

## WHEN YOU ARE OFFENDED

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Series: Life In Community  
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Offended, Honour, Forgiveness  
John 18:15-17, 21-35

Human beings we are greatly tribal. We desire to be in a family, to be in community. To identify people who look like us so that we can identify with them and be part of them. And I think it is part of our wiring. We cannot completely step into who we are called to be, or meant to be outside of community. Not spiritually, not culturally not economically you name it.

But then the price of community is confrontation. It is not easy and soon people realize how much hard work relationships need and some try to avoid it.

Paul who wrote so many letters that ended up being a huge part of our New Testament encouraged the church to keep meeting together. To not give up the habit of meeting together as others were fond of doing.

Turns out, this whole idea of skipping church did not start yesterday with TV and Podcasts. I think we all get to times when we get lazy or even just mad at the community for one reason or the other and we think it would be much easier to avoid community.

Hey, to be honest, I envy the fact that most of you guys can skip church because it rained or your favourite show is on. Or maybe there is a boxing match showing or the premier league finals are on. Or just maybe your crush is in town. I can't. I am not like super excited about going to church every week, I am just the pastor. Sometimes that is needed. Especially because we can get to a place where we think that going to church is following Jesus. It is a useful part of our following Jesus but in and of itself it is not.

But getting into a habit of not gathering with other believers can be potentially dangerous for our life of faith because we are not meant to do any of our lives alone. We just cannot. Community is a place where you are loved, you are healed, you are invited into growth and you are accepted. A place where you are allowed to be human. You are because the community is and quite frankly the community is because you are.

If we need community to fully grow into what God is inviting us to, how would Jesus invite us to deal with offense? Because trust me if you have been in any community long enough you have been or soon will be offended by someone.

Let's pray

So obviously with an offence, you are either the offender or the offended. Today I want us to talk a bit about how to deal with offence.

Matthew 18:15-17

***'If your brother or sister sins against you or hurts you, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they***

***will not listen, take one or two others along, so that “every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.’***

This is Jesus the King of the Kingdom of God basically saying that even in Christ-centred, God focused communities there will be hurt and conflict. And alongside the prayers and the being Spirit-filled, there is some action to be taken.

Or maybe part of being spirit filled is to see the importance of proactively working on relationships instead of just assuming that our being spiritual would take care of things.

Basically, Jesus is inviting us to have difficult conversations. When you are offended, do not just sulk around hoping the offender picks out that you are mad. Some people block you on Facebook and then 5 days later you get a friend request from them because they just realized that you did not even realize. Their pouting was not effective.

That is not how to deal with being offended you speak up. Okay, not everything that is done against you is worth speaking about. But if you realize that your heart is still aching from something someone said to you or about you. Something someone did against you then you have to talk about it.

I am learning that there isn't any culture that is necessarily comfortable with hard conversations. Especially around offense.

So Jesus teaches that you should go call your friend privately to talk about it. Here is the thing. This is about honouring the other person even if they have offended you or perceive that you have been hurt. And I think we miss it a lot at this point.

Honouring one another is such a big part of living together in community. It really boils down to treating others as you would like to be treated. So do not share the offence with anyone else if you have not yet first made an attempt to reach out to the other party. Sometimes we offend each other and the offender has no idea. It would be totally unfair for you to tell someone else before you tell them.

Have you ever hang out with someone and soon realized that all they really wanted was to nail someone else? You would hope they asked to have coffee with you but from the moment they sit down all they really have to say is how so and so is such a jerk for doing the and the other.

They go on and on about how they have been hurt and offended by this other person. Here is the thing, community exists in a web of connected relationships. It is not fair to paint the other person's picture of the perceived offender.

Well, and do not for a moment think that this moment does not have an impact on you either. Because now they realize what will be said for them when they offend you.

Jesus was keen on honouring people around him. A few examples come to mind. When Jesus was about to get baptized the guy who was baptizing people in the river was a guy called John. And when John sees Jesus he immediately recognizes that this was the real

deal. He recognizes that Jesus was God's main man. So he is ready not to even touch the sandals on his feet.

