
Chapter Ten

The OFFENSE TEST

This test will reveal whether you will allow offense to derail you from following the will of God. The Offense Test always comes to interrupt an impending spiritual promotion, and it is the test people fail most often. To pass this test, you must learn to submit to the Holy Spirit's leading instead of yielding to your emotions.

HOW WOULD YOU feel if you learned that your best friend was talking about you all around town? How would you feel if the owner of the company where you work suddenly hired his niece and asked you to train her to become your boss? How would you feel if, just when you were ready to move your relationship to the next level, you received a text message from your boyfriend or girlfriend calling it quits—"It's not you; it's me"?

What are these scenarios? They are opportunities to take

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From a prison cell, Paul writes these words to the church in the town of Philippi: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:9-10). Paul's prayer is that these believers will learn to cling to the things that are excellent and live without offense until the day Jesus Christ returns. I believe more people need to make this their prayer today.

There is a spirit of offense that is growing more and more prevalent in the world. It causes marriages to end because of "irreconcilable differences," friendships to break down, and relationships to be destroyed. It leads to church splits, petty lawsuits, domestic violence, and even murder.

Recently I was watching the news coverage of a tragic situation that unfolded in my home city of Jacksonville, Florida. Two children got into an argument over who won a basketball game. Instead of just agreeing to disagree and walking away, one child pulled out a gun and shot the other child in the head. How in the world could something like that happen between two kids? The reason we're seeing this more and more is because there is a spirit of offense that has grabbed hold of this world, and it is spreading like wildfire.

As members of the body of Christ, we must guard our

hearts to make sure we don't fall prey to this worldly spirit. We can't allow ourselves to follow the tide of society and become offended at every little thing that does not go our way. Second Corinthians 2:10-11 says, "If you forgive anyone anything, I too forgive that one; and what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sakes in the presence [and with the approval] of Christ (the Messiah), to keep Satan from getting the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his wiles and intentions" (AMP).

We can't be ignorant of Satan's tactics and fall for his tricks. I believe offense is Satan's number one weapon against Christians. Some people might think fornication is at the top of Satan's list. But if someone commits the sin of fornication and his heart is still open to the Word of God, he can repent and get right with God. When a person gets caught up in offense, however, his heart will often become closed to what the Bible says about forgiveness, and he won't listen to anyone who does not side with him in his hurt.

TWO TYPES OF OFFENSE

Offense is defined as "something that outrages the moral, emotional or physical senses" and "the state of being insulted or morally outraged."¹ Typically, there are two categories of offended people. The first are those who have actually been mistreated.

There are times when things happen to us that are absolutely wrong. For example, when a couple gets married and vows to live together "till death us do part," and for some reason one of them decides to commit adultery or leave, that's just wrong. Now the innocent spouse is left to raise the children, pay the

bills, and live alone. Things shouldn't have happened that way. That person has a legitimate reason for feeling hurt.

In the second category are those who *feel* they've been done wrong. These individuals may not have been mistreated at all. In fact, if you brought one hundred reasonable people into a room and gave them the details of the situation, perhaps 90 percent or more would say, "I know you won't like what I'm about to say, but what he did to you really wasn't wrong."

But in these cases it doesn't matter whether the individuals were mistreated or not because their perception becomes their reality. When people feel wronged and don't allow the Holy Spirit to intervene, offense sets in and becomes a deep, dark pit that will prevent them from walking in the miracle-working power of God. Ultimately that is what the enemy intends offense to do—stop the Word of God from working in your life.

Proverbs 18:19 says, "A brother offended is harder to be won over than a strong city, and [their] contentions separate them like the bars of a castle" (AMP). The Bible makes it very clear that when a person gets stuck in offense, it's harder to win him over to a reasonable way of thinking than it is to conquer a fortified city.

During ancient Roman times huge walls surrounded cities. There were soldiers positioned on the wall, always on guard, awaiting an attack. When the children of Israel marched around Jericho for seven days, it was because the walls of the city had to fall down in order for them to take it. Unless God had supernaturally intervened to help them, it would have been nearly impossible for them to invade Jericho and receive their promised land.

