, and how will He bless us when we stay humble? Read **Proverbs 15:33 and 22:4; James 4:6-10; Matthew 18:2-4 and 23:11-12;** and **Psalms 37:11 and 149:4,** and write what the Lord shows you about this amazing, God-honoring quality.

“Believer, study the humility of Jesus! This is the secret, the hidden root of your redemption. Sink down into it deeper day by day. Believe with your whole heart that this Christ, whom God has given you, even as His divine humility accomplished the work for you, will enter in to dwell and work within you too . . . It is only by the indwelling of Christ in His divine humility that we become truly humble.” —Andrew Murray¹

Where does humility come from? Spending time with Jesus and allowing Him to impart His Spirit into our lives moment by moment. Contemplate the examples in Matthew 11:28-30; John 13:1-17; and Philippians 2:1-8, then write what God speaks to you.

STEP 27 - EXERCISE YOUR SOUL AND SPIRIT

. . . I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward God, and toward men.—Acts 24:16 KJV

Jesus said in Luke 17:1 that it is impossible for offenses not to come. Therefore, if we’re going to live free of offense, it’s going to take effort—effort Paul compares to *exercise*. While few like to talk about exercise, much less do it, it has the power to keep us healthy—body, soul, and spirit.

All exercise provides specific benefits, whether it’s traditional sports, aerobics, swimming, or weight training. What rewards and advantages have you gained from exercise?

What kind of benefits do you think come from exercising spiritually to steer clear of the trap of offense?

EXERCISE: Exertion made for the sake of *training* or physical fitness [or spiritual fitness]; a task or problem done or practiced to develop skill.² The Greek work for *exercise* in Acts 24:16 is *askeo*—a word which generally signifies “to take pains, endeavor, exercise by training or discipline.”³ [Words in brackets added for clarity; italics added for emphasis.]

Just as there are certain ways to build strength physically, there are specific “exercises” we can do to build spiritual strength. Think for a minute: What activities build your faith? What breaks down barriers between you and God and fills you with His love, joy, peace, and hope? What difference do you feel overall when these happen regularly?

Consider these time-tested strength builders: Isaiah 40:29-31; Psalm 27:13-14; John 15:1-8; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Psalm 119:165; Proverbs 27:17; Hebrews 10:24-25; Exodus 15:1-2; Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Corinthians 14:4; and Jude 1:20.

Now that you know what brings you close to God and strengthens you, how can you begin to make room for these practices in your schedule? What may need to change in your life to allow your faith to grow? Take a moment with Jesus and ask Him to show you. Together, write out a plan to create more opportunities to get closer.

Exercise daily in God—no spiritual flabbiness, please! Workouts in the gymnasium are useful, but a disciplined life in God is far more so, making you fit both today and forever. You can count on this
—1 Timothy 4:7-9 MSG

STEP 28 - CHECK YOUR VITAL SIGNS

Examine and test and evaluate your own selves to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it —2 Corinthians 13:5 AMP

If you're on the road to recovery from the effects of offense, there will be signs to confirm it. One of the greatest indicators that you're being healed is greater health in your relationship with God. There is no true healing apart from abiding in Him.

Seasoned author, counselor, and teacher John Eldredge states:

“There are no formulas with God. The way in which God heals our wound is a deeply personal process. He is a person and He insists on working personally. For some, it comes in a moment of divine touch. For others, it takes place over time and through the help of another, maybe several others. . . . Healing never happens outside of intimacy with Christ. The healing of our wound flows out of our union with Him.”⁴

How would you describe your relationship with God? Is it thriving, barely surviving, or somewhere in between? How does your relationship now compare with what it was a year or two ago? When was the last time you truly felt God's presence? What do your answers say to you?

On a scale of 1 to 10, rate the following (1 being *absolutely not* or *never*, 10 being *always*):

____ I enjoy reading God's Word.

____ I love listening to and talking with God in prayer.

____ I'm excited about going to church.

____ I enjoy serving others (in the community/at church).

____ I believe God loves me deeply.

____ I trust God to handle the difficult people in my life.

____ I look forward to getting up each day to see what adventure God takes me on.

The highest score is 70, and 7 would be the lowest. Do you like what you scored? In what areas could you improve? Does your score reveal anything alarming? The good news is, regardless of your score, you can improve upon it as you grow in relationship with Jesus.

Another sign that God is healing your wounded heart is a positive change in how you feel toward the one who hurt you. Be honest: Are you sincerely or half-heartedly praying for your offender?

If you've been praying, have your attitude, thoughts, and/or feelings changed since you began? Has the initial sting subsided?

Stop and think: What is it that causes you to come to God and repent? When did He forgive

you? When were you reconciled (brought back into right relationship) with Him? What do these answers say to you about forgiving your enemy and being reconciled to him or her?

Consider Romans 2:4 and 5:8; and Luke 23:33–34.

STEP 29 - SEEK RECONCILIATION

We are Christ's ambassadors. God is using us to speak to you: we beg you, as though Christ Himself were here pleading with you, receive the love He offers you—be reconciled to God.—2 Corinthians 5:20

TLB

Once you have forgiven the person who hurt you—and you know you're healed—it's time to seek to make things right with them. God calls this *reconciliation*.

In their book *Boundaries*, Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend stated:

“The Bible is clear about two principles: (1) We always need to forgive, but (2) we don't always achieve reconciliation. *Forgiveness* is something that we do in our hearts; we release someone from a debt that they owe us. We write off the person's debt, and she no longer owes us. We no longer condemn her. She is clean. Only *one* party is needed for forgiveness: *me*. The person who owes me a debt does not have to ask my forgiveness. It is a work of grace in my heart.

