

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

I WILL NOT STAY OFFENDED | SET LIKE FLINT

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Well, we are honored that you would be with us today across all of our locations and those of you tuning in online. We're really glad that you're here today.

If you have a Bible, head over to Colossians, chapter 3. That's the passage that we're going to be working through together in just a moment.

I want to start this way. When I was in college I worked a part time job for a family friend. And one day when I was getting ready to get off my shift, his wife had come over to the office. We were making some small talk. They had a younger daughter who was about a year younger than me.

Now, I what you need to know about her is that she was a year younger than me and I'd grown up around this family. So, the way in which I viewed their daughter was kind of like a little sister. I kind of had an older brother kind of thing. That's an important factor that you need to remember as I tell this story.

So, as we are talking they kind of bring their daughter up. And her name was Sarah (not her real name, I've changed the names to protect the innocent). So, they bring her up and they were talking about how she and her boyfriend had just split up and how sad she was. They were talking about their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for Sarah. And they said, "We're really praying that God would bring a fine young man into her life to date.

You may see where this is going. Her mom looked right at me. I've known this family my whole life. She looked right at me, and she said, "Maybe you, Aaron." Now remember that part when I said that I kind of viewed their daughter like a little sister. That will explain what I did next without even thinking about it. I laughed and then I said, "Oh, not Sarah."

Now, what I meant was that I kind of see her as a little sister. I would be like this older brother figure. I would try to intimidate the guys she would date. That's what I meant. That's not how she took it. She looked right at me, gave me this cold look, and she was offended. I didn't mean to offend her. I didn't want to offend her. But, nonetheless, that's what I had done.

I'm just kind of wondering if anybody has ever been in a situation similar to that where you've been talking to somebody, and you fell into an offense. You didn't mean to offend,



you didn't want to offend, nonetheless it was very clear that you had offended this other person.

Or flip the tables. Have you ever been talking to somebody and they said something or did something that offended you? Maybe they weren't totally aware of it in that moment, but that's what they had done.

Now, I don't even need to ask you to raise your hands, because the answer to both of those should be a resounding yes. We are all fallen, broken, sinful human beings and we are going to get offended, and we are going to offend. That's just a fact of life.

There are a number of different reasons for this. One would just be personality differences. They are oftentimes the culprit of offense. Don't you agree? Somebody is kind of like up here with their personality and others of us are kind of down here. And the collision is an offense. Somebody is extroverted; you're introverted. Somebody has a different sense of humor than you do. What they think is funny you don't think is funny or vice versa.

How many of you are like me? You have the spiritual gift of sarcasm; you just break that out in all of the wrong places. You're like, "Oops, I've offended once again." Personality differences.

Another one would just be generational differences, I think. People of different generations just kind of have a different lens, kind of see the world a little bit differently. How many of you have anybody in Gen Z living in your house? They are using words, and you have no idea what they are saying? You are like, "I don't know if I should be offended or not."

Maybe it's another culture. Have you ever traveled to another culture, and you don't know the traditions, you don't know what you should do when you walk into somebody's house? And maybe you just accidentally offended, you didn't mean to, but that's what happened.

I was recently exchanging text messages with a friend of mine who lives in Germany, he's German. We were texting back and forth. All of a sudden he offered me an apology. And he said, "Hey, I really feel like I need to apologize for what I said a few texts ago." And I didn't know what he was talking about.

He goes, "I forgot I was texting an American." And he was like, "Us Germans are way more straight forward than you, so if I offended you, I apologize." And he hadn't offended me at all. I actually appreciate straight forwardness. But he had done that before, clearly. So, he recognized in a different culture, "I've offended."

See, the question isn't if you are going to be offended, or when you're going to be offended. The question is (it's going to happen and when it happens) what do you do



with it? That's what we're talking about today. Actually, in that moment, what you do with an offense—there is more at stake than what you might realize.

If you are just now joining us, we are about half-way through a message series that we started at the beginning of the year with the funny title, Set Like Flint. It comes right out of a passage of Scripture in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, in chapter 50, verse 7 where the prophet said these words. He says, "I will set my face like flint upon the sovereign Lord."

So, what this series is about is developing, as followers of Jesus, what we are calling godly grit or a spiritual backbone to go the distance with a series of declarations. On week one we talked about how we're going to declare that we are going to be more consistent. Week two, we talked about how we're going to declare war on temptation. Last week we said that we declare that we are going to receive and process and respond, if necessary, to the criticism that comes our way.

Today, where we are going is that we are going to declare that we won't stay offended. Now, we aren't declaring that we won't be offended because that's impossible, we are declaring that we won't stay there and that's different because, if you could say this sermon in a sentence today it would be this:

Being offended is unavoidable; staying offended is a choice

And it is a choice with devastating consequences. Here's what I've been praying for all week. Our team has been praying this—that somebody would get set free from an offense maybe you are not even aware you've been holding on to.