Even harder to be won over than a city that has these types of walls and military protection is a brother or sister who has become offended. Proverbs 18:19 goes on to say that their contentions separate them like the bars of a castle. If you think about the bars of a castle or a jail cell, one thing you will note is that they are always parallel. The bars don't bend or give way. They stay the same distance apart, and no matter how much you pull or tug on them, they won't come any closer together.

Just like the bars of that jail cell, the offended person's contentions separate them from the one who offended him. No matter what you say or do, that person won't open his heart enough to come close to reconciling things. That's because a wall is up that says, "I'm offended, I'm mad, and I'm not going to forgive the wrong I feel was done to me! I don't care what you, the minister, or even Jesus Christ has to say! I feel this way, I've got a right to feel this way, and nobody can change that!"

Am free from this

STEALING YOUR FUTURE

We have all been offended and probably know of many others who have been as well. But as a minister of the gospel, I need to warn you that offense is not just some innocent little thing that we can hang on to until we feel like letting go of it. Offense is a serious issue, a weapon designed by the enemy to rob you of God's best and steal the future He has destined for your life.

Offense causes a person to shut down on God's way of handling the problem and urges him to construct walls of safety, which eventually become walls of imprisonment. These walls

are built of pride, with a gate that opens only to those who agree with the offended person.

When someone has offended you, do you want to hear what the Bible says about forgiveness? No! Offense's job is to get you to close your ears to God's way of rectifying the situation. Furthermore, you may choose not to interact with the person who offended you and thereby create a pathway of safety to protect yourself from getting hurt again.

But what you meant to be a means of protection will unknowingly become a wall of imprisonment. It will hold you captive and keep you from getting to what God wants you to have.

When you are offended, you view every word people speak through the lens of your hurt, thus cutting off ordinary conversation you should be able to have. The spirit of offense chokes off your ability to give people the benefit of the doubt. It suffocates forgiveness and tolerance. It denies human imperfection. It demands that a simple, loving person be mechanical and precise while trying to express sincerity. It assumes the worst. It ignores obvious intentions and digs around for something ugly and sinister. It allows common, everyday words to be misconstrued.

Offense is quite possibly the most vicious problem in our society today. It nourishes an attitude of dissatisfaction with life, especially among those who choose to carry it around like a badge of honor that reads, "I'm indignant and rightfully so!" Most offended people would rather place the blame on someone else—anyone else—than accept responsibility and acknowledge that it is their choice to be offended.

DON'T SIGN FOR THE PACKAGE

When offense comes on the scene, it's like a UPS or FedEx courier coming to your front door. Just because he shows up, rings your bell, and says he has a package for you doesn't mean you have to sign for it. You can't stop the UPS truck from pulling up in front of your house. You can't keep the FedEx courier from ringing your doorbell. But when you open the door, you can choose whether you'll accept the package.

In the same way we can't stop people from doing and saying things that are hurtful and offensive. But we can choose whether we sign for that offense package and allow it to control our lives or change the course of what God wants us to do.

when The thing about giving way to offense is that in doing so, you are giving control of your life over to the person who offended you rather than to God. When you change churches because you were offended, it's not God ordering your steps; it's offense. When you leave your job because you don't like what someone said, you've allowed offense to rob you of a job that has been a blessing to you and your family.

One of the best things you can do when you've been offended is not make any major decisions until you have calmed down and can clearly hear what the Holy Spirit is saying. Some of what people say the Lord told them to do after they were offended wasn't really God speaking; it was offense talking.

Often when they say the Lord told them to do this or that, it's their way of saying, "Shut up! I don't want to hear what you or anybody else has to say about it." They just blanket it with "The Lord told me" because they know most people won't argue with what someone believes God said. But isn't it

Lord, Help Us (me)

amazing that the Lord wasn't saying anything about making that decision until *after* they were offended?

When God talks to us, He doesn't use the vehicle of heightened negative emotions. It is nearly impossible to hear what God is really saying when your feelings are hurt. One of the best things *to* do when you've been offended is *to not* do anything differently until you get your emotions under control. Then you can really hear what the Lord is saying to your spirit.

Let me be very clear: I am not trying to convince you that refusing to be offended is an easy task. Satan is very good at his job. He's not going to send someone you barely know to do you wrong. He's going to send those who are closest to you—those you would least expect to hurt you.