But Jesus walks up to him and totally honours John. John was his forerunner and he allows him to do his job. In front of everyone who is just about to be treated to a front-row seat of God's revealing of Jesus, John is honoured to baptize Jesus. He could have said "yeah, you are right I am better than your or yeah, you do not come close enough to touching my shoes.' Instead, he honours him and allows him to baptize him.

*See the thing about honor, it is not about whether that person deserves it. It is the intentional effort of a person to put the other in greater or better footing.*

Honour is a big part of living in community together in the Kingdom of God. And when it comes to offence we so often throw this out of the window in how we talk about the other person on their absence.

And one place this shows itself in ugly ways is when people break up or go through divorce. It is ugly how people who once promised their lives to each other become brutal in dishonouring each other. You start telling stories of them that are not yours to tell just to grind them.

Let's be honest, before it all crumbled no matter who's fault it was you saw something in them? Or maybe you didn't love is blind anyway. But can you honour them just because like you, they are human beings with beauty worth focusing on and worth respect?

And one of the ways to do this is to make sure before anyone else finds out how offended you are, the alleged offender has been given a chance to hear from you.

But I get it, we all have our people who listen to our rambling when we are just too emotional and angry and hurt before we can even be sober enough to go face our offender. We need that.

But if any of the information you share is going to paint how that person views your offender who is also on the same community, withhold it.

If I come over and talk about Joe who I went to high school with and how he has offended me. Y'all don't know him. It might not matter. But if I tell you how some tall, dark guy who leads worship at our church just did not answer my call and it really hurt me, you all know who I am talking about and at that point I am not being fair to someone you are all in relationship with. I am not honouring him.

And as a community, we have a role to play. If there is one thing that really burns a lot of relationships in Kenya is rumours. Someone said something about someone in their absence and the other repeated as true and soon it is a stain on their name.

How many of you have been hurt by a rumour spread about you? I can't count how many times I have heard some of the most outrageous things said about me. I mean it would be easier for someone to claim that I was born in China before some of the things I have heard said were true.

As a community we have the responsibility to say, what you are telling me about so and so ends here. When people are hurt it is easy to think that what they need is a pity party. So in raw emotions, they can even unfairly hit below the belt.

Maybe part of what we are to do is be the people who will not let them stay in state or at least not for too long. Can we call them out to better? Instead of just agreeing or even causing and joining them to say more damaging things about people can we decide that we are where it ends and ask them to seek conversation with the other person.

But let's be honest some people will still not care about it and offend you or do not repent. And that word repentance is not about saying sorry. Saying sorry is part of it but repentance is only complete if one changes their mind and action. If an offender apologizes and keeps on with the same behaviour they have weaponized apologies.

So if they do not repent either by not acknowledging your hurt or by continuing in offence you then you go to the next step is to call 2 or 3 other people. And it is not just any person. It has to be people that both of you respect and people that love both of you. And the process begins again. You see what we're looking forward to is reconciliation not shaming or giving the hurt person some sort of feeling of victory over the other.

And what if you are called to be the go-between? Listen, what you are looking for is not necessarily the truth, your job is to bring reconciliation and that is often about people acknowledging hurt and what their role was in causing that hurt and repenting, which of course is not only saying sorry but making amends.

Why isn't 'truth' what you are tasked with finding? Because often what people call truth is their subjective narrative of the events. What that means is that a set of facts will always look very different to 2 people, especially where emotions are charged.

Yet at this point, the church does not need to know about it. If there is a dispute between 2 members of the worship team or even 2 senior leaders it still has nothing to do with the rest of us if it can be handled at that level. The moment we start spreading it we are helping the enemy divide us up. We are helping potentially spreading a rumour about someone and making reconciliation between the 2 parties even harder.

So just 2 or 3 mature people who care for you both. And they are just coming in as witnesses. Also because when people we care about are involved we are less combative, less confrontational and more thoughtful about the things we say.

If one is still unrepentant that is where it goes to the church. Now I wanna make a comment at this point. Remember the issue of honour. Congregations at this point were not very big. Some of the biggest gatherings were during big Jewish feasts in Jerusalem.

So it is not about telling on 1 person in front of a gathering of hundreds or thousands. It is about inviting the immediate people that do the walk of faith with intimately. Their sin does not directly impact on the entire church but it sure could impact their immediate family or even their small group.

