

Challengers of Hope 04: The Reflection of Grace STUDY GUIDE

In this series, we are talking about things that both stop people dreaming and stop people walking in their dreams. We would not do this series justice if we did not talk about bitterness and offense. This has stopped so many people from dreaming big and walking in their dreams. Of all the wrong attitudes we can have, offense and bitterness seem to go straight to our imagination and stop us dreaming of victory and start us dreaming about getting that person back, of hurting that person, of this and that, and now we are no longer dreaming of walking in love, in truth, in our destiny, in our dreams. It is a true enemy of our dreams, a true challenger to hope, and if you are serious about walking in your dreams and destiny you must learn to deal with it.

What I believe strongly is God's will and purpose for all of us is that we do not just receive grace from God but reflect that grace to others. We all needed grace, so we should show grace to others. The brutal, but unavoidable, truth is that you will never walk in your dreams if you are easily offended. You will never survive in Christian ministry or big business if you are easily offended. You will never do well in life until you can easily forgive others. This is truth that you need to hear, maybe not what you want to hear, but it is what you need to hear.

Someone emailed me recently and told me that I upset them because I told them that they are unfit for Christian ministry. They said that they are definitely going into ministry because they once had a vision of heaven. That is not how you enter ministry – Paul did not tell Timothy to find out who in the church had a vision of heaven and appoint them as elders, he said appoint people who are sober minded, can live wisely, can handle having guests in their house, gentle, able to lead others. All of those are someone who can forgive! All of those are people who are not easily offended!

Read Luke 17:1. This is the teaching of Jesus on the subject. Jesus says that offenses will come. So therefore, you must learn to deal with them because they are coming!

You cannot do anything without someone doing something that offends you. And the more you grow there are more temptations to be offended. I don't live on a silver cloud in heaven with a harp, I am a human with flesh and blood – sometimes someone does something and I am tempted to be bitter, to be offended. Now when I had one church with ten people, that's ten opportunities, now we have over four hundred people a weekend, some of our YouTube videos are watched by thousands, and the TV audience is much more. I have more temptations to be offended. The more your life grows big, the more you walk in your dreams, the more opportunities you have to be offended, and the more you need to learn to reflect God's grace to people.

Jesus always 100% of the time reflected the grace of God to humanity, to people. But He was criticised, lied about, questioned by people who had no business questioning him, he was not allowed in the inner circles. Born in a manger because no one could make space for him in their lives, he started life on the back foot but He still showed grace to everyone!

He had so many opportunities to stop reflecting the grace that was on Him, and He could have easily allowed it to affect the way He lived and treated people. But He never did – He knew that God's grace was on Him, and He knew His place was to reflect that grace. He did not make up what He revealed to people, He revealed the same grace that was on Him. We should be the same!

You have been shown nothing but grace from God and now your job is not to change the image and give people another image, but to reflect that grace to others. Learn who you are – and do not let people define you, and do not respond to their carnality with your carnality, but rather reflect God's grace to them.

Jesus had a mission from the Father, He had a dream which some people disrespected, some people laughed at, but He did not get offended. He kept His eye on the prize, reflected grace to the people, and did what God called Him to do. That is what we should do too.

I want all of you to know that the moment you decide to accept the grace of God into your own life and become a Christian, you do not have the right to reflect anything else to the world except grace.

You do not have the right to offend.

You do not have the right to even the score.

You do not have the right to hold onto an offense.

You do not have the right to imagine harm to another person.

You do not have the right.

Not only do you not have the right – but doing it will be one of the single most self-destructive things you can do. You have to recognize that every time you say no to being offended and yes to reflecting the grace of God you gain power, strength, wisdom, life and you set yourself up for walking in your dreams.

Every time you resist the temptation to get offended and reflect bitterness and anger from that person rather than reflect love, kindness, sweetness and grace from the Father – then you are free to be promoted to the next level.

When you make that choice, you get free from negativity, you get so much energy freed up to create, to dream, to imagine, to flow in the grace of God. It's the greatest way to live. You get the time to invest and dream about the things that matter. You will still have tough times, but your reactions will be different, your thoughts will be higher, your focus will be more intense, and your life will be more in the plan of God than you dreamed possible.

