

---

Alright. Well, I want to welcome all of our campuses, those of you watching at TPO, Traders Point Online, so glad to have everybody today. Those of you in the room, you guys doing good? Doing good? Great to see you guys.

And before we get rolling in week number two of this series, I'd like to just take a quick minute and just pray a pastoral prayer over our church and our nation. Obviously, this has been another heavy week. In the news just down the road from us, in Louisville, Kentucky, the verdict is in concerning Breonna Taylor, which stirs up different emotions in all of us.

And Romans, chapter 12 is a passage I just want to draw all of our attention back to. It says that we need to grieve with those who grieve. It's this idea of understanding and empathy and knowing that certain emotions get stirred up within all of us.

I'm reminded that this is a great time to apply the content of the current series that we are in. And we want to be supportive and vocal toward our men and women in law enforcement, who do such a good job and have such a challenging task. So, it gets tense at times with situations like this.

I want to read you a quick text message I got this last week from a friend of mine who pastors a large church in Louisville, Southeast Christian. Many of you may be familiar with that church. But he texted me on Thursday. Here's what he said.

He said, "One of the police officers was shot just last night," that was part of the riots, "He was with his family. He goes to our church. One of the police officers directly involved with Breonna's shooting has become a Christian just in the last couple of months. He and his wife have never been involved in church before and they recently started attending ours. Breonna Taylor's attorney also goes to our church." And he said, "There's a lot to navigate." And I'd say so.

I'm grateful for their church. I'm grateful for how they are modeling that. And I just want to pray for us as a church family and for our community right now. So would you please join me in that?

Father, we come to you right now with heavy hearts and we are just reminded once again of the brokenness that exists in our world, the hurt that exists in us as people. And we want to be people of empathy, grace and understanding. We want to be people who strive for justice because it is a biblical issue.

So, God, today I just ask that you would be with Breonna Taylor's family. I pray that you would be with our communities, be with our men and women in law enforcement, that they would know that they are loved and supported.

God, I pray that as a church we would model a different way. A way to be unified in the midst of such tension and division. So we just come to you right now asking that you would pour out your Spirit upon our cities, our nation, and our church. And we ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody says: Amen.

Well, welcome back to week two of our physical regathering. Last week, if you weren't aware, after six months we gathered physically at all of our campuses and it really exceeded all of our expectations. And that's largely because of you. I just want to thank every single person across all of our campuses that serve on a team from the parking lot, to the auditorium, to the classrooms. You guys are what makes this work. You're the rock stars and I want to thank you.

And then everybody else, thank you for your grace and your understanding as we try to navigate these waters together. And I really am excited about the future that God has for us. I really do think it is bright.

And if you're not yet comfortable joining us physically and you're with us online, we understand that, and we love you and support you. Can't wait to see you when the time is right.

I also just want to acknowledge all of the watch parties that are going on across our city and even around the country. In fact, we have a brand-new watch party that is launching on the campus of Purdue University today. So just want to say hello to you guys. Thanks for joining us.

And we've got another watch party and it's going to be launching, I believe, in just a few weeks at a restaurant in West Lafayette. So we're excited about all of the things that God is doing and so glad to have you join us.

If you're just now joining us, whether in person or online, we are in week number two of a short three-part series of messages that God really laid on my heart several months ago as I was just dreaming, and praying, and planning for our physical regathering. I didn't know when it was going to be. And it was as if God said, "Okay, when that happens talk about this."

So we paused our series in Luke and we're doing just a three-part series I've called *Behind the Mask*. And last week we said that:

2020 has become the perfect storm for division and disunity.

For all kinds of reasons this has been a crazy year with all kinds of unprecedented events, and it's left every single one of us, me included, feeling fearful, worried, anxious, and depressed.

There isn't a single person hearing this right now who hasn't felt, if you're being honest, those emotions at some time or another over the past six months or so. And all of that sort of results in, and this is how I sort of phrased it last week, our emotional shock absorbers, you know those things that allow us to sort of overlook something if it kind of rubs us the wrong way, those are just shot this year.

And it's resulted in us being offended. In fact, I don't know if I know anybody who hasn't been offended multiple times throughout this year. And then magnifying all of that is that right now we're currently in a season of mask wearing and physical distancing, which just makes it difficult to communicate and connect with one another.