Maybe some of you right now are really struggling, and maybe 2025 hasn't gotten off to the start that you had hoped that it would have. Maybe you're just really struggling right now. You've been praying and it feels like God is silent, it feels like you are stuck, and you are not making any spiritual progress.

There could be a number of reasons for that, but one big culprit to this is when we are holding onto an offense, whether we know it or not—it will block the movement of the Holy Spirit in your life and in mine. I've been praying that some of us would come to recognize those chains that are holding us back and that we would be set free from them.

When you walked in today, if you are at one of our physical locations, you should have been given a stone like this. In fact, I want everybody just to go ahead and grab the stone you were given on the way in and hold onto it.

Now, I want you to know it takes a great deal of faith for me to give you a projectile weapon as I stand in front of you. Last week if you didn't like the sermon, you could just give me a little red, frowny face—no big deal. This week, we could play back the book of Acts, and you could stone me. In fact, when I told the team I wanted to do this last week,



I sent the whole security team on red alert. They are panicking right now. Please pray for them. I've got a great amount of faith that you won't do that.

Hold on to that stone. Here's what that stone represents. An offense that you may or may not realize you've been holding on to. It's actually blocking the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in your life. So, in the midst of this message I just want you to keep ahold of that rock. Maybe you're like, "I just need to take notes." Well, put it in your lap. Just keep it within eyesight.

Here's a prayer that I want to be running in the background of your mind as I'm preaching today. Ask God to reveal to you if there is an offense in your life that you've been holding on to. Maybe for some of you, you don't have to think about it. You know exactly what I'm talking about as soon as I say it. Some of you are like, "I need more than one rock."

Some of you are like, "I don't really know." And that could be for any number of reasons. Maybe you've suppressed it. You've denied it. Whatever it is, just ask God, "God, would you reveal something to me."

And I'm going to ask you not to leave this auditorium today with that rock. You can only do one of two things with it. And I'll tell you what here in about 30 minutes.

I also want you to know that at the end of the sermon, that's not the end of the service. I feel like I need to point that out because sometimes when I get done preaching I look up and it's like the Red Sea. Don't leave early because I'm trying not to preach as long today to give us room for the most important thing that we're going to do all day.

Our passage is Colossians 3, five verses. Paul writes these words:

"Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance,"

That word means be understanding, take into consideration. Maybe a slang term would be: cut someone some slack.

"... make allowance for each other's faults," because we've all got them," and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts.

"For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father." Colossians 3:12-17 (NLT)

What we just read is a part of a letter and we call the letters that occupy the middle of the New Testament epistles, so when you hear that word epistle what it means is letter. And Paul is writing this to a group of real people not so different from you and me, living in the real city of Colossae.

There is a lot that has changed from the first century to today, but on the other hand there is not much that has changed because it is very, very clear that the reason why Paul has to even put this in the letter is because, clearly, there were some people who got offended by each other within this church harboring some angry and resentful thoughts that were holding them back. And it was hurting more than just their relationships, it was hurting them, and it was actually hindering the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Would you not agree that today we live in an age of rage? It just seems like everyone is so offended and gets offended so easily. People are just losing their ever-loving minds. We see these video clips of people losing it on airplanes and road rage and in grocery stores—it feels as if you can't say anything without somebody taking it the wrong way and being offended.

What makes it worse is we've all got these global megaphones [cell phones]. Where it's like, "If I've got an opinion, if I'm offended, I'm going to post about it and it's instant, it's constant, and it's permanent. And it's just all of this rage twirling around us.

Now, did you know that the Bible predicted that? It says that in the last days this was going to happen. Now, when I say last days don't get freaked out. I'm not talking about, "Hey, 25 reasons why Jesus is coming back in 2025." I'm not doing that.

In fact, the Bible says the only thing that we are to be concerned about when it comes to the second return of Christ is to be ready. We're not trying to guess when it will be, we're just to be ready for when it might be. By the way, when the Bible uses the term last days, that's been true ever since Jesus ascended into heaven 2,000 years ago. We have been in the last days.

And it says that it's kind of like a pregnancy when the contractions get closer and more intense, it's saying that's like the pains of childbirth. We don't know if He's coming in two minutes or another 2,000 years. It doesn't really matter. Just be ready.

But one of the things that Jesus said about the last days is He says, "What you'll see is more people are offended. Matthew, chapter 24, verses 10 to 11, I'm going to read this in the New King James Version says in the end days:

"...many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many."



Would you not agree that that is kind of the culture in which we live? And then he says, here's what will happen, false prophets will then rise up and deceive many. So, it sets the stage, when we are offended and when we are hating one another, for all kinds of false prophets to deceive the masses. And I would say that's a pretty good description of what is going on.