Psalms 55:12–14 says, "It is not an enemy who taunts me—I could bear that. It is not my foes who so arrogantly insult me—I could have hidden from them. Instead, it is you—my equal, my companion and close friend. What good fellowship we once enjoyed as we walked together to the house of God" (NLT).

Notice that David said it wasn't some stranger who did him wrong. If it were just somebody out there on the street, he might have been upset for a minute, but eventually he would have forgotten about it. Yet when the person who hurts you is a close friend, it strikes you to the core! David said, "We walked together to the house of God." That means this person went to the same church!

I believe the reason we get so upset by certain things our friends do is because we have a higher expectation of those closest to us. We assume the people at work who don't really know us may do something we don't like, but we don't expect

to experience hurt when we come home or go to church. Consequently when people we're in close relationship with do things that don't measure up to our expectations, it tends to cut deeper into our hearts.

This is why you see so many relatives who haven't spoken to one another in years. Offense comes to sever relationships and separate us from the people God has placed in our lives to be a blessing to us—and who we are to bless in return. There is always something that can offend us if we allow it. But when we become mature enough to know that Satan is always going to play the offense card, we can stop his plan to cause us to fail The Offense Test and suffer the consequences.

THE HIGH COST OF OFFENSE

Though Satan will never reveal it to you, there is indeed a price tag for offense. If you go into a clothing store and see a dress or suit that you like, you can't just grab it and walk out. The store has a little camera watching you. There's a guy in a uniform with a whistle, flashlight, and can of mace who will tackle you from behind and detain you until the police come. You can't just walk out without paying what's on the price tag.

Offense also has a price tag associated with it. You can't just partake of offense and think there's no price to pay. The enemy tells you, "Just go ahead and wallow in your offense. Stay right where you are. Put on a good smile and look like nothing is really bothering you." He will never tell you that offense is eating away at the blessing of God. Even if the person really did you wrong, God still does not give you a right to stay angry.

One of the possible costs associated with offense is your

family. Colossians 3:18–21 says, “Wives, be subject to your husbands [subordinate and adapt yourselves to them], as is right and fitting and your proper duty in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives [be affectionate and sympathetic with them] and do not be harsh or bitter or resentful toward them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke or irritate or fret your children [do not be hard on them or harass them], lest they become discouraged and sullen and morose and feel inferior and frustrated. [Do not break their spirit]” (AMP).

Notice that God has something to say to everybody in the house. He tells the wives to submit to their own husbands. Husbands are to love their wives and not be bitter against them. Children should obey their parents. This information is still important today because many families live in a perpetual state of offense, and it can get so bad that the home looks and feels much like a war zone. Some families attend a good church on a regular basis, lift up their hands and sing songs of praise and worship to God, then go right home and curse out one another. The end result is an entire house full of hostility.

This is not how God wants things to be. The home should be a place of refuge and safety. Prisons are filled with people who come from broken homes and never learned where they could find rest and security. Don’t allow the enemy to steal your family by holding on to grudges. Allow God to direct your family life and reap the rewards of obedience.

FORFEITING YOUR MIRACLE

Offense can also cost you your miracle. When Jesus visited His hometown of Nazareth, He couldn't perform any miracles there, and for one reason—offense set in.

Jesus went away from there and came to His [own] country and hometown [Nazareth], and His disciples followed [with] Him. And on the Sabbath He began to teach in the synagogue; and many who listened to Him were utterly astonished, saying, Where did this Man acquire all this? What is the wisdom [the broad and full intelligence which has been] given to Him? What mighty works and exhibitions of power are wrought by His hands! Is not this the Carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not His sisters here among us? And they took offense at Him and were hurt [that is, they disapproved of Him, and it hindered them from acknowledging His authority] and they were caused to stumble and fall. But Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honor (deference, reverence) except in his [own] country and among [his] relatives and in his [own] house. And He was not able to do even one work of power there, except that He laid His hands on a few sickly people [and] cured them.

—MARK 6:1-5, AMP

The Bible says these people couldn't receive any miracles because they were offended. Jesus could not overcome the offended hearts of those in His own hometown in order to

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perform miracles in their lives, and He can't do that for us either.