So, what we simply want to do in this series is just be reminded of what you likely already know, we just need to be reminded of it, behind the mask, and in many cases on the other side of that screen, is a real live person created in the image of God who Jesus died for.

And regardless of what any of them currently believe about God or where they are in their spiritual journey or where they are in their political convictions and beliefs, they still deserve to be loved and respected.

In fact, it just might be a demonstration of your unconditional love into their lives that might be the catalytic opportunity that God uses to bring them to the grace that can only be found in Jesus.

I've been doing this a long time and I've never ever talked to people about their story, like, "Tell me your story. How did you come to know Jesus?" And it's like, "Oh, man. It's just the craziest thing. I just got verbally attacked by a Christian and he just gave me a good tongue lashing in the comment section of Facebook and I just realized the error of my ways and dropped to my knees right there in the living room and baptized myself in my hot tub."

I've just never heard that story. If that's your story, I'd love to meet you. Come find me after. But I don't know if I know of anybody who said, "Yeah, I entered into a life-changing relationship with Jesus because I got shamed into it."

And we never see Jesus modelling it that way. Jesus was always going to people. He was always going out of his way to reach people who never thought they would be welcomed by him. And he demonstrated unconditional love and that was the catalyst that changed their lives. As a church, we need to not ever forget that.

See, the events of 2020 have not taken God by surprise. And the division we are currently seeing right now did not take Jesus by surprise either. He saw all of it coming 2,000 years ago, which is why his dying prayer that we looked at last week in John, chapter 17, the night before his arrest and crucifixion, was all about our unity.

And we said this last week. He didn't pray for:

Uniformity, where everyone's the same

I can't sit there and get a group of people together who look like me and talk like me and think like me and act like me and vote like me and declare unity. No, that's uniformity, where everybody is the same. No:

Unity, implies diversity

That's exactly what you need in order to have unity. And even with Jesus' disciples, we oftentimes think that these 12 guys were all the same, that they grew up in the same little town, that they would have had the same beliefs, the same values, and they looked the same, and acted the same and that's just not the case. Jesus chose a diverse group of followers to be his disciples.

Some of them were Jews and some of them were Gentiles. Some of them grew up in small towns, and some of them grew up in big towns. And some of them were fishermen and some of them were tax collectors. I guarantee you that Matthew and Peter's politics did not see eye to eye. And there would have been plenty of heated conversations around the campfire at night when Jesus had to, on multiple occasions say, "Guys, could you tone it down?"

You just read through the gospels and you see that the disciples were always jockeying for position, they were always trying to one-up each other and so Jesus, the night before he was getting ready to leave them, prays for their unity. And he says, "God, the church is kind of hinging on these guy's actions and their words and I need them to be unified."

And that leads in to the two primary reasons why you and I should strive for unity today. And the first one is:

The mission of the Church is far too critical!

And I just want to be super clear, especially as we regather, why we do what we do. I don't want you just coming or joining us online just to get a little bit of spiritual content for your week, I hope that happens, we work hard for that to happen, but that's not our mission.

I hope that you get a little bit of encouragement so that you can dive into whatever the week has ahead of you. And I want you to be encouraged, but that's not our mission.

Our mission very clearly is to remove unnecessary barriers to get people to Jesus so that he can transform their lives in ways that only he can. That is our mission. And over and over again, Jesus would say, "I need you to be unified," and when Paul would write about it in the New Testament, he would almost always follow with, "...so that the world would know..."

He would almost always follow it, "This will prove to the world that you are my followers, if you can be unified." Why? Because it's such a rare thing for people to actually not look alike and talk alike and think alike and act alike and yet be unified under the blood of Jesus Christ, keeping their eyes focused on him.

Here's the second reason and this is what I want to drive down on today, God's plans for your future, and I'm talking to you, whoever you are, are too big for you to hold on to an offense.

God's plans for your future are too big for you to hold on to an offense!

And as we look at Scripture on this, I just want to point out that out of all the ways that Satan can destroy you—and I want to be really, really clear here, that he is out to destroy you, he's not the little cartoon character with horns and a pitchfork just running around doing a bunch of mischief.

No he hates you. He hates your marriage. He hates your emotional well-being. He hates the core of who you are. He wants to destroy you. And one of his most hidden and sinister weapons to destroy you is when you, and I, get caught up in the trap of offense.