Now when the offense comes, it comes in two levels. The first level is the emotional level – you feel offended. The second level is the effective level – you start to let the offensive change the way you think and live. The emotional level is the first level, you start to feel offended. You start to feel bitter, so this is in your soul. It is a genuine feeling, that starts to dominate your emotions. Someone does something or says something, and you feel it – you felt it.

Everyone of you knows what I am talking about, and the truth is, whether you want to admit it or not, everyone of us has felt offended before. The emotional level hits us, that is pretty much out of our control. What we control is whether we let it affect our life. This is the issue – we feel offended but will be live offended, will we be offended.

The feeling is a temptation. It is like if you are on a fast, and I hand you your favourite chocolate bar. Handing it to you is just a temptation. You will feel like eating it. You will.

It is the same with offense. I might say something or do something, and that is – me handing you the offense, and you will feel like taking it, feel like accepting it. But that is just a feeling, it is not eating the thing. You will not break the fast just by holding a chocolate bar and wishing you were eating it, and you are not offended just because someone offended you and you feel offended. When offense is still at the emotional stage, you can make the choice to pass – you can decide not to eat the offense and not to be nourished by it, and not allow it to become part of you. You can still reject the offense.

Now as tasty as that chocolate bar would be, an offense is like a chocolate bar in that it is tasty and desirable, but it is a poisoned chocolate bar. You will enjoy eating it, enjoy getting offended, but then it will kill you!

When you live by offense, when it is more than an emotion but it becomes effective – it changes the way you dream, you act, you live – then you are eating the poison and it will make you ill. You are making the choice to live in bondage, you are making the choice to make your soul unhealthy, you are making the choice to infect others, to ruin your business, your church, your ministry, your life. It is time to let that offense go and get it out of your system.

If you cannot consistently let things go – you will never be a success! So, let's be practical here so we can get it right. Let's think – what is your life like when you get around someone who is thin-skinned, someone who finds it easy to get offended and hard to forgive. Some people like the chocolate bars so much they hunt them down. I mean it – some people are not overlooking offenses, rather they are looking for offense.

Some people are looking for an offense, then rather than reflect grace they want to reflect the offense – this is what Paul meant by a root of bitterness defiling many – because offended people are contagious – they will either offend you at how offended they are or share their offense with you and you pick it up too. If you are offended, you will never build healthy good relationships and you will never be strong enough, wise enough, focused enough to walk in your dreams. This will knock so many people off of their future, it's a tragedy. It is so sad.

I taught you all last year that the word offense in Greek is scandalon – a scandal, and it is the word used for the bait in a trap. That is an offense – it is a trap, that your enemy will use to get strife and envy in your life and then he can do whatever he wants in your life over and over and over – he can make you sick, broke, put your focus wherever he wants. You are now trapped by the offense, and all that grace God has given to you, all that life in your spirits will be stuck – and not reflected to the world!

Offense will have negative consequences to you, and to everyone around you. Now remember our Scripture – it is impossible that offenses will not come. You cannot live in this world and not have someone do something that offends you. Jesus said it was impossible, and I believe Jesus!

But we need to learn to stop looking for offense and start overlooking offense. We live in a generation like never in history looking for reasons to be offended, people are offended at TV programmes, at adverts, at statues, at history, at films, comedians, jokes... people are hunting through Twitter and social media looking to find something to be offended about. It's like we are addicted to the poison chocolate bars and we think the poison is ok, but this obsessed with looking for offense has led to a generation of people who have no dreams, no integrity, no creativity, no life, no godliness, no character and no freedom.

People in our age think they have a right to get offended and a right to get upset. They go on the keyboard and because no one knows who it is – they take their being offended to another level, a super-level. They attack people they do not know, they rip people apart, they are offended at your views on gender, on age, on politics, on the police, on race, on the rich, on the poor... and then you have the stuff in “real life” – your family, your friends, people at work, in the church – even your pastor will offend you one day. You listen to me speak long enough, you will definitely at one point feel offended, but will you go from emotional to effective offense – will you take and eat the offense?

I am going to give you some advice to stop eating the chocolate bar, no matter how hungry you are. If you listen and put this into place, it might be the most life changing message you can ever put into practice– it will change your life, set you free, and help you move into your dreams! Here are my four pieces of advice:

1. KNOW YOUR PLACE
2. THINK THE BEST OF OTHERS
3. MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS
4. DON'T EXPECT EQUITY

You get these right, all will be well!