So, Paul writes to this church in Colossae, and he says, "Listen guys. You got triggered by something, you got offended by what somebody else did in your life, and that sparked an offense, and it swept like wildfire through the church, and it's a trap. Don't fall into the trap."

If you've been in our church for the last several months, we've been talking a lot about a couple of things. We've been talking a lot about the fact that we are in a war. I'm just trying to make you aware of the fact that you are in a war. Now, not a physical war. And your enemy is not flesh and blood. It's a spiritual war with the principalities and powers of darkness in the evil realm.

When you go public with your faith, expect to be attacked in private. When you get serious about Jesus, Satan gets serious about you, and he creates this big, red target on your back.

So, right now if it feels like something strange is happening, it feels like, "You know what? I've started reading my Bible very single day, I've gone 23 consecutive days reading my Bible. I haven't missed church. I'm taking my faith seriously. I'm planning to do the 21 days of prayer and fasting, and it feels like I'm in a war."

It's because you are. You have an enemy with a real name. He is a fallen angel and his name is Satan. And for some of you, I just lost you, "I don't believe in that guy. You know that guy with the horns and a pitchfork, playing pranks, Yeah, I don't believe."

It's fascinating to me, statistically, the number of Christians who believe in God more than they believe in Satan. And so, if you are one of those, "I don't think I believe in that guy," he's like, "Good, I'd rather you not. I can be far more effective against you if you think I'm just an imaginary figure."

He is coming against you and here's what he would love to do. He would love to get you to get mad at God, abandon your faith, and walk away from the church. But if he can't do that, listen, here's what he'll do. He'll just make you inconsistent in your faith. He can't get you to walk away, he just gets you to be sporadic.

I want to say this, and I want to say this with a brokenhearted tone, a pastoral tone. I bump into people out in public and they are like, "Hey Pastor Aaron."

"Hey, how's it going?"

“Oh, man. Honestly, things have been really hard lately. And it’s been a while since I’ve been in church.”

And I always want to be like, why is it our natural reaction when life begins to fall apart that we pull away? It’s like a sheep being pulled away from the flock. Satan wants to pick you off in isolation. Don’t run from the gathering, run to the gathering. It isn’t perfect, but you’re not perfect either.

So, he’ll just make you inconsistent. Just occasionally. Just every once in a while. If he can’t get you to abandon your faith, here’s what he’ll do. He will just entice you and take you down with your temptations to the point where you just wallow in your shame over giving in once again. He’ll just embitter you through the criticism that comes your way.

Or he will put you in a situation where you will get offended by what somebody says or does and then hold on to it. It is, perhaps, one of the most sinister weapons that Satan uses against you individually and as a church. And the irony of the weapon is that you’re the one holding it.

“Pastor Aaron, what are you talking about?” Well, when the Bible says the word or uses the word offense the big idea is the anger or the resentment that is attached to it. So, when Paul says in our passage today, “Forgive anyone who offends you,” what he is saying is, forgive anyone who has made you angry. Forgive anyone who you resent right now in your life. And that’s a bit different because if I don’t forgive and I don’t release it, then I’m inevitably choosing to give into it, and I live my life as an angry or resentful person.

Now, I’ve got to be honest with you guys. This whole series has kind of hit a little harder than what I anticipated or intended it to. It’s almost like every single week I’m like, “Man, it just kind of feels like body blow after body blow of conviction.” You are like really, really quiet in the room in all of the services. And here’s the deal that I just want you to know, especially if you are new to our church, if it feels like I’m stepping on your toes, it’s because God has already crushed my feet.

Sometimes it’s like if I’m laying out the message series and I’m like, “Oh, that will be really good to preach on,” and then I come to the date and I’m like, “What was I thinking?” I’ll show you what this looks like: number one, I will choose to be consistent. And then all of a sudden I’m struggling to be consistent.

I will declare war on temptation. All of a sudden it’s like, I’m fighting all of these temptations that I thought that I’d left in the rear-view mirror. Or when it comes to criticism, I preach on criticism and give all of this sound counsel, a whole other wave of criticism comes in.

Then it comes to this issue: I will not stay offended. And this last week I was like, “You know what? Finally, I think I’m okay on this one.” I don’t think that I’m holding on to

anything. And all of a sudden... That's a stupid thing to think, man. It's like all of a sudden the Holy Spirit starts to bring some stuff to mind.

He'll tap me on the head, "What about this person that you wrote about that you're really close with. He hurt you. And you kind of said you forgave, but really what you did is you just kind of wrote him off like, 'Good riddance.'" He brings that person back to mind. You didn't really forgive them. There is still some bitterness that is in your heart over that. You need to let go.

"Hey, Brockett. Let's think about this, man. People may say whatever they want against you. You're fine. You've just got to let that roll, but don't you get a little bit angry or resentful if somebody says or does something that hurts your wife or your kids or your friends? Somebody says something about your friends, you get defensive, you want to come to their aid."