Now, what do I mean and why do I say that? Well, let me just start off with this right here. I think most of you would agree with me. It is impossible, especially in our day and age to not be offended. Would you agree with that? With people who you know and people who you don't know, in your relationships, your friendships, your marriage—you do life with a group of people long enough and they are going to do something or say something that is going to offend you.

And we're actually going to see here in a minute that Jesus actually says that very thing. He says that it is impossible to go through life and not be offended. And the challenging thing with it, let's just say you manage to navigate getting around an offense or forgive an offense but there's just going to be another one. And then there's going to be another one. And there's going to be another opportunity for you and me to get offended.

I just want you to take a quick second and think about all of the ways maybe here recently in which you've gotten offended. And how did it happen? I can't speak for you, but I can speak for me. Maybe you can relate to this. It's that most of the time when I get offended, I very rarely see it coming. It sort of blindsides me. And it sort of spins me out a little bit. And then I end up, on occasion, maybe behaving in such a way that really I shouldn't, because I just got offended in the moment.

I was trying to think this last week about an example from my life and honestly, I just thought of way too many, and we only have 35 minutes, so I had to narrow it down. And I was like, "Okay,

what is the biggest, most recent one?" And it just sort of came to me. This was just a few weeks ago. This is not like some old illustration. This is just like fresh.

My wife and I were out to dinner with some friends of ours on a Friday night. We went to one of our favorite Mexican restaurants. And it was a gorgeous evening. We sat outside. Beautiful weather, great food, good conversation—I was in a good mood.

And we get finished. We get in our truck and we were driving, this was downtown, and we're like on a four-lane road, so two lanes going in one direction and two lanes in the other. And I'm in the left-hand lane. And apparently my right tire sort of bumped up against the line and I didn't know it.

And there was a tow-truck kind of behind me and back a little bit. I didn't see him. He was sort of in my blind spot. And he just laid on the horn. And it sort of startled me. And it sort of startled all of us.

And right then there was a red light so we're stopping at the light. He's just like right there. And he sort of honks again and he got sort of angry. And I got offended. I was just like, "Hey, this guy needs to chill out." So, here's what I did. I just kind of honked back. Like you can kind of honk back, alright? I just kind of honked back.

So he then proceeds to roll down his window and he leans out and he just starts screaming at me. He's like cussing, "You need to pay attention." He was using sign language telling me I'm number one. I assume that's what that meant.

And you've got to understand. My wife hates conflict of any kind and so she's like between me and the tow-truck driver. She's the closest to him. And she's just hiding her head in her hands, "Aaron, Aaron, Aaron."

So here's what I did. I mean, as a pastor, I just wanted to lay holy hands on this guy. So I just leaned as close to the windshield as I could and I (I'm not proud of this, alright?) I just reached out my arms and leaned in like, "What are you going to do?" That's what I did. Just inflamed the situation, alright? Our poor friends in the back seat are going, "Wow, Pastor Aaron."

It was later on in the night I was thinking about it and I was just like, "Man, what happened?" I was having a great night up until that point. I mean, we were at one of our favorite restaurants, having a glorious meal, enchiladas and enchiros—can I get a good, Amen. Just one of the gifts from God.

We were having a great conversation with dear friends, beautiful night, I'm cruising down the road. We were listening to some of our favorite tunes and somebody honks? And it just spins me out and I act in a way that if you all were with me, you'd think less of me, because of how I responded.

Can you think of a moment in your life where you've gotten offended? Some of you are like, "Well, sure. But not that bad. I mean it's just... We're praying for you." Alright. Thank you. No, you probably know, don't you? Maybe it even happened on the way to church today. You got offended.

And here's the thing we all have in common it just kind of comes out of nowhere. It's almost as if you stepped into a trap. And the reason why we use the word trap actually is because throughout Scripture that's actually the word that Jesus uses for it.

In fact, this is the word that he says in Luke, chapter 17. Jesus is talking about his disciples and he's talking to them about how they can live out God's plan and purposes for their lives. And Jesus says to his disciples:

*"It is impossible but that offenses will come..."* "Hey, listen. It is inevitable. You are going to be offended regularly in this life. And the word that Jesus uses for offenses, in that passage and other New Testament writers, when they use this word, it actually comes from the Greek word:

skandalon

And skandalon simply means:

the bait that triggers a trap to close.