If we don't want to forfeit the miracle, we have to decide to bypass the offense. A lot of people say, "Oh, if I could just see Jesus! If I could have been there when He walked the streets of Galilee and seen Him raise the dead, I just know I could have believed Him for a miracle."

The truth of the matter is that a lot of Christians today still wouldn't receive a miracle if they saw Jesus face-to-face because they would find Him hard to take. Jesus was a man of business who could sometimes speak in a way that was difficult to hear. One time a Canaanite woman came to Jesus with a serious need.

And behold, a woman who was a Canaanite from that district came out and, with a [loud, troublesomely urgent] cry, begged, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is miserably and distressingly and cruelly possessed by a demon! But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, Send her away, for she is crying out after us. He answered, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But she came and, kneeling, worshiped Him and kept praying, Lord, help me! And He answered, It is not right (proper, becoming, or fair) to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.

—MATTHEW 15:22-26, AMP

Did Jesus just call this woman a dog? That one statement would have cleared most churches. "Oh, no, He didn't call me a

PASS The offense to get your The Offense Test miracle

dog! I don't care if that's Jesus or not! Nobody calls *me* a dog!" That's where the offense comes in and steals your miracle.

But this woman passed The Offense Test. Instead of allowing her daughter to continue to be plagued because of her pride, she replied, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little pups (little whelps) eat the crumbs that fall from their [young] masters' table" (Matt. 15:27, AMP). Jesus Himself had to acknowledge her great faith, and He healed her daughter. She received her miracle because she refused to allow offense to take root in her heart.

In the Old Testament we learn about Naaman, who almost failed The Offense Test and lost his healing.

Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper.

—2 KINGS 5:1

Naaman had a maid who was from Israel, and she suggested to Naaman's wife that he see the prophet Elisha in order to be healed. Naaman set off for Israel with a letter from the king of Syria, along with silver, gold, and clothes for the king of Israel. When Naaman came to the king of Israel with his letter and presents, the king tore his clothes saying, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me" (2 Kings 5:7).

When Elisha heard the king had torn his clothes, he told the king not to worry about it. He said, "Let him come now to me, and he shall know there is a prophet in Israel" (v. 8).

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So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha. And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

Thank You for Wisdom & Knowledge ^{2 KINGS 5:9-10}

Naaman was furious! In his anger he spoke two of the most deadly words in the entire Bible: "I thought." Most offense occurs because we "thought" things would be a certain way, but they turned out another way.

But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

—2 KINGS 5:11-12

Most offense comes because we have an expectation. When what we expect doesn't pan out, we get offended at the person who didn't do what we wanted him to do: "I thought after going to Bible school I'd be in full-time ministry by now." "After all these years of working at this company, I thought they would have at least interviewed me for that promotion."

Naaman believed his stature and position made him worthy of Elisha's personal attention. He thought Elisha would come out and say, "Oh my goodness, can you believe this? Is that Naaman? I've heard about you, Naaman. Aren't you the one who won that battle over there in Jericho? Oh my goodness!

Lord, sorry -
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The Offense Test

By the power of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, let the leprosy that is upon thee be gone! *Whoosh!*"

Instead Elisha told his servant, "Just go out there. If it's Naaman, I'm expecting him. Tell him to go dip seven times in the Jordan River."

At the beginning of the story we get the impression that all Naaman really wanted was to be healed. But when his healing didn't come the way he anticipated, his real motives were uncovered. Thank God his servants had enough sense to say to him, "Well, Master, if the prophet had told you to go and do something great, wouldn't you have done it so you could be healed?"

If Naaman had not come to his senses, he would have died with leprosy and missed out on precious years with his family. At his funeral people would have been asking, "Why did God let that happen?" They wouldn't have known that God had sent Naaman a way out, and he was too offended to take advantage of it.

But Naaman did listen to his servants. He dipped in the Jordan seven times and came out with brand-new skin! So for Naaman we could say that on the other side of his offense was a miracle—and that is often the case with us. We miss out on all sorts of miracles when we fail The Offense Test.

OFFENDED TO DEATH

The most expensive cost of offense is your life. King Herod had imprisoned John the Baptist because his wife, Herodias, wanted it. John the Baptist had publicly disapproved of Herod's marriage to her since she had been the wife of Herod's brother. Later, during Herod's birthday party, Herodias's daughter

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performed a dance before the king and his guests that greatly pleased them. So Herod said to the girl:

Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom. And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist. And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her. And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother.