Or our church. Man, our church isn't perfect. Far from it. But, I love our church, the bride of Christ. Blood sweat and tears have been invested into this place, so if people take shots at our church, it makes me angry

I even get a little bit resentful whenever people say things about my beard, my shirt, my tattoo, or my cat jokes. It's like: offense, offense, offense, offense. Just a little bit of resentment builds up and all of a sudden I'm like, "Man, maybe I've got some more work to do."

You know, in James, chapter 1, verse 19 it says these really convicting words:

"Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry." (NLT)

Can I just ask you this? How are you doing with that? Now, I've got to tell you, I am applying this verse perfectly if we flip it—in reverse. Because I can be so slow to listen, fast to speak, super-fast to get angry. And, man, if that's you, if you can relate to any of that, that is a major foothold that Satan gets. We give in to him, we give it up in our lives and the life of our church.

What we've been praying over the last few months and then coming into 2025 is for an awakening, for a revival, for a renewal. I think we are seeing signs of that around our nation and around the world. We're just asking God for His full presence in the life of our church and in our individual lives. A renewal. A revival. An encounter with the living God.

That's part of when we say, "Come ready," what we mean. That you're not just showing up going through the motions, but you're showing up ready, leaning in, saying, "I want to have an encounter with the living God. I want to hear from Him today."

One of the things that keeps me up at night, as a pastor, after doing this for about 25 years or so, is that I've learned how to teach and preach and I've learned how to do

systems and programs, and I've learned how to operate a church. Here's the thing that will keep me awake at night. If the Holy Spirit left would we notice? Or have we just gotten really good at doing church, where we just kind of keep the thing going, but we don't really know that He slipped out the back door because He's no longer wanted or needed. We've depended upon natural things rather than supernatural things.

And the thing that will keep our church from an awakening, the thing that will keep our church from a revival, the thing that will keep you from having an encounter with the living God is when you hold on to an offense and you refuse to let it go.

This is what 21 days of prayer and fasting is all about and the worship night that we're going to have next month. That is what this is about.

Right now, is there anything in your life that you can't fully put your finger on? Some of you are like, "You know what? I'm really trying to earnestly follow after God, but it feels like there is some sort of a distance between me and Him. Something is hindering my prayers." Maybe it's this. Maybe there is an offense that you are holding on to and it is blocking the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Once again you are like, "Pastor Aaron, what are you talking about. You're losing me." Well, the Greek word for offend comes from this little word right here:

Skandalon

And the word signifies the laying of a trap, specifically the part of the trap to which the bait is attached. So, the New Testament pictures this as a trap that our enemies set that we step into. 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 23 says:

"Again I say, don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights. A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people."

Any of you have those people in your life? We call them EGRs—extra grace required. You can see them coming a mile away. It makes sense. Right? It's not hard to be patient with easy to get along with people. It requires patience to get along with difficult people. And then he says:

"Gently instruct those who oppose the truth." There is a lot of truth opposing going on now a days. "Perhaps God will change those people's hearts," because, by the way, He is the only One who can, you are not going to convince anybody of anything, "and they will learn the truth. Then they will come to their senses and escape from," here it is, "the devil's trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants." 2 Timothy 2:23-26 (NLT)

Now, we're reading this as if it's applying to somebody else. Maybe you read these verses and you're like, "I know that guy. I know that girl. I'm going to forward this sermon to somebody. They really need to hear this because they are trapped by Satan's trap."

And what I want you to do is I want you to turn the passage like a mirror and ask yourself if maybe you have stepped into the trap that Satan has set for you. We do that when we get offended and we hold onto the offense, we harbor the anger, we harbor the resentment in our hearts. It's one of his greatest schemes to bring to you and me to keep us in captivity.

Here's how this works. The visual. There is a live trap set up here on stage. So, when the Bible talks about this, what happens is that when we get offended here's what goes on [the gets triggered and snaps shut]. And then all of a sudden it's like clamped down on you and now you've got a decision to make. You can either be set free or not be released from the trap.

Here's what many of us do. We step into the offense, and we stay offended, and we get triggered, we get angry, we get resentful. Maybe we have good reason to because a person has legitimately hurt us. But instead of being released from it we just carry it around like this [dragging it behind us]. We are just dragging this trap along through our lives.

And when that happens, the resentment begins to overwhelm us. We can't move forward anymore. If you step into a trap, you aren't going to run a marathon because it's ensnared you, it's holding you back. This is the imagery, the word picture that the New Testament gives us for holding onto an offense or anger or resentment in your life.

I want to show you what this looks like and how easy it can be to slip into. I actually had the idea for this illustration on Monday. And I texted one of the guys. For any of our sermon slides, any of the visuals that I use up on this stage, like the bench press a couple of weeks ago, there is one guy behind them. His name is Jack. And Jack is amazing.