1. KNOW YOUR PLACE

A lot of offense happens when people do not know their place. I pastor Tree of Life, but I do a lot of speaking at other churches. I did a Zoom meeting last week to South Africa to Tafara and Chipso's church. Now when I did it, I had a prophetic word for a couple in the church, but I asked if I could share the word, I asked if it could be tested, and I told the couple to run it by the pastors. I am a guest in that house and I know my place. If a pastor tells me “Don't teach this message of yours, I don't like it, I don't agree with it, my people are not ready for it...” I will not get offended because I know my place – it is not my place to go around someone else's house and move the furniture around.

A lot of offense is people thinking they are more important in a situation than they are... we had one lady leave the church because she cannot tell me what to preach... what? How does that person go shopping and not re-arrange the shop and tell them what to sell? That's why people get offended at shops, at businesses, it is not your place to tell them how to run and if you think it is people will offend you.

When you are in the business world, know your place in the company, when you are in church, know your place in the church, when you are in the family, know your place in the family. Be very aware of your role in the lives of others. This is so important. Often tension in a relationship is because someone just did not know their place. Often we get offended because people are not responding to us in a place that we are not in!

2. THINK THE BEST OF OTHERS

Give people grace. Reflect the grace of God to them – LOVE ALWAYS EXPECTS THE BEST! If there are two reasons why someone would have done something, and one of them is evil and the other is nice, assume the nice one. That's treating people how you would want to be treated. It's amazing how we do terrible things and our flesh tells us our motives are great, and someone does the same thing, and our flesh tells us they are selfish, evil and did it JUST TO UPSET US. That has happened to me more than once – someone has said “YOU ONLY DID THAT TO UPSET ME” – trust me I have more on my plate than

just upsetting you, and I do not do that. You need to realize most people are not thinking up ways to upset you! Be more positive!

3. MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Read I Thess. 4.II. A lot of times people get offended because they meddle and someone tells them to mind their own business, rather than them deciding in advance to mind their own business. I am not saying it is wrong to help people, to minister to people, to be good, but I know so many people who are very thin-skinned but they are thin-skinned and in combination with that they are constantly asking questions that are none of their business, they are constantly seeking information that is not their information.

You should not have a sphere of concern that is larger than your sphere of influence if you want to grow your sphere of influence. YOUR BUSINESS IS YOUR BUSINESS, THINGS THAT ARE NOT YOUR BUSINESS ARE NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS.

I am a pastor, my sphere of influence is to feed the sheep. I am very reluctant to get involved with someone's life – unless I know it is right. I DO NOT WANT TO MEDDLE. I want to mind my own business. I would always give everyone these pieces of advice:

- BE WARY OF PEOPLE WHO ALWAYS WANT TO BE IN THE KNOW!
- BE WARY OF PEOPLE WHO ALWAYS MEDDLE!
- BE WARY OF PEOPLE WHO ARE ALWAYS CONCERNED ABOUT THINGS ABOVE THEIR PAYGRADE. Do not promote them!

4. DO NOT EXPECT EQUITY

I love John the Baptist, one of my heroes. He was the cousin of Jesus Christ, that's a hard one to live up to growing up I reckon. His ministry was just to do one thing – prepare the way for Jesus. Along the way he got beat up and put in jail. During his time in jail he asked his disciples to go and find Jesus and make sure he was the Messiah. I wonder what was happening, I wonder if John the Baptist was getting offended by Jesus. I think he expected equity from Jesus. Was he thinking "We are both the same age, both the same kind of minister – but I am in jail and he is out there healing the sick celebrated by people. I started in ministry first, but everyone loves my cousin."

When we expect EQUITY – when we expect things to be equal – when we expect to have the same money, the same house, the same situation, the same life, the same car, the same ministry as everyone when we are all unique – we are setting ourselves up to be offended. We are stopping to reflect the grace and now judging the grace everyone else has!

Read Matthew II.I-6. Notice the message Jesus sends back – "Blessed is He who is not offended because of me". Jesus knew that John the Baptist was sending people because John the Baptist was getting offended.

You are blessed when you do not get offended. You are blessed when you realize Jesus is not being unfair or unkind or that He treats everyone the same.

Some people think like that: "I did so much for Jesus, preparing his ministry, I baptized him, I am in prison, I expect at least a visit" – that sort of expectation will cause you to get offended. If you expect life to be fair, you will be offended. If you expect to be treated the same as someone else, you will be offended when it does not happen.