—MARK 6:22-28

How does someone Jesus described as the greatest man ever born from the womb of a woman end up having his head paraded around on a plate during Herod's drunken party? We know God has the power to rescue people who've been captured. When Daniel was in the lions' den, didn't God demonstrate His power to set him free? When the three Hebrew boys were thrown into a fiery furnace, didn't God demonstrate that He knew how to deliver?

In the New Testament, when the apostles were arrested and thrown in jail, didn't an angel of the Lord come and set them free and tell them, "Go stand right back in the public square

and keep on preaching”? When Peter was locked up in jail, didn’t an angel of the Lord wake him, break his chains, and send him to the house where the believers were praying the night before the rulers were going to kill him?

So we know God has the ability to set people free who have been captured. Then why did John the Baptist die in such a violent and tragic way? I believe the answer is because he became offended at Jesus.

John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.

—JOHN 1:26-34

John the Baptist had no doubt whatsoever in his mind about who Jesus was. More than once he acknowledged that Jesus

was the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. However, shortly before John was beheaded in prison, he seemed to have some doubts about Jesus.

And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities. Now when John had heard *in the prison* the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

—MATTHEW 11:1-3, EMPHASIS ADDED

Well, hang on, John! Didn't you say, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"? Didn't you say, "Jesus is the Son of God"? Didn't you acknowledge that He was the Lamb of God? Now, are you sending your disciples to Jesus to ask Him, "Are you the one who is supposed to come, or should we be looking for somebody else?"

The problem is that John has been sitting in prison. And instead of waiting for God's timing for his deliverance, he's sitting in there getting offended because Jesus has not helped him out as he thought He should. Jesus didn't even take time to answer his question.

Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

—MATTHEW 11:4-6

In other words Jesus was telling John, "I'm giving you a chance to recover from this offense." Obviously John didn't heed the warning. You have to know Jesus felt horrible. He must have been wondering, "Why wouldn't this guy listen to Me?"

As a pastor I know that feeling. Why wouldn't this person just listen? Why wouldn't he just open his eyes to see that the offense rooted in his heart is destroying everything God is trying to do in his life? As Jesus did with John, many times I've had to just sit back and watch destruction rain down upon a person's life because he wouldn't open up his heart when God was knocking and asking him to let the offense go.

LOVE NEVER FAILS

Offense is not something you can play around with. It will eat away like a cancer at everything productive in your life unless you release it back to God. When the disciples asked Jesus about His return and the end of the world as we know it, Jesus said that one of the signs of the end times will be widespread offense—"And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another." (See Matthew 24:1-10.)

Offense is a trick of the enemy to trap you. Everywhere you look, somebody is offended or taking out his anger and aggression because he doesn't like something that was done to him. This happens because we live in a time when the spirit of offense won't allow people to put down their guard and let Jesus work it out.

You have to give God room and be willing to say, "You know what? Despite how bad I feel about what happened, I'm

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willing to let all of this go so the Lord can do what He wants to do in my life." When you call Jesus Lord, it means He has the right to order you to do things you may not want to do.

Sometimes that means having to forgive people and things when your flesh and emotions still want to be riled up. Instead God asks you to choose to be a person who has an attitude and heart like Jesus's. Even when people mistreat you, you love them, forgive them, and let it go for your own benefit.

Agape love, the kind of love God has and that He has placed inside every born-again believer, will not allow you to remain offended. Agape love does not keep score of all of the wrong deeds someone has done.

Love endures long and is patient and kind; love never is envious nor boils over with jealousy, is not boastful or vainglorious, does not display itself haughtily. It is not conceited (arrogant and inflated with pride); it is not rude (unmannerly) and does not act unbecomingly. Love (God's love in us) does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking; it is not touchy or fretful or resentful; it takes no account of the evil done to it [it pays no attention to a suffered wrong]. It does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness, but rejoices when right and truth prevail. Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything [without weakening]. Love never fails [never fades out or becomes obsolete or comes to an end].

—1 CORINTHIANS 13:4–8, AMP

The only way to get offended and stay offended is if you're keeping track of all the things someone has done to you. The Bible says love is not "~~touchy or fretful or resentful~~" (v. 5). The word touchy literally means quick to take offense, overly sensitive, requiring special tact or skill in handling, and easily ignited or flammable.