So, I texted Jack on Monday, and I said, "Hey, I have this idea for a visual on stage. Do you think you could get a live trap?" And he immediately sent me back a little video of doing what I just did in his garage. And I was like, "Holy cow."

I want to show you the text message. I said, "Is that yours?" And he said, "Well, I purchased these at Cabela's. And then he said, "I returned them after you didn't use them in September of 2020." The next sentence may be a little bit passive aggressive, "I could go buy one again."

I've got to tell you, man. I had no memory of that at all (I've blocked most of 2020 out of my mind) but apparently back in 2020 I was preaching on this theme, and I had this idea,



and he went out and he bought the traps and was ready to go, but I pulled it. Opportunity for him to be offended.

Hey, I've actually had conversations with people, by the way, where we are coming to a heated moment and I'm like, "What is wrong?" And all of a sudden they say, "Well, you said (or did) something four years ago." I'm like, "Whoa. I don't even remember four days ago, let alone four years ago."

And they were never released from it. They never brought it to my attention. They acted like they were okay, but they stayed trapped in that offense and by the time it finally came to the surface it was too late to do anything about it. The damage had been done.

So, Jack could have done that in September of 2020. Here's the next text I sent to him. I said, "Okay, now I feel bad." And he said, "No." In other words: Don't feel bad. "I love getting to do this. When else would I have to go and ask, what's the largest trap you own?"

I love it. That was officially what he said. He could have offered some bitterness over the fact that I didn't use the illustration when he'd gone the length back in 2020, but he let it go. That's what I'm talking about. Getting offended, that's going to happen. Staying offended, that's a choice.

Two little books that I would highly encourage you to read, put them on your book list"

"The Bait of Satan" John Bevere

and

"Unoffendable" by Brant Hansen

Required reading for any of us who know another human being and we want to follow after God. Satan loves to trap us through an offense so that we just simply can't move forward.

And ironically we think... You ever done this? You get trapped by an offense or you're upset with somebody and you're like, "I'm showing them how mad I am." And in reality we're the ones who are stuck. They are not in the trap. Very likely they don't even know. They are not aware. They are not around anymore. They don't even care. You're the one who is trapped.

Now, some of you are like, "Aaron, okay I get it. I could let go of little petty offenses like that. Somebody accidentally offends me or says the wrong thing. That was a nice little sermon illustration you did. Probably not difficult for Jack to forgive you, But what about the big things?"

So, let's go ahead and go there. What about the big things? Maybe you've got an ex-spouse. You're sharing custody of the kids and on the days when he or she has the kids

they take every opportunity to undermine you and to slander you and to say all kinds of untrue things about you to your kids. What do you do then?

What about somebody who has cheated on you and was unfaithful to you and never apologized for it? What about the family member who abused you when you were a kid and now is no longer around? What about the friend who just gossiped about you, and you saw the text thread to all of your friends, ruining your reputation?

What about the coworker who undermined you and now you got overlooked for the promotion that you deserved? What about the business partner whose lack of integrity and dishonesty has now left you on the brink of financial ruin? And they never said they were sorry. They never got caught. Justice doesn't seem like it's been served. In fact, they keep turning the knife. Maybe, they are no longer around. What do you do then?

What do you do with the anger and the resentment that you feel over something where somebody has done you wrong? And it's so clear that they have.

Common ways we deal with an offense:

Well, here are some common ways that we try to deal with the offenses that come into our lives. I don't know if you can relate to any of these. I can relate to all of them.

Bury it

Sometimes we just try to bury it. We're just like, "Well, I don't know if I can ever fix it. I don't know if they are ever going to apologize, so let me just stuff it and try to forget it." And we throw ourselves into work or our accomplishments and we never really deal with it. It's kind of like we never take out the trash. We just keep pushing it further and further down in the can, but it still stinks. Eventually it's going to overflow. And it does. Which leads us to another way.

Vent it

We think, "Well, instead of burying it, I'm going to go the other way. I'm just going vent my anger and resentment all of the time." How many of you have ever heard of these anger management, rage rooms? We actually have these in Indy right now. It's kind of like an escape room except you go, you get dressed up, so you don't hurt yourself, you walk into the room, and you just wreak havoc all over the room trying to get your anger out.

Or there is something else called rage rituals. To describe them, I quote, "Wellness ceremonies where participants express anger and other emotions by screaming, yelling, and hitting sticks on the ground often held in remote locations. Participants are encouraged to think about people and experiences that have wronged them." And some of you are on your phone booking an appointment, "That sounds pretty good."



Newsweek actually did an article on this a few years ago. Notice this: Scientist Bust the Myth that Venting Helps Reduce Anger.

Brad Bushman, Professor of Communication at Ohio State University said, "Venting anger might sound like a good idea, but there is not a shred of scientific evidence to support catharsis theory.