That's the word that Jesus uses for offenses. It makes it even more interesting when you see how the Amplified Bible translates the exact same verse. It says:

*"Jesus said to His disciples, 'Stumbling blocks [temptations and traps set to lure one to sin] are sure to come..."*

So, why set a trap? Well, to kill or cage something you don't want around. And so why use a trap? Well, because it sneaks up on whatever it is that is being baited. So Jesus is saying, in this passage, that when you step into the trap—not just of being offended, everyone gets offended, but holding on to the offense, that is Satan's way of holding you back and keeping you stuck from God's best—his plans and purposes for your life.

That is an incredibly descriptive word picture, isn't it? I just want you to think about all of the creative ways that we, as human beings, have designed traps. I've just got a few traps up here. We've got a racoon trap down here. We've got the old bug zapper, it's on the back porch. We've got fishing lures; really they are just traps. They are designed to attract a fish, get the hook set in its mouth.

This is actually a carpenter bee trap from our house. We put these on the back porch, on the front porch because we hate it when the carpenter bees bore into the wood in our house. And so carpenter bee gets trapped. They go into this little hole and the get stuck in this little container. And I would imagine they are just like screaming for their lives. A lot of entertainment, alright?

You've got your trusty mouse trap—this is actually a rat trap; this thing is massive. It was the last one at Lowes. I'm glad I've got it. I don't know if I'll ever use it. You've got these ant traps. You've got some type of coyote trap here. We actually were going to set this today, but we decided that I would probably step into it. So, we've got all of these... Oh, and these right here, you remember these? Little Chinese finger traps. This just brings out some of the worst memories on the playground doesn't it? "Put your finger in there. Put your finger in here. Whoa!!" I'm having too much fun here.

All of the creative ways that we as human beings have designed traps; you know what Genesis 3 says about Satan? That he's a deceiver and that he is way more creative at designing traps for you and me to fall into.

And it's not just about avoiding one trap, but there is going to be another one coming, and another one, and another one, and another one. And it's not just being offended, it's holding on to the offense that is his way of absolutely destroying your life.

So if I could say today's message in a sentence, like if you forget everything else I say today, remember this. Avoiding an offense is impossible, Jesus says that, but living offended that's a choice. Living offended is a totally different thing. And that's on you and that's on me and you don't have to stay there, you don't have to stay in the trap of offense.

Now why is this so destructive? Well, for this reason right here. I eluded to it last week. It's that:

Whenever you hold on to an offense, you allow bitterness into your heart.

That's the opportunity when bitterness gets in there. And bitterness is the cancer of your soul. And bitterness makes no distinction among people. It will sink its teeth into the young and the old, into men and women, into those with a great disposition and those with not so great a disposition, into the life of a Christian and the life of a non-Christian.

In fact, can I just say this? Nothing grieves the Spirit of God more than a bitter Christian. And the reason why is because, fundamentally—I'm not talking about growing up religious. I'm not talking about growing up in a Catholic home or a Baptist home. I'm talking about where you have had a personal conversion to Jesus Christ that radically transformed your life, by his grace, meaning that you understand what you have been set free from.

Meaning that you understand that it is an underserved gift. Meaning that you know that your identity is found who God says you are and what Jesus died to give to you, not what other people say to you or about you. Meaning that this world is not our home. So why do we keep getting spun out by everything we hear on Fox News or CNN?

The government is not my savior, Jesus is. I can hold onto this life loosely because I've got something far more valuable that Jesus died to give to me. Therefore, I am a gracious, sweet, generous person regardless of what you can say to me or do to me.

And so, can I just say this right here. And I want to say it a little bit stronger:

A bitter Christian will cause more damage to the Kingdom of God than any militant atheist ever will.

Now what do I mean by that? Well, I just simply mean that when you have people who do not know Jesus, they're wondering if the Bible can be trusted, they're wondering if this whole gospel stuff is really true, they're wondering if we're really legit, and then they come into contact with a bitter person who calls himself a Christian—man, it's a turn off. Man, it will push them away.

When they come across a post on social media that is from a Christian but is really sort of vile, it's really sort of angry and bitter, it will push them away. And I'm not just talking about this hypothetically. I've talked to a number of people, as a pastor, who struggle with faith. And normally when I ask them to explore that with me, almost always it's because they had an interaction with a bitter Christian, or somebody who called himself a Christian.