Therefore, if you're a person of love, you can't be easily offended. You can't make people feel like they have to think long and hard about how they're going to talk or act around you to keep from hurting your feelings. You also can't be someone who is easily ignited or flammable; you can't be a stick of dynamite walking around ready to blow up!

THE INFLUENCE OF OUR PERSONALITIES

Knowing your motivational, or spiritual, gifts will help you understand why you think and react to things the way you do. If you don't already know your area of gifting, I recommend you find a good book on motivational gifts and take a spiritual gifts test. This will not only help you discover the area of ministry you are best suited for, but it will also help you see the unique ways offense may try to take root in your life.

Okay Some personality types are more susceptible to offense than others. People with compassion and servant motivational gifts, for example, tend to be quite sensitive. Because they care so much for people, they can easily get their feelings hurt. They tend to look for little signs of how others feel about them due to their need to be liked or appreciated. If what they believe they see seems less than favorable, they can become upset and think people don't like them or are out to get them. In reality, no one is usually trying to do them any harm at all.

Those with *perceiver* motivational gifts tend to want everything to be just right. They are often *fretful*, which means "irritable," "marked by worry and distress; unable to relax or be still, or moody."² Perceivers have a strong urge to have everything fixed. They are not procrastinators; they want things corrected immediately.

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The problem with this attitude, of course, is that most things in life don't get fixed right away. You can't put everything in its proper box and make things go exactly the way you want them to all the time. Therefore, perceivers can get offended when circumstances don't fit into their idea of perfection.

Those with *teacher* and *administrator* motivational gifts tend to struggle with feeling resentful when people or things don't make sense to them or are unorganized. *Resent* means "to feel or express annoyance or ill will."³ To be honest, this is one I have to work on all the time because I have a teacher motivational gift. I'm a law-abiding citizen, except I hate abiding by laws that don't make sense. I do obey those laws, but I can't stand it.

me
Individuals like me can get annoyed with people simply because they're not doing things that fit our rationale. We get frustrated with people who, in our expert opinion, are not organized. The reason those of us with teacher motivational gifts get irritated is because we think we know everything about everything.

Those who are *exhorters* and *givers*, two other motivational gifts, also can be easily annoyed. When they do things to encourage or bless a person, they need to know they are appreciated. If that appreciation is not present in a big way, they're put off.

Thank you for helping me understand myself

The Offense Test

All of us have to watch those little areas within our personalities that can make us more prone to offense. Instead of assuming someone has done us wrong, we must remember that the problem may be much closer to home. We may be super-sensitive to particular triggers because of how we're wired.

PASSING THE OFFENSE TEST

As I mentioned before, The Offense Test is the one people fail most often. But the good news is that you *can* pass this test with flying colors if you keep some principles in mind.

1. Admit that you are offended

The first thing you must do to pass The Offense Test is admit it when you are offended. Your feelings are no secret to God. Hebrews 4:12 tells us the Word of God is able to expose, sift, analyze, and judge the very thoughts and purposes of the heart—it exposes us for who we really are.

We can say something didn't bother us, but the Word of God has a way of getting down to the truth of the matter. When God begins to show us where we really are, we then have a choice to get honest with ourselves and allow God's Word to fix us or live in denial. Too many people get offended and refuse to acknowledge it.

This is especially true if they attend a church where they are truly being taught the Word of God. They know they're supposed to walk in love. They know offense is not something they should harbor in their hearts. So they don't want to admit their true state because they know they're violating

God's Word. However, when a person chooses to live in denial, there's nothing anyone can do for him, including Jesus.

How do we determine if we or someone we know is in offense? There are several signs. Offended people tend to have a consistently negative outlook on life. They also tend to be overly critical. They never see the good in anybody. They don't give people the benefit of the doubt. If someone does something that might have been a genuine mistake, they assume the person did it on purpose.

Offended people complain constantly. They may refuse to interact with a particular person. I'm not talking about people who are purposefully trying to get under their skin but those who have asked for forgiveness or who don't realize they did something hurtful. Instead of working out their differences as Matthew 18 teaches, offended people won't have anything to do with the individual they feel wronged them.