A study a few years ago The Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology found that people who acted aggressively after they were provoked did sometimes feel better immediately afterward. However, the catharsis was short lived as they were more likely to respond with aggression the next time they felt angry. In other words, you aren't getting to the root of it.

Science is always catching up to the wisdom of Scripture because Proverbs 29 told us this a long time ago:

"Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end." Proverbs 29:11 (NIV)

So, sometimes we try to bury it, sometimes we try to vent it, others.

Act on it (revenge)

Others of us, though, just try to act on it. We're just going to seek some revenge. When I was growing up there was a really popular phrase that I heard all of the time: I don't get mad, I get even. Yeah, you were there too. And we just think, "Well, you know what? I'll just get even and that will actually do away with my anger."

But, once again, every study shows that when you take revenge, your anger gets worse not better. What Scripture tells us to do is to never take revenge. There is not a single time in Scripture or an exception when the Scripture says that we should take revenge. Some of you are like, "Where does it say that?" Romans, chapter 12:

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone." Not just the people you like or agree with or get along with. "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you," meaning you can't control them, but you can control you, "live at peace with everyone."

Here it is:

"Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.'" Romans 12:17-20 (NIV)

What's that about? Conviction. Leave it to the Holy Spirit to bring conviction upon them because they actually see your calm nature and they see that there is something supernatural about that and it convicts them.

What Scripture says to us about this is so counter intuitive, but Jesus actually takes it to a whole new level when He offers these really sobering words in Matthew 6. He says:

"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you." And I wish that He stopped talking right then. "But if you refuse,"

So, it's like, "No. I'm going to stay trapped because what they did wronged me. So, I refuse to forgive. I refuse to let that go."

Then He says, "...your Father will not forgive your sins." Matthew 6:14-15 (NLT)

Man, that is a rough passage. Am I allowed, as a pastor, to say I don't like that passage? I don't like it. I'm guessing you don't like it either.

Man, I've heard people read that passage and they try to do all kinds of hermeneutical hula hooping around it. Hermeneutical is just a fancy word for Bible interpretation. So, they are like, "Well, you know. There is no way," that's my hula hoop interpretation, "There's no way, there's no way that Jesus literally meant that. That's hyperbolic language." Is it?

"Well, you know what He's talking about there is not that God wouldn't forgive you, but your heart would get so hard in your unforgiveness that you'd no longer be able to receive the forgiveness of God." Is it?

Or we could just take the passage at face value, even though we don't like it, including me. Maybe what Jesus is saying is God won't forgive you unless you forgive others. Man, I thought it would be quiet in here.

Please understand this. When the Bible says hard things like that, it's not a threat, it's a warning. There is a difference between a warning and a threat. A threat is like, "Or else." A warning is made out of love. You're only hurting yourself.

Can I just say this? This is just an observation. In 25 years of preaching, not every sermon comes with the same amount of spiritual warfare or resistance. So, what I mean is there are sometimes when the spiritual warfare before and during and right after I preach a sermon like this is much more intense than others.

What I mean by spiritual warfare—it could be anything. I could mean physical sickness. I don't know how many Easters and Christmases I've preached from this platform sick. And I don't see a devil under every rock, but sometimes I'm like, "Okay, come man. Is this a coincidence? Every time we're going to have a packed-out house I get strep throat."

Or I'll have a series of things that happen: a water leak at home, a flat tire on my truck, whatever. Maybe there is some sort of personal issue, a certain crisis, a financial thing that just comes up. I just feel off. I feel resistance in the room.

You want to know the three subjects that I preach on where I get the most spiritual resistance? Sex and sexual ethics. Money and generosity. And forgiveness. It's like clockwork. I think that there is no coincidence in this because in all three of those are Satan's favorite areas to keep you trapped and held back from God's best in your life.

Forgiveness is the way that God wants to free you. Anybody like, "Well, there has been so much wrong done against me." Yeah, there has. And there is a massive difference between getting angry, which is totally understandable, and holding onto that anger.

Listen, man. Getting angry is not a sin. Just like noticing an attractive person is not lust. It's what you do next. It's like, "Am I going to hold onto it? Am I going to harbor it?" If I harbor the anger, that's what turns into sin.

Some of you are like, "Well, what about this righteous anger that the Bible talks so much about?" And I would say, "Does it? Does it really talk that much about that?" And you are like, "Well, yeah. The Bible talks about the times we can be righteously angry." And I hate to burst your bubble, man. It does not.

Actually, any time the Bible talks about righteous anger, it is in reference to only one person: God. Because He's the only one who is righteous. He's the only one who is sinless or perfect. In other words, He's the only one who can handle it without it destroying everything.

Do you know the Bible mentions anger 49 times and 45 verses are in the New Testament? And the phrase to be angry is listed only nine times, only three of those are in reference to human beings. You know what they are?