Most of the time when I meet someone who is offended, it comes back to this. They expected equity with someone, and it did not happen. Most of the people I met offended with me expected either me to treat them the same as someone else, or Jesus to treat them the same as me, and neither will happen.

And inevitably, they didn't tell anyone their expectation, it was completely unspoken — a lot of times they are not spoken because we know fine well how petty and envious and inconsiderate, they sound. You are not paid the same as the boss because you are not the boss, you don't have the same invites to preach as someone else, you are not the same person, you don't have the same options as others, you are not them. Stop comparing yourself to others!

Often these expectations of equity are revealed when things do not go as planned, when things you thought might happen don't, and then we get offended because "well they happened for that person, so therefore it should happen to me". It goes back to my chocolate bar... it's like when a young child sees a chocolate bar at the supermarket and assumes it is going to be theirs, and mum doesn't buy it, doesn't even know – and then suddenly crying and screaming and throwing themselves on the ground.

Someone else got the invite you wanted, someone else is getting married and you are still the bridesmaid, someone else is getting the promotion you thought was yours! You are not toddlers these things should not cause tantrums!

A lot of the time – these expectations are insane. I don't have a more polite word than insane – maybe unrealistic, foolish. Now I am all for the big, huge dreams, you know it. But it is amazing what people expect from others.

SOME PEOPLE ARE OFFENDED AT ME BECAUSE I DON'T DROP EVERYTHING AND COME RUNNING WHEN THEY HAVE A NEED... they want me to mentor them when they never listen to a word I preach. They want me to wave a magic wand and solve all their problems, when I don't have one. When your dream depends on some other person doing something totally unreasonable you are setting yourself up for being offended. People expect me to have answers I could never have, they expect me to do things no human could. We need to not do that.

I believe all of us can make some changes to our thought lives to prevent this evil bitterness taking root in our souls and stopping us walking in our dreams.

- Start thinking the best of people – stop expecting the worst. When someone cuts you up in traffic, do not think they did that just to wind you up today. Cut them the same slack you would cut yourself! You have to become more positive in your thoughts about people!
- Learn how to mind your own business. Learn your sphere of concern, what you have authority over and what you do not. If you have never had employees, don't tell someone else how to manage theirs, if you have never been in the military never tell a soldier how to soldier, if you have never run an airline, don't tell the airline how it should be run. You know the news love grabbing someone and asking them what you would do if – you – and they know nothing. Allow yourself space for your ignorance – that is humility.
- Do you have secret expectations of people that they do not know – and then get upset they do not meet them. Do you expect life to be fair, and everyone to get the same results? You are a candidate for getting offended and you need to

change. Do you have thoughts “well that person could get me out of this mess so easily” – that will get you offended, “that person could write one cheque and change my life, why don’t they” or “they could tell people about me and open this door for me” – those secret expectations lead to you being BITTER and not SHOWING GRACE! You need to change your thinking, and think big and get back to dreaming. PROMOTION COMES FROM THE LORD NOT FROM A HUMAN! Listen to the words of JESUS “Blessed is HE who is not offended in me” – blessed is HE WHO IS NOT OFFENDED IN THE BODY OF CHRIST – because you will have opportunities, when people do not come through for you, or open the door you thought they would or whatever. THE BLESSING IS IN NOT GETTING OFFENDED!

BUT IF YOU DO NOT GET OFFENDED YOU WILL WALK IN VICTORY – you will get the BLESSING – the power to succeed in life. You know if you eat the chocolate bar – it tastes good for a minute, but if you do not eat it and develop a habit of not eating it – you will BE HEALTHIER. IF you do not eat the offense, you will always be healthier. You give up the temporary joy of letting that feeling of OFFENSE rule over you – and in exchange you get the blessing of the LORD, you get peace, you get to live above hurt, and you get to win in life and walk in your dreams. If you eat the chocolate bar that is handed to you – if you let the emotion become the effective offense in your life – you will lose out.

The problem with the offense is that you lose out – you don’t hurt others or get even, you hurt you. They don’t lose out, you do. They do not live with envy, anger, strife, loss, sickness and pain – you do.