Another characteristic of offended people is that they have difficulty getting excited for those they believe wronged them. They have continuous feelings of hurt, anger, or resentment, and will refuse to discuss how to reconcile with the person who upset them.

One of the saddest things about offense is that it negatively affects other relationships that are totally unrelated to the situation that created the offense. That's because offense is like a fungus; it can spread and affect others. The Bible warns us not to allow any root of bitterness to form.

Strive to live in peace with everybody and pursue that consecration and holiness without which no one will [ever] see the Lord. Exercise foresight and be on the

watch to look [after one another], to see that no one falls back from and fails to secure God's grace (His unmerited favor and spiritual blessing), in order that no root of resentment (rancor, bitterness, or hatred) shoots forth and causes trouble and bitter torment, and the many become contaminated and defiled by it.

—HEBREWS 12:14–15, AMP

You probably have seen this in a family in which two siblings are having a dispute. Instead of being mature adults and keeping the dispute quiet, one sibling will talk with family members he's close to, and the other sibling will do the same. Of course each person is going to tell his side of the story, which is skewed by his perspective. When the family members hear the one-sided reports, their hearts will begin to change toward someone who has done nothing to them. Soon there's a feud within the family, and it's all because unresolved conflict between two people contaminated the hearts of others. Now everyone involved is short-circuiting the blessing of the Lord in their lives.

Mothers who have been through terrible divorces can contaminate the hearts of their daughters when they tell them they can't trust any man because all men are dogs. The young lady will grow up without proper respect for her father and men in general. If she doesn't allow God to intervene, she may find herself eventually entering into a marriage that is doomed before it starts because she doesn't know how to respect her husband.

Racism is spread in much the same way. Parents rear their children to believe those of other ethnic groups are not to be

trusted and should not be viewed as their equals. Typically this is all because of one bad experience the parents—or the parents' parents—had with someone of another ethnic group. For that reason the children grow up without experiencing the beauty of interacting with and learning about people from other cultures.

God created all of us to be instruments of His love. Offense and God's love cannot coexist. That is why offense has to be acknowledged and uprooted—so it does not spread to others.

2. Resist pride

The second thing you must do to pass The Offense Test is refuse to let pride dictate how you will react. "By pride comes nothing but strife" (Prov. 13:10, NKJV). If strife comes as a result of pride, we must conclude that when a person refuses to let go of offense, pride has grabbed hold of him.

Have you ever heard a person say things such as, "I have more experience. How did he get the job?" Or, "I'm older than he is, and I know more than he does. Who is he to correct me?" This is pride. We give offense an open door when we start to believe we are due certain benefits simply because we've had certain experiences, earned a college degree, or have a title in front of our names.

If anyone deserved to react to not being treated the way He deserved, it would have been Jesus. Jesus was spat upon, spoken evil of, and beaten, though He was the Son of God. Yet the Bible says Jesus made Himself of no reputation. He had all the status any person could ever dream of, but He never felt it was above Him to wash His disciples' feet. When you come with the mind-set of a servant, it's hard to get offended.

3. Decide to forgive

The third thing you need to do to pass The Offense Test is make a quality decision to forgive the person or people who offended you. The Bible says, "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" (Matt. 6:14–15, AMP).

All of us need forgiveness, even after we have given our lives to Christ. In this passage in Matthew 6 Jesus is letting us know that if we are to be partakers of God's forgiveness, we also must be dispensers of it. That means we have to let go of the resentment, bitterness, and hurt—even if we were purposely wronged. No matter what the intentions of the person who hurt us, we must forgive and commend him to God. We don't do this by expecting God to heap punishment upon the person, but by having the same heart of love Jesus had on the cross when He asked God to forgive His offenders.

God is so long-suffering that even when somebody is absolutely wrong, He often will give him time to turn around and make things right. We needed the grace of God to abound toward us when we were blatantly wrong, and we need to extend that same grace to others as proponents of God's love. In doing this, we will not only bless the person we forgive, but we also will be blessed.

Life is terrible, lonely, and cold when you're bitter. But there is beauty in forgiveness. Forgiveness is not an emotion. You

don't have to feel like forgiving someone. Forgiveness is a decision. It is an act of your will.