The first one: Matthew, chapter 5, the sermon on the mount. Jesus preaches this message. This is not on a slide; I'm just going to read it to you. Jesus says this:

"You must not murder. If you commit murder you are subject to judgement." And all of us are like, "Yep. We can get up with that." "But, I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgement. If you call someone an idiot you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell."

Now, I'm pretty sure those things happen every week in the parking lot after church. In the Traders Point hunger games parking lot. You know what I'm talking about. You experienced it coming in today. You called someone an idiot and you told them they were not number one. That's what He's talking about.

Luke 15, in the parable of the prodigal son, you've got the younger son who tells his dad he wishes he were dead, "Give me my share of the inheritance." He goes off to a foreign land. He blows it on wild living. But his older brother, the holier than thou son, the perfect son, stayed with his father. He didn't do any of that stuff. And then he was angry when his younger brother came home, and his father received him back and reinstated him. That's the second time.

The third is Ephesians 4:26 where it says, "In your anger don't sin." In other words, don't let the day end while you are still angry. You're still going to get angry upon occasion, just get rid of it as fast as you can.

So, we end up using the term righteous anger as justification to stay trapped in our resentment. And it doesn't mean that. Some of us are destroying our lives due to the anger or the resentment that is in our hearts. The Psalmist says this in Psalm 37:

"Be still in the presence of the LORD, and wait patiently for him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes. Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper—it only leads to harm." Psalm 37:7-8 (NLT)

In other words, don't take the bait.

In the New Testament, the only thing we're told to do with anger is get rid of it

The only thing in the New Testament that we're told to do with our anger is to get rid of it. Ephesians 4:31:

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior." (NLT)

So, really quickly what I want to do. And I mean really quickly like super-fast. This is as fast as I can make it. I just want to say this: The way to get rid of that resentment and anger is to forgive. And I just really quickly want to tell you what it is not, what forgiveness is not, and what it is. There is a lot of confusion around that. So, just really, really quickly:

Forgiveness is not forgetting, accepting, or trusting

Those are not the same things, "Well, I just need to forgive and forget." We're not talking about amnesia. It's not like sweeping it under the rug and saying, "Well, that's okay. It's fine." It's not an excuse for somebody to continue to abuse you or to continue to treat you like a door mat.

And it's not the same as trust. If anybody ever comes to you and tries to gaslight you by saying, "I thought you forgave me so now you can trust me," that's wrong because you can forgive in an instant, trust takes a long time. There are people you forgive but that doesn't mean you trust them right now. Now, eventually one day you will, but not right in that instance. You can forgive them in a moment, trust takes time.

Forgiveness is not a feeling

Some of you are waiting to feel like forgiveness and that will never happen. Never once in Scripture is forgiveness linked to our feelings. It's a decision.

Forgiveness isn't fair!

And then, finally, forgiveness isn't fair. Some of you are saying, "I hear everything that you are saying, but Aaron, it's not fair." And you are right. Forgiveness isn't fair. And you wouldn't want it to be, by the way. Because God forgave you and He forgave me when we didn't deserve it.

In the book of Romans, it says: while we were still sinners. I like to read it this way. While I was still sinning, it's present tense, it's an act of rebellion, Christ died for me. Grace means underserved favor. God gave you what you don't deserve to put you in right standing with Him.

So, now the parable of the unmerciful debtor in Matthew 18, if we can be forgiven of so much, would we turn around and refuse forgive others?

What is forgiveness? Really quickly:

Forgiveness is a decision to release the wrong

Forgiveness is a decision to release the wrong, that's what it is. You're not telling the other person it's okay, you're not telling them that there are no consequences. What you are doing is releasing or letting go of that thing that is keeping you in prison.

There is kind of a financial undertone to this concept. It's a debt/debtor relationship. So, what that means is, somebody hurts you and now they owe you something, they owe you a marriage, they owe you your purity, they owe you your innocence, they owe you your reputation, your childhood, your sanity.

They owe you because they took something from you, they hurt you. But even if they wanted to, they can't give it to you. So, what you're doing is you're saying, "I'm going to let go of that because I know you can't ever give it back to me, so you don't owe me anymore."

Forgiveness can't change your past, but gives you back your future.

Forgiveness cannot change your past, what it does is it gives you back your future. You cannot move into the future without release. Any of you ever see those nature shows where an animal gets its foot stuck in a trap and somebody tries to come up to release it and it lashes out at them? Maybe they are able to get ahold of the claws and they have to dig it in deeper causing the animal more pain in order for there to be a release. That's forgiveness.

Forgiveness is freedom



Lastly, forgiveness is freedom. That's what it is. We deceive ourselves into thinking that by refusing to forgive we're just punishing the other person, but that is just not true. Lewis Smedes puts it this way, "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."

Listen, man. I've got all kinds of faces in my traps, and I've got to be willing to let them go and to forgive. And here's why. Here's maybe the most important thing:

Whatever doesn't get transformed gets transferred

So, man if you choose to not deal with it, it doesn't go away. You'll just transfer it. You'll transfer it to the people you love, you'll transfer it down the family line, you'll transfer it to your relationships.