Can I just say...? I've said this a long time ago here and those of you who have been in our church for a while, you've heard this before. Can I just say to you who are here or listening to this and you're sort of wondering if all of this can be really true and trusted? Just because somebody follows Jesus poorly doesn't mean that he isn't worth following. So don't allow the bitterness of somebody else keep you from the goodness of God's grace.

And if you are a Christian, maybe it's time to have another conversion, except this time realize what it is that you are truly responding to—we are saved by grace. That ought to make us the most gracious people on the planet.

See we should, as a church, commit these verses to memory. Colossians, chapter 4, 5 and 6. It says:

*“Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity.”* Especially in 2020. *“Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for,”* those who agree with you. No, it says *“for everyone.”*

Meaning that everyone you come into contact with, whether they agree with you or not, whether you use eye to eye on things or not, let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right answer for them, which means that you're anticipating traps. Your anticipating things that you might step into. Because, listen. Bitterness is a killer.

In fact, right now what want to ask you to do is to take just a quick second right now wherever you are and I want you to think about a person in your life that you know who is bitter, alright? Go.

Did you get one? Some of you are like, “Oh, yeah. Right away. Right away. I had to narrow it down. I've got a whole group of people who I know of in my life who are bitter.” Maybe your former boss came to mind. Maybe your ex-husband came to mind. Maybe your in-laws, maybe your neighbor, maybe the person you're with—don't look at him, he's going to know.

You just immediately had, probably a lot of people come to your mind. Now, why are they bitter? And there may be a number of specific circumstances that you could mention in their life, but here's what's generally true for everybody who is bitter, at some point in their past they got offended. And instead of dealing with it, they chose to stay offended and now they are living offended. And that's how it works.

In fact, the author of Hebrews urges us in chapter 12, verse 15. He says:

*“Watch out,”* be alert, be on the lookout *“that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you,”* and then the result of that is it corrupts many.

So, he's basically saying how bitterness works is you let a little bit of it into your heart because you didn't deal with the offense and then it sort of takes root in you and it overtakes your heart and it troubles you and it corrupts your relationships.

And all of us know somebody who is bitter. That's not hard to discern. We can always see bitterness in other people, it's hard for us to see bitterness in ourselves. So what I just want to challenge you to right now, I know maybe some of you are thinking, “Oh, man. This message is so good. You know, such and such really needs to hear this.

“You know, Karen. Karen needs this message like so bad. So I hope she's here today, Karen. And you know, I don't know when this message is going to get posted online, but I'm totally reposting and I'm tagging Karen. Karen needs to hear this.”

And maybe she does. Nobody is going to dispute that. But can I just ask you right now not to move too quickly to want to bless Karen. What does God want to say to you? Because what's true for me is that I'm usually the last one to see bitterness in my heart, because I get really good at justifying things. I am a great defense attorney for Aaron Brockett. And I can speak up and I can get defensive and I can say, “No, what about this. It's not really bad.”



What is it? Is God doing something in you right now? Reality is, is that even if Karen does need to hear that—poor Karen, we're picking on her, right? My apologies to all of the ladies named Karen.

The reality is that you can't do anything about her bitterness anyway, even if you wanted to. And some of you have tried. You've tried to deal with it. She just digs her heel in farther.

But you can do something about the potential bitterness that is in your own heart. So, can I just very lovingly but very directly ask you this question? Right now. Today:

Is there any bitterness in your heart?

Have the events of 2020 caused bitterness in your heart? Has your divorce caused bitterness in your heart? That person who you loved betrayed you, walked out on you. Is there bitterness in your heart? That failure in your past, you thought those people would always have your back. Has it caused bitterness?

Can I just say that I am so sorry for the hurt that you have? And nobody is going to blame you for feeling that way. Can I also just lovingly invite you to enter in to the painful but yet freeing process of allowing Jesus to free you up from the bitterness, because it's holding you back. It's actually holding you back from God's best for your life, the plans and purposes that he has for you. He wants so much more for you.

Nobody ever won by being bitter. Nobody ever once said, "I'm better because I'm bitter." Nobody.

I can speak from personal experience. Several years ago there was a young leader that I really took a great interest in and was investing into him and pouring into him really believed in him. I was trying to give him as many opportunities as I could. Loved him. Still do. And things got sideways. And he's not here anymore. And he blamed me for some things that really hurt me. And I got offended and I got hurt.