Here is a list of some of the symptoms of being offended – symptoms that show you ate the chocolate bar:

- It consumes your thoughts
- It interferes with your sleep
- It is in your imagination
- The feelings get worse not better
- Your actions change – you separate from things that are good for you. You walk out of the church, you have a go at someone, you do something to get someone back.

So, if you have the bar in your hand, and you feel you want to eat it, what you do next is so important. What we need to do to keep our minds dreaming, to keep walking in our dreams is REFLECT HIS GRACE!

Read Matthew 18.6-9. Now Jesus does not expect you to maim yourself – if you thought otherwise you need to do my exegesis course on Saturday mornings – he was exaggerating for comic effect, a very common way of communicating back then, still works today if anyone has a sense of humour!

BUT THE POINT IS THIS: DO WHATEVER IT TAKES NOT TO EAT THAT POISONED BAR. DO NOT GET OFFENDED, DO NOT LET THAT FEELING DOMINATE YOUR LIFE – YOU DOMINATE YOUR LIFE WITH YOUR WORDS – I WILL NOT LET THIS BEAT ME, I WILL NOT LIVE OFFENDED, I WILL NOT LET THIS FEELING, THIS EMOTION BE EFFECTIVE IN MY LIFE – IT WILL NOT RULE OVER ME, I AM UNDER GRACE AND I WILL REFLECT THAT GRACE TO OTHERS.

GO TO DRASTIC MEASURES – TAKE EXTREME ACTION TO AVOID GETTING OFFENDED.

You don't understand, you don't know what I have been through, you don't know what they did – it is fine to have that feeling, it is ok to have the chocolate bar in your hand – but you cannot eat it.

So many people are living the loneliest, the saddest, most unfruitful lives because they are offended, they are not reflecting the grace they have been shown, and they are trapped in envy, strife and bitterness. THEY ATE THE POISON AND THEY ARE CRIPPLED INSIDE. THEY NEED HEALING TODAY – THEY NEED FREEDOM. You are going to get set free.

YOU CANNOT CHANGE WHAT ANYONE DID TO YOU – YOU CANNOT CHANGE WHAT HAS HAPPENED, but YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR RESPONSE RIGHT NOW.

JESUS CHRIST IS GOING TO TAKE ALL THOSE FEELINGS RIGHT NOW – HE HAS COME TO TAKE BACK THE CHOCOLATE BARS – YIELD TO HIM RIGHT NOW – YOU WILL HAVE A MUCH HEALTHIER SOUL LIFE – YOU WILL HAVE THE ULTIMATE DETOX – OF YOUR SOUL!

Read Psalm 119.165. WHEN YOU START LOVING THE WORD MORE THAN ANYTHING – YOU DECIDE THIS IS HOW I AM GOING TO LIVE, OFFENSES WILL COME BUT THEY WILL NOT SETTLE. THE BIRDS WILL FLY OVER YOUR HEAD, BUT THEY WILL NOT LAND ON YOUR HEAD.

IT'S THE GREAT PEACE YOU ARE LOOKING FOR!

TODAY DRAW A LINE IN THE SAND, I LIVE BY THE WORD, NOT BY OFFENSE. Develop an attitude that says: "You are going to have to work very hard indeed to OFFEND ME, and you are going to have deliberately try very hard – and even then, I WILL GET OVER IT."



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Challengers of Hope 04: The Reflection of Grace STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. What did Jesus say about the probability of an offense coming your way?
2. What does Ben mean when he says “offense goes straight to your imagination and stops you dreaming?”
3. How can we reflect grace to other people when we are tempted to be offended?
4. What is the difference between the emotion of being offended and being effectively offended?
5. Why does our society think they have such a right to be offended?
6. What does it look like when someone knows their place?
7. What does it look like when someone does not know their place?
8. How can you knowing your place in any group of people help you not get offended?
9. When do you find it most difficult to think the best of others? How could changing your thinking help you not get offended?
10. What does it mean to mind your own business? Why is this linked to being offended?
11. Can you think of a time you got offended? Was it because you did not know your place, mind your own business or because you did not think the best of others? How could you have handled that time differently?
12. What does it mean to expect equity and how can that lead to people getting offended?
13. Have you ever expected equity with someone and then it did not happen and you got offended at someone, or even offended at Jesus?
14. How can having unrealistic expectations of others lead to us being offended?
15. What can we do when we are tempted to be offended? How can we deal with it?
16. What about this message inspired, challenged or encouraged you the most?



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