Now the standards of course change when you are the leader of that community. Your issues affect that community. So congregation here is about who is in their direct sphere of influence.

It is not so much about never going something wrong to hurt someone, it is about our attitude towards the situation. So at which point if they remain unrepentant engagement with them changes because it is hard to restore someone who does not acknowledge that they have hurt someone and in so doing continue to hurt other within the community.

We have to get over ourselves in thinking that we can heal everyone. We cannot. Some people are a bigger task than we are ready for so it is okay to wash our hands so we need to learn to let people go.

So even as Jesus says to treat them as tax collectors he is referring to how communities would keep away from tax collectors but do not forget in so many ways he also said he came for the tax collectors. So we can rest easy even as wash our hands knowing that God will not wash his hands.

So then where does that leave you as the offended? I want us to read a story Jesus told possibly on the same day in the same conversation.

Matthew 18:21-35

***At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask, "Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?"***

***Jesus replied, "Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven.***

***"The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn't pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market.***

***"The poor wretch threw himself at the king's feet and begged, 'Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back.' Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt.***

***"The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, 'Pay up. Now!'***

***"The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, 'Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back.' But he wouldn't do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king.***

***"The king summoned the man and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn't you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?' The king was furious and put the man in prison until he paid back his entire debt. And that's exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn't forgive others from their heart."***

So Peter is thinking that he must be really generous to offer to forgive someone 7 times in one day. I mean you have to be really after me if you need to be forgiven 7 times. It is like one of these twitter wars I saw where some guy posted that a real girlfriend wakes up at 4 am and prays for her man for 3 hours and some replied that if someone needs 3 hours of prayer every day maybe they should not be in a relationship.

So Peter is in some sort of ways in this place saying 7 times must surely be generous unless that person should not even be around you, to begin with. Then Jesus gives this outrageous answer and says 70 times 7. Other versions have varying arrangements of that answer but the point is, Jesus' answer was basically as many times as they will need forgiveness.

And he tells a story that ends with his emphasis on how important forgiveness is in our spiritual life. That the freedom we hope to receive as we accept God's forgiveness is intricately tied to the freedom we give others as we give them forgiveness.

And it is not just saying hey I forgive you. It is genuinely dealing with that stuff in your heart with the Holy Spirit or even better with the offender.

Because some people quickly jump to claiming they have forgiven you and a week later they are still holding it against you. Take your time, talk through the grounds you need to cover with the offender and with the Holy Spirit but certainly do not sit in unforgiveness.

Just like the King repressing God forgave the first debtor, He has forgiven us. We all know how freeing it is to hear the genuine words, I forgive you, from someone we had badly wronged. Why hold it away from someone else? Even better, are we aware of how much God has forgiven us? Then how dare we hold others away from forgiveness?

You see, guy number 1 was in debt and what landed him into trouble with the King again was debt situation too. The offences that you do not deal with will keep showing themselves up. The areas of bitterness and unforgiveness in your heart are the areas in which the enemy will always get you offended.

It's like a foot. It is not so bad when someone accidentally steps on your foot. But when you have an injury on your foot then it means the whole world when someone steps on your foot and all of a sudden it feels like everyone is gunning for your foot and all the furniture in your house have turned against you.

The sore places from our past relationships from the last church you were at. If you do not deal with them they will keep coming up. And you will never have freedom until you deal with them.

And I think this is why the story has the guy put in prison with his entire family. It is not that God will punish us and put us in some sort of prison but we essentially put ourselves in there by the choice not to forgive. And it hurts everyone around us. Our family is essentially dragged in there with us. They have to be careful as they breathe and walk on eggshells around you.

No one can talk about race because you are still hurt from the last racial slur thrown against you. No one can talk about Luos because you are still hurt that Raila lost the last election or it was rigged or whatever the interpretation is. No man or woman can dare say hi because

the pain of your last marriage is still something you hold close to you. You are in a prison and you have taken your community with you.

The bottom line is we will offend and hurt each other in community. Let us be bold enough to deal with it, honouring each other with the desire being reconciliation. No matter the outcome of the process of reconciliation, we have to choose to forgive those who have offended us just as we have been forgiven if we want to enjoy the freedom of our forgiveness and also free the ones in our lives.

*Let's Pray*