And I didn't deal with it. Some of you are like me, "I don't have time for emotions. I'm a robot." And I just kept forging ahead. If you were to ask me about it, I would be like, "Yeah, it was an unfortunate deal. I've forgiven him. It's all fine. It's all good." Not really.

It came to the surface early last year, 2019, I met another young leader who just joined our staff and he came up all enthusiastic, he came on really strong because he was enthusiastic. He was like, "Oh, man. I'm so glad to be here and I've been listening to your messages for a long time and I can't wait to actually work with you. I can't wait to spend time with you. And I can't wait to actually have coffee with you."

And it just shot into my mind. I didn't even know where it came from. I remember thinking to myself, "Whoa, slow down. I don't know if I want to know you. You might hurt me too." And it stunned me because I didn't know where that thought came from.

And I walked back to my office and I sat down and was as if the Spirit of God said, "Um, Brockett. You didn't deal with it. That hurt, that offense, you've allowed a root of bitterness to take root in your heart and it's going to hold you back if you don't deal with it."

Maybe there is somebody listening to this right now and you need the same message. God, right now, wants so much more for you. He wants to do so much more in you and through you in your life.

And actually the thing that is holding you back is not talent. The thing that is holding you back is not charisma. The thing that is holding you back is not finances—it's bitterness. And maybe you don't even see it. Maybe you don't even know. You've gotten really good at justifying it.

Now, the really, really good news today—I want to give you good news—is that there is a way not only for us to avoid the traps of offense, but actually get out of them if we find that we are stuck in them. Going back to what Jesus said in Luke 17, He said, "It is impossible to not be offended."

And you just think about all of the ways that we can be offended today. I mean there are so many ways that we can be offended. You get offended when somebody suggests that you're 40 when really you're 35. Ladies, you get offended when somebody asks you how far along you are—you're not pregnant—offended.

Single adults, you get offended when somebody is talking to you, "Why don't you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend? What's wrong?" You're like, "What's wrong with your face? That's what I want to know."

You get offended by the posts on social media. You get offended when the coach doesn't give your kid a fair shake. You get offended when you get criticized unfairly and it damages your reputation.

Have you ever just been offended by a look? Somebody gives you a look and you're like, "What does that mean? I'd like to know what they are thinking."

The ways that we can get offended are endless, but I want to bring you back to the message in a statement:

Avoiding an offense is impossible, but living offended that's on you, that's on me.

That's actually a decision that we can make.

"Well, Aaron, how can I let go of that thing in a healthy way?" Well, I'm glad you asked. Proverbs is packed full of practical wisdom for everyday life. And we find this incredible principle, I actually mentioned this a few weeks ago, and it helps us to get out of the trap of offense. It says this in Proverbs, chapter 19, verse 11:

*"A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory,"* and that just simply means magnificence, it means that something is really good, something is beautiful, *"to overlook an offense."*

You unpack that verse a little bit and it says that it's your wisdom that gives you patience, that then gives you the ability to overlook offenses when they come. And we all know this to be true.

I think about some of the people on our staff who are the most respected on our team. And maybe there are a number of reasons that they are so respected, but almost always what they all have in common is that they are not easily offended. They are gracious people who give the benefit of the doubt. They assume the best.

You look at some of the people throughout history who have changed our world for the better. There might be a number of attributes to that. They might be heroic. They might be generous. They might be wise. But almost always they are people who are not easily offended.

So what does it mean to overlook an offense? Well, actually that word comes from the Hebrew word àbar and here's the big idea. To àbar is:

To "overlook an offense" it means to pass or step over it.

So what that means is that during the course of your life and mine, when Satan sets these traps into our path, traps of offense when it comes to any sort of relational dynamic at all, when we come up on a trap, we can choose to step into it and get stuck in it, or we can choose to àbar.

You can choose to react, and you just tell that person off, write them off, or you can àbar. You can step over or around the offense.

Now, let me just offer a few words of caution here, what I don't mean by that. Some of you right now are like, "Well, I think I'm actually really, really good at this because I don't like conflict and so anytime there's any sort of conflict or I get offended and somebody asks if I'm okay, then I say, "I'm okay. I'm fine. Everything is good. It's great."

And you know it ain't all good. And you're not fine. And it's not great. And you didn't àbar, you just stuffed it down deep. And you know that eventually that's going to come out like a volcano at some point. That's not what I'm talking about.