This brings us to the second principle: We do not always achieve reconciliation. God forgave the world, but the *whole* world is not reconciled to Him. Although He may have forgiven all people, all people have not owned their sin and appropriated His forgiveness. That would be *reconciliation*. Forgiveness takes one; reconciliation takes *two*.”⁵

In light of Dr. Cloud and Dr. Townsend's quote, has God asked you to go to the person who hurt

you and apologize? If He has, have you done it? If you haven't, what is holding you back?

Imagine: You've had a disagreement with another believer—we'll call him Bill—who's still upset and constantly avoiding you. One day as you're praying, God prompts you to go and be reconciled to him. How would you handle this? Briefly explain your *attitudes* and *actions*—what would you do and what would you *not* do?

Using the situation with Bill, imagine that you go to him with the right attitude and try to make things right, but he refuses to listen. How should you handle it? (Check out Matthew 18:16-17.)

It's the kindness of God that softens our hearts and leads us to make things right with Him. Similarly, when we show kindness to someone who has mistreated us, we set the stage for reconciliation. What practical steps can you take to create an atmosphere filled with God's love?

STEP 30 - PURSUE PEACE

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord. —Hebrews 12:14

While it *is* God's will that we be reconciled to each other, it will not always be attainable. That's why He tells us in Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, *as much as depends on you*, live peaceably with all men." As we do our best to mend broken relationships, He will honor our efforts.

Take a few moments to reflect on these passages:

So let's agree to use all our energy in getting along with each other. Help others with encouraging words; don't drag them down by finding fault. —Romans 14:19 MSG

For let him who wants to enjoy life and see good days [good—whether apparent or not] keep his tongue free from evil and his lips from guile (treachery, deceit). Let him turn away from wickedness and shun it, and let him do right. Let him search for peace (harmony; undisturbedness from fears, agitating passions, and moral conflicts) and seek it eagerly. [Do not merely desire peaceful relations with God, with your fellowmen, and with yourself, but pursue, go after them!] —1 Peter 3:10-11 AMP

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure and full of quiet gentleness. Then it is peace-loving and courteous. It allows discussion and is willing to yield to others; it is full of mercy and good deeds. It is wholehearted and straightforward and sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness. — James 3:17-18 TLB

And let the peace (soul harmony which comes) from Christ rule (act as umpire continually) in your hearts [deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds, in that peaceful state] to which as [members of Christ's] one body you were also called [to live] . . . —Colossians 3:15 AMP

What is God speaking to you about peace in these verses? Why is it so important to pursue?

When someone tries to make peace with you, what words and/or attitudes *close* your heart and which ones *open* your heart? How does this guide your efforts?

What can you do to allow Christ's peace to rule your heart? How will this affect your interactions with others?

TAKE ACTION

This action has two parts.

PART 1: The Exercise of Prayer

"When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer." —Matthew 5:44 MSG

In this lesson, I mentioned that Jesus never told us to pray for our mom, dad, or those who love us and treat us well. He challenged us to pray for those who have mistreated us. This is not easy to do, and it will require exercise.

In Lesson 1's action, you were challenged to write letters to the people who have offended or mistreated you. Take a few minutes to review those letters. Do you feel differently toward them

after completing the course? Are there things that you need to communicate to them?

Perhaps you still feel angry, hurt, disappointed, or even offended with one or more of them. This exercise will help you develop the spiritual muscles to forgive them completely.

Use the space below to write down the names of the people who still need your forgiveness. This will be your hit list. A hit list is usually created to mark people for death or destruction. But you're going to use your list to identify who you need to target for good.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Start praying for each person on your hit list. Pray for them to know God deeply. Pray for their finances. Pray for their success. Pray for them like you would want others to pray for you!

Commit to doing this for the next thirty days or until you are excited to pray for them. Once you're in a place where praying for a person is no longer difficult, then you will be able to cross that person off your list and progress to the second part of this action.

PART 2: Reconciliation

Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. —Romans 12:18 NLT

We learned in this lesson that forgiveness takes one, but reconciliation takes two. When appropriate, we should pursue reconciliation, but keep in mind that the other person might not be willing to reconcile.

Here are some steps that you can take toward reconciliation:*

Contact the person. It could be a call, text message, or email. Break the ice and connect with them. It might take time to rebuild the relationship and establish trust again, but reach out.

Arrange to connect with them in person, if appropriate. Be sure to choose a suitable setting.

Create an atmosphere of goodness. Prepare to meet them in a posture of humility. This is not about reminding them of the wrong they have done. Rather, go into the meeting apologetically—take ownership of any wrong things you've done. Be the first to apologize. Even if you're only one percent in the wrong, take ownership of your one percent. Remember, it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance.

Ask for forgiveness and release them.

FINAL THOUGHTS . . .

Jesus forgave us long before we were reconciled to Him. He wants to empower us to be reconciled with not only Him, but others who've offended us. Our sin of staying offended is not justified by the way we were mistreated—God has far greater plans for us than that! His mature love in us covers a mountain of sin, always hopes for restoration, and heals us from the inside out.

Although we can't control what other people do, we can control what *we* do. Let's choose to be the people of God—people who embrace the transforming power of forgiveness. After all, isn't that what the gospel is all about?

**If your safety could be jeopardized by connecting with your offender, we suggest seeking the advice of a pastor, counselor, or trusted friend. There are situations where contact with your offender would not be appropriate.*

(1) Andrew Murray, *Humility* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 1997) pp. 23, 42. (2) Adapted from *Merriam-Webster's Desk Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1995). (3) Adapted from *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, W.E. Vine (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1996). (4) John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001) pp. 127-128. (5) Dr. Henry Cloud, Dr. John Townsend, *Boundaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992) p. 251.

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