When you forgive someone, you are choosing not to expect anything from the person as restitution for what he did wrong. You are deciding to restore him to a place in your heart where you can love and pray for him just as you would anybody else.

That does not mean you become best friends with the person, but it means you're not going to harbor bitterness and ill will in your heart toward him. And if there is ever an opportunity for you to be a blessing to that person, you should take advantage of it, as you would choose to bless anyone else who came your way. There is a freedom that comes from living without unforgiveness in your heart and knowing you've done what Jesus Himself would do.

4. Pray

Jesus said, "But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you" (Luke 6:27-28). If you want to pass The Offense Test, you must pray for the person who offended you.

When people tell you someone is saying negative things about you, it is natural to become upset. But when someone is saying all kinds of evil things about you, Jesus says you should bless him, say good things about him, and pray for him. It's hard to stay offended with somebody when you are praying for him.

Jesus goes on to tell us that if we love or do nice things only for those who love and do nice things for us, we're no better than those who don't know Jesus. Instead we should love and

be good to our enemies without expecting anything in return. If we do this, our reward will be great, and everyone will be able to see that we are children of God because we have shown His character through our conduct. (See Luke 6:30–36.)

I'd say that 99 percent of the time, when a person stays offended with someone, it is because he has not been praying for that person. You cannot consistently pray sincerely for someone and stay offended at the same time. It's not possible. There's something about genuinely asking God to pour His blessings into a person's life that softens our hearts.

5. Remember your miracle

The fifth thing you need to do to pass The Offense Test is to remind yourself of the miracle that awaits you beyond the offense. That's how the Canaanite woman received the healing she needed for her daughter. Jesus told her He shouldn't take the anointing intended to bless the children of Israel and give it to those who were not God's chosen people. But this woman kept her focus on the fact that Jesus was the answer to her daughter's problem.

If she could only get Jesus to agree to make her daughter well, everything would be all right. So that became her anchor. It kept her from becoming offended at Jesus's statement and gave her the strength to ask for just a morsel of His power to make her daughter well.

That's true for you as well. A miracle is waiting for you on the other side of your offense. Maybe it's a miracle of healing. Maybe it's peace in your mind. Maybe it's that child coming back home. Whatever the miracle may be, you have a choice to

make. You can remain offended, or you choose to release the offense and claim what's yours!

6. Identify the lessons you need to learn

The final thing you need to do to pass The Offense Test is to identify the character lessons you need to learn. The Bible says, "Therefore I always exercise and discipline myself [mortifying my body, deadening my carnal affections, bodily appetites, and worldly desires, endeavoring in all respects] to have a clear (unshaken, blameless) conscience, void of offense toward God and toward men" (Acts 24:16, AMP).

After you've owned up to the fact that you're offended and refused to let pride tell you how you should react, after you've made a quality decision to forgive and committed to pray for the person who offended you, once you've reminded yourself of the miracle that's awaiting you on the other side of that offense, your next step is to identify the character lessons you need to learn about yourself.

Even if you were truly wronged, the Lord will still use the situation to teach you some lessons if you are open to it. Perhaps He'll tell you, "Yes, that person did you wrong, but you could have responded differently." If we learn the lesson this time, then the next time The Offense Test comes—and you can be sure it will come again—you will be prepared to respond in a way that honors the Lord. You'll pass the test without much effort, and you'll be so proud of yourself!

Why don't you just take a moment right now to humble yourself and ask the Lord to show you if someone or something has offended you. Maybe it's an organization or your job. Maybe it's your spouse, your parents, or your pastor. Has

someone come to mind, someone you took offense with or who tempted you to take offense?

If the Lord is speaking to you about someone, I urge you to not let another day go by with offense brewing in your heart. If left unchecked, it will turn into bitterness. Ask God to stir your heart with compassion and genuine love, so you can see the good in the person, just as He does. Ask Him to give you the strength to pass The Offense Test by walking in total forgiveness toward everyone who has sinned against you.

DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. Has The Offense Test been difficult for you in the past? How so?
2. Is there a particular area that tends to leave you easily offended? If so, what do you think this means?
3. Which of the six steps will help you in passing The Offense Test the next time you have to take it?
4. Can you think of a time when you failed The Offense Test? What did you learn about yourself from that failure?