Others of you, you're like, "Well, Aaron. I don't know if I like this whole idea of àbar. It kind of sounds weak. It kind of sounds soft. Man, if somebody offends me, if somebody says something I don't like, man, I need to tell them. I need to put that person in his place."

And I would just simply say this:

It takes more strength to step over an offense than it does to react or respond every time you're offended.

And some of us, we're too defensive. So when somebody comes at us, maybe it's not even a criticism, it's just a little bit of feedback. Ever try to give somebody some healthy feedback in a work evaluation? It's like playing racket-ball with him. You give him some feedback and he's just immediately hitting it back, "No, I'm not going to receive that."

"Well, you don't understand."

"Well, I tried."

And he is just not open to anything. Eventually you're going to stop giving some feedback. When we get overly defensive, that's not àbar either.

I had to learn this sort of the hard way. As a younger leader this was really hard for me. I'd never really seen myself as a leader. In many ways, one of my Achilles heels as a leader is that I don't like displeasing people. And so if I know that you're upset with me, I'll lose sleep over it until we're good.

And early on, as a young leader, I stepped into a role that was way bigger than my ability to fulfill. And immediately I was blindsided with criticism. And I'm not talking about a little bit of feedback. I'm talking about harsh, cutting criticism. And it spun me out. And it caused me to either get gun shy about making decisions or I wanted to lash back out and defend myself every single time. I actually crossed the line into defensiveness.

And I'll never forget an older mentor, who really loved and cared about me, put his arm around me one day. And he said, "Hey, Aaron. I'm watching this in you, and this is going to hold you back. You're not going to make it if you don't deal with this."

And I'll never forget what he said that day. He said, "Aaron, if you're going to be an effective leader, then you need to develop the courage of a lion, because you're going to have to make some tough decisions and not everybody is going to like them, the skin of a rhino, because the arrows will come, and the heart of a teddy bear."

In other words, protect your heart. Thick skin, soft heart, because if you're a leader who develops a bitter heart, then that's the end of your effectiveness as a leader.

Maybe there is somebody who needs to hear that today. Don't stop being courageous. Don't just kind of go in a different direction every time you get criticism. But maintain a soft heart.

And I know that that's true for you as well. Some of you right now, every time you get criticized or you get offended in some way, you don't need to automatically jump to defend yourself. And here's why. This is a little principle you might take with you, your friends, your true friends who really know and love you, they don't need an explanation and your enemies won't believe you no matter what you say.

So instead of trying to defend yourself all of the time, just don't try to convince them. They will ultimately find out the truth about you by the way that you live. That doesn't mean that you don't occasionally speak up, it doesn't mean that you don't respond, it means that you don't react. There is a big difference.

And we respond by assuming the best and leading with love. In Proverbs, chapter 10, verse 12 says:

*"Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs."*

And practically lived out that means that when offended you can assume the worst of someone, or you can lead with love and you can assume the best.

So, can I just ask you today as we begin to close up, what do you normally lead with when you get offended? Do you assume the best about somebody's intentions or motives, or do you automatically jump to the worst possible explanation about it?

You get cut off in traffic do you immediately get offended and go, "Man, that big jerk. He just totally risked my life. God, right now I pray that you would just bring upon him some crippling constipation tonight because of what he just did." You're just assuming the worst.

What if you, in that moment, led with love and assumed the best? I don't know, maybe he got a phone call that his child is in the ER and he's trying to get to the hospital. "Have I ever cut somebody off in traffic when I didn't mean to? Yeah. Hey, I'm going to assume the best and lead with love."

A coworker says something really rude to you. You assume the worst, "Oh, man. She's just trying to get my job." "He's just trying to make me look bad." Or do you assume, "Well, I don't know what he's got going on in his life. Maybe today he's really dealing with something at home. Maybe he wasn't thinking. Maybe he's got poor people skills and he came across in the wrong way." I'm not saying you stuff it, you can investigate, have a conversation, talk about it, but you lead with love and you assume the best.

Maybe a friend ghosts your text message. You text him, don't hear anything back, and you actually put a lot of thought into that text. And your waiting for a response. What's even worse, you ever get the bubbles showing that they are texting you back. And you're like, "Okay, here it comes." Then the bubbles go away and nothing.

