

Handling Offences

By Alan Utting



'Offence is the bait of Satan – it keeps you trapped while thinking you are right.'
John Bevere

One of the biggest challenges we face in ministry is dealing with offences. It's so common and so destructive that John Bevere dedicated an entire book to it: 'The Bait of Satan'. He writes, '...most people who are ensnared by the bait of Satan don't even realise it.' In other words, offence can sneak in unnoticed. But make no mistake you will be offended at times in ministry. The real issue is how you choose to respond. That response will shape your spiritual walk and even your future. Jesus warned us about this. 'In this world you will have trouble...' (John 16:33). That includes getting hurt, misunderstood, and let down. It's part of life. But we don't have to let it derail us.

Over time, I've noticed four main ways people fall into the trap of offence:

1. We get offended by God and His ways.
2. We get hurt by others and hold onto it.
3. We take on someone else's offence out of compassion.
4. We are overcome with self-pity.

When we give in to any of these, the results are predictable: anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, judgment, and control. Left unchecked, this can make our ministry powerless. One way to tell if we are holding onto an offence, is whether the unfortunate incident constantly plays on our mind or not.

If any of this sounds familiar, it's time to find freedom. You can be released from offence. You can flourish again. Ask God for discernment and healing. There is hope.

A Biblical Lens on Offence

Jesus Himself experienced offence constantly. When He returned to His hometown, people questioned Him: 'Where did this man get all these things?' They were offended by Him and rejected Him (Matthew 13:56–57). Later, after a hard teaching, Jesus turned to His disciples and asked, 'Does this offend you?' (John 6:61).

Scripture addresses the pain of offence many times:

'Forgive all the offences they have committed...' (1 Kings 8:50).

'Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers all wrongs' (Proverbs 10:12).

Let's look more closely at how offence takes root—and how we can overcome it.

1. Offended by God

Some people struggle deeply when God's ways seem unfair or confusing. I wrestled for years with the story in 1 Chronicles 13 where Uzzah touches the ark to steady it—and God strikes him dead. It seemed so harsh. But then I read 1 Chronicles 15, where God clearly instructs that only the Levites were to carry the ark. Uzzah had ignored that. What initially looked like unfairness was a lesson in reverence and obedience.

Still, it's easy to get offended at God when things go wrong, or prayers seem unanswered. We must hold to this unshakable truth: God is good. Even now, as I write this from a hospital bed, with what we later learned was a stroke I still believe God is kind, loving, and just. We don't have to understand.

2. Offended by Others

People will hurt you—sometimes deeply. It has been said that betrayal is the worst kind of hurt. But holding onto that pain only deepens the wound. The real challenge is not just surviving hurt but allowing God to 'refine us through it.

Psalms 66:10–12 beautifully captures this process:

'You tested us, God... You brought us into prison... You let people ride over our heads... but you brought us to a place of abundance.' This passage of Scripture brought us much comfort as we travelled through our 'dark night of the soul'.

There's purpose in the pain. Don't waste it by clinging to resentment. Let it shape you into Christ's image. It's not easy, but it is worth it.

3. Taking on Others' Offence

Out of compassion, we can sometimes carry someone else's hurt as our own. The Sandfords call this 'empathetic defilement'. We hear one side of a painful story, and our emotions get pulled in. But we don't always know the full picture.

This often leads to gossip, division, and more hurt. Leaders, especially, often have access to broader context but can't share everything. Be careful not to take up someone else's offence as it can weigh you down more than you realise. 'If you don't handle the hurt properly, their sin becomes a catalyst for your own' Craig Groeschel.

4. The Trap of Self-Pity

Self-pity is a subtle but dangerous snare. When we feel rejected or misunderstood, it's tempting to justify our bitterness. But Jesus knew rejection well as His hometown tried to throw Him off a cliff (Luke 4:29), and even His disciples on another occasion abandoned Him (Matthew 26:56).

How did He cope? He turned to the love of the Father. In John 17, He speaks of basking in the Father's glory and love. And then He says something incredible: 'You have loved them even as You have loved Me' (John 17:23). Let that sink in. You are loved by the Father as much as He loved His Son Jesus!

With God's love, you must fully forgive everyone who has offended or wronged you.

'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors' (Matthew 6:12). When we forgive fully and freely, we step out of Satan's trap. We're no longer held hostage by the offence. Instead, we become bearers of healing, ambassadors of grace. By an act of the will pray God's blessing upon their life even though that is the last thing we may want to do. In time we will experience that freedom. 'By His wounds we are healed' (Isaiah 53:5). Appropriate that truth for yourself by faith and enjoy His love.

Resources

John Bevere, *The Bait of Satan*

Marjory F. Foyles, *Honourably Wounded*