Some of you, you're experiencing generational sin because maybe it was your great grandfather who had something happen to him, or your great grandmother, and they got offended or they got hurt or they got angry or they got resentful and they didn't deal with it and instead of it getting transformed it got transferred. You don't even know what the thing was but you're dealing with the consequences of it. Generational sin.

Maybe for some of us today you're like, "You know what? This anger and resentment is eating me alive. It needs to stop right now by me releasing it. I'm not saying the other person is okay or right or any of that, I'm just refusing to allow the enemy to keep me trapped in this resentment any longer."

Here's what we're going to do together today. That's the end of the sermon, that is not the end of the service. Sometimes when I pray I look up and people are leaving. And I get it. You've got to deal with the Traders Point hunger games parking lot. I get it. But the most important thing that we're getting ready to do is in the next few moments. I want to ask you to grab ahold of that rock, which represents an offense. I want to ask you to stand on your feet at all of our locations, and we're going to sing together.

Here's what I want to ask you to do. As we are singing, I want to ask you to ask God to bring to mind an offense in your life. For some of you, you've already got it. For some of you, you're going to need the Holy Spirit to bring it to mind. And I just want you to think about that as you clinch the rock. I want that to represent the offense that maybe you've been trapped by for all of these years.

We're going to sing. I'm going to lead us in a prayer and tell you what to do next. So, right now I invite you to enter in and we'll sing this song together about being released by these strongholds.

Here is where I lay it down. Every burden, every crown. This is my surrender. This is my surrender.

Here is where I lay it down. Every lie and every doubt. This is my surrender.



Every voice, come on:

Oh, I will make room for you to do whatever you want to, to do whatever you want to.

Oh, and I will make room for you to do whatever you want to, to do whatever you want to.

Come on, sing that again. Come on.

Oh, I will make room for you to do whatever you want to, to do whatever you want to.

Oh, and I will make room for you to do whatever you want to, to do whatever you want to.

Oh, strongholds bowing to the Savior, resurrection power over every circumstance. His words stand final and forever, He will not be shaken He alone is worthy.

Oh, strongholds bowing to the Savior, resurrection power over every circumstance. His words stand final and forever, He will not be shaken He alone is worthy.

Oh, and I will make room for you to do whatever you want to, to do whatever you want to.

Come on. One more time today:

Oh, and I will make room for you to do whatever you want to, to do whatever you want to.

It's more than a song. We want to make room for Him to do whatever He wants to, which might mean that we need to let go of some control.

John, chapter 8, if you recall that passage, Jesus finds a woman who was caught in the act of adultery, how embarrassing would that be? And these religious leaders had gathered around her, the Scripture says with stones in their hands. They wanted to stone her because the law said that they could.

And Jesus said, "Any of you who are without sin, go ahead and throw the first stone." Maybe you know the story, I'm sure she's looking down in shame and all of a sudden it says that when she looked up they were gone. I would imagine that they dropped the stones as they walked away. And the only thing she could hear was the dropping of stones. In my ears, that's the sound of strongholds being released.

So, today, here's what we're going to do. We're going ask you not to leave this auditorium with this stone in your hand. You're going to do one of two things. Number one: Maybe you're here today and you're like, "I don't know that I'm ready to let go of the offense."

I don't know what has been done against you. And I have great empathy for you in that. Maybe you just need more time. You need the Spirit of God to do a work in your heart.



That's totally fine. Here's what I want to ask you to do. You just leave the rock where you're standing.

For the rest of us, you're ready. You don't feel like it but you're going to make the decision to say, "You know what? No longer. No longer will I be trapped by this offense. No longer will I be trapped in by somebody's actions toward me so long ago. I'm going to release it to God."

So, what we're going to do as we leave, it's going to be a little bit unorthodox. We're not going to have any music. If I can just ask you to keep the talking to be limited. You can talk out in the lobby. We're just going to leave in a spirit of quietness as we listen to the sound of strongholds being released as we drop these rocks into the cans down front or at the doors as you leave.

And let's pray this prayer together. This comes out of John Bevere's book *The Bait of Satan*. Let's just pray this together.

Father, in the name of Jesus, I acknowledge that I have sinned against you by not forgiving those who have offended me. I repent of this and ask your forgiveness. I also acknowledge my inability to forgive them apart from you. Therefore, from my heart, I choose to forgive .

I bring under the blood of Jesus all that they have done wrong to me. They no longer owe me anything. I remit their sins against me. Heavenly Father, as my Lord Jesus asked you to forgive those who had sinned against Him, I pray that your forgiveness will come to those who have sinned against me. I ask that you bless them and lead them into a closer relationship with you. Amen.

So, one by one as you leave, let's release the offense. You're released.