And you're just like, "Well, didn't he have the courage to hit send?" We can assume the worst. I don't know. Maybe he got distracted. Maybe he just decided that day that he was just going to take a day and be text free for a while. I don't know, just assume the best. Lead with love.

Hey, this is what's true in marriage. You want to know the secret to marriage? It's not the romance. It's not perfect compatibility. Marriage is two imperfect people who are always assuming the best about each other's motives and they lead with love. I'm talking about in a healthy marriage, not in an abusive one.

Can I just give you this little principle for free right here? When it comes to your relationships, it's that when you win an argument, and some of you are really, really good at this, you just want to be right. When you when an argument with anyone you care about, the relationship always loses. You might have made your point, but it's costing the relationship something.

In Revelation it describes Satan as an accuser. And that should be an alarm for us. That when we are always accusing others, then perhaps we are never more like him.

But when we can assume the best, and lead with love, in a gracious and generous spirit, who's that more like? Man, that's more like our Savior. That's more like Jesus. And if he didn't do that for you, you wouldn't stand a chance of doing it for others.

I love how the King James Version translates Romans, chapter 4, verse 25. It says Jesus:

*"...was delivered for our offenses,"* yours and mine, *"and was raised again for our justification."*

And growing up I never knew what that word meant. My Sunday school teacher told me, "Well, Aaron. That just means just as if you've never sinned." And I was like, "Oh, man. That's amazing. That's an easy way for me to remember that." He was delivered for our offenses and he was raised again so that we could be just as if we never sinned.

And see, our sin, we've got to be reminded was really offensive to God. It was a deterrent to our relationship with him. Sin is not just like a list of things that God kind of created off to the side and was like, "Well, here's all of the naughty list. Don't want you to do those because that's a no no." No, sin is anything that actually creates space between you and a God who loves you.

And he made the first move. In fact, Romans tells us that he sent Jesus, knowing full well that not everybody would receive him. But he said, "No, I'll still go. I'll still lead with love and cover the gap with grace."

So today I just want to invite you into that relationship. Maybe you grew up in church your whole life, but you didn't grow up in Christ. Maybe today that's going to change. Maybe you've grown up religious, but you didn't really let grace get into your heart. Maybe today you're just going to begin to realize, there's a root of bitterness that's choking out your heart that you didn't even know was there.

And I want you to know that it is never too late to be set free by a God who covers you by his love and grace.

See, being offended, that's just what it means to be human. Living offending, that's a choice. And you can make a different one.

And today if you're ready to begin following Jesus, just very simply, wherever you are, in person or online, you can just text Jesus to 87221 and our team would love to follow up with you, just help you take your next step to whatever that growth is.

So, what I want to do right now is just invite all of us, whatever campus you're joining us from, whether you are on campus at Purdue, you're in a watch party in somebody's back yard, you're joining us online from your living room, would you just stand to your feet and we're going to pray, we're going to ask the Spirit of God to come.

And this is the part of the message that's application. This is the part of the message where, we sang some songs, we said hello to a few people, we've heard a message and now is the time for us to actually invite the Spirit of God, who is in the room that you are in right now, to do a work on your heart.

And that's going to come by lifting our voices and singing and inviting him into our presence. And I don't want you to move past this moment. I don't want you to leave too early. Maybe your body will stay here but maybe your mind is somewhere else. I want you to just stay in the moment for a few minutes together and just pray that the Spirit of God might do a transformational work in your heart.

Father, we come to you right now and I am just so grateful that your word is so living and active, it is sharper than any double-edged sword.

And, God, right now I pray that there may be a number of people whose eyes are opened to the fact that maybe they've been trapped by bitterness and it is a root that has overtaken their life, troubling them, and corrupting many.

God, our life is too short and your plans for us are far too big for us to stay in that trap. And you sent Jesus so that we could be set free from it. So, Father, today I pray that we would taste and see that your grace is so good.

God, I pray that if there is any one of us who maybe forfeited that, we've actually traded, it's a poor substitute. We've been going through religious behavior, but we've never been changed by your grace. And that doesn't mean that we need to overlook the hurt that's in our lives or to downplay it or dismiss it. We need to redirect it. We need to give it to you, the great physician, to heal us from that.

God, I pray that somebody's life, right now, in these moments would change because of your love and your grace. We ask this in Jesus' name. And everybody says: Amen.