

“Forgiving from the heart is Christ’s commandment for Escaping the Pain of Offense. Only through Christ are we empowered to forgive and bless. This book helps the reader engage the power of Christ’s death and resurrection to release the provision for healthy and joyful living.”

**John Sandford**, Founder, Elijah House

“The author of Escaping the Pain of Offense is a former student of mine with an insightful and heart-felt approach to this important topic. Seldom does a book on forgiveness weave theology, science, and pastoral aspects of forgiveness into a form that is practically helpful. Dr. Hersh does this beautifully. His emphasis on uncovering core beliefs that hold hearts captive to the pain of unforgiveness can lead you to deeper levels of intimacy with the Lord. His book is well-worth your time and effort.”

**Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.**, Associate Professor, Liberty University

“Dr. Hersh captures the essence of forgiveness in a way that takes the reader of Escaping the Pain of Offense to the heart of the matter. His thorough study of the topic gives the reader wise counsel and practical steps to follow towards wholeness.”

**E. Daniel Martin, MD**, Psychiatrist

“Finding freedom from emotional pain buried by long forgotten hurts sometimes involves examining the source to allow God to show you where the ‘stuck point’ occurred. Escaping the Pain of Offense provides sharp insight to cut to the heart of the matter. It sensitively leads you to Jesus as the true Healer of all life’s hurts.”

**Frank Meadows LCSW**, Clinical Director, Christian Psychotherapy Services and Founder of the Meadows Healing Prayer Center in Chesapeake, Virginia

“Ed Hersh has astutely captured the essence of forgiveness in his book Escaping the Pain of Offense. Ed’s educational background, discernment, and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit make him a qualified person to address this topic with integrity and reliability.”

**Barry Wissler, Sr. Pastor**, Ephrata Community Church

“As a recent student of mine, Ed Hersh demonstrated knowledge and commitment to the topic that makes this book well worth your effort to explore. Escaping the Pain of Offense outlines key aspects of forgiveness with biblical truth and action steps to greatly enhance your walk with God.”

**Dr. Howard Dial**, Senior Pastor, Berachah Bible Church, Jonesboro, Georgia

“The ministry of reconciliation is for all Christians, in all places, and spanning all times. The book *Escaping the Pain of Offense* helps Christ followers resolve conflict and pursue relationships reconciled through hearts surrendered to Jesus. This produces fruit to make the great commission a reality.”

**Dr. Roland Werner,** General Secretary of CVIM (YMCA in Germany) and Founder of Christus-Treff Church in Germany (Marburg and Berlin) and Jerusalem

“Taking the bait of offense gives the enemy of God’s people the greatest opportunity to pierce our prayer shield. Learn how *Escaping the Pain of Offense* can ward off the tormenters of our souls, invite God’s presence into our midst, and make our prayers more effective. This is a vital topic to help you and your group experience health and well being.”

**Abby Abildness,** President, Hershey Aglow; Healing Tree International

“*Escaping the Pain of Offense* will truly empower you to forgive from the heart. This book contains truth for healing of all peoples from varied cultures and backgrounds. Practicing forgiveness and reconciliation is key to unifying the Body of Christ.”

**Manny Roman,** Pastor of Puerto de Refugio, a church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania

“There is little doubt that the topic of this excellent resource compiled by Edward Hersh will be relevant and helpful for all who have personally experienced struggles with forgiveness and reconciliation or are aware of others with a need to face those issues. I have known Ed to be passionately and compassionately focused in addressing these topics. He has combined a wealth of life experience with intense research to produce *Escaping the Pain of Offense*. As both a long-time friend of Ed’s and one who has worked beside him in a variety of cultures, I know that this book will be a valuable tool and a useful addition to any library.”

**Evelyn Biles,** President of Global Mosaic International

“Forgiveness, everyone talks about it, but few actually practice true forgiveness. Here’s a book that will empower you to forgive from the heart. Challenging, engaging, and equipping for *Escaping the Pain of Offense*, your relationships with God and others will be deeply enriched.”

**Kenneth Martin,** Senior Pastor, First Assembly of God, Hermitage, Pennsylvania

## *Escaping the Pain of Offense*

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# **ESCAPING THE PAIN OF OFFENSE**

Empowered to Forgive  
from the Heart

**DR. EDWARD HERSH**





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# PART ONE—FOUNDATIONS

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: THE CYCLE OF OFFENSE

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah uses the imagery of imprisonment to communicate the condition of mankind and the mission of Jesus Christ to set us free.

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me,  
because the LORD has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives  
and release from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
to bestow on them a crown of beauty  
instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy  
instead of mourning,  
and a garment of praise

## THE CYCLE OF OFFENSE

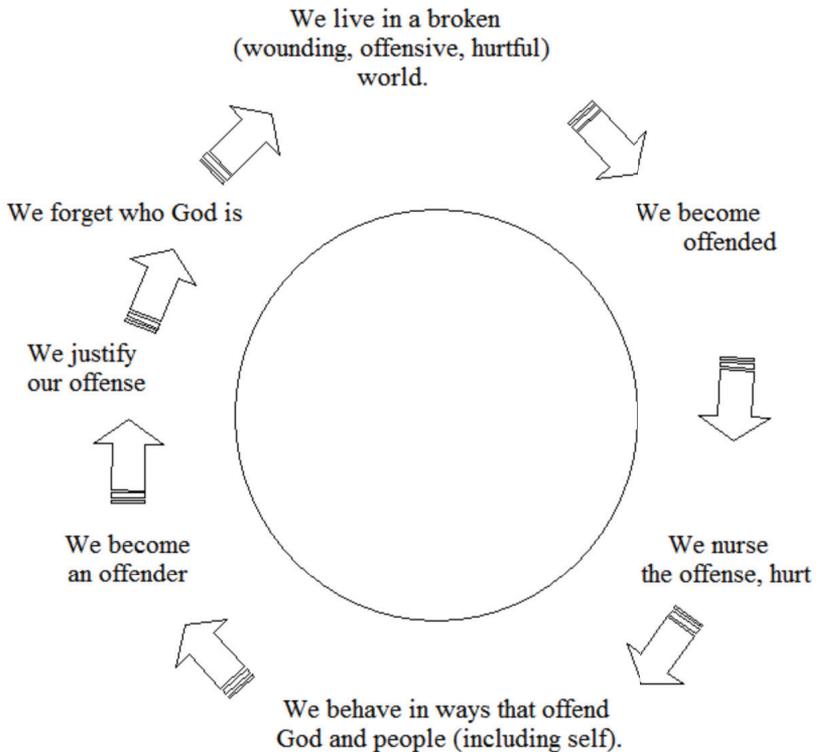
instead of a spirit of despair.  
They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the LORD  
for the display of his splendor. (Isa. 61:1-3)

As explained later, the poor, brokenhearted captive describes every person who ever lived including all of us today. Jesus came to *proclaim liberty* to that condition for all who believe in Him. In Matthew 18 Jesus himself uses an illustration of a debtor's prison to show the condition of the human heart and the need for salvation from being "handed over to the jailers to be tortured" (Matt. 18:34). Torment "is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (Matt. 18:35). Again, these verses will be discussed more later, but for now let us understand that the Bible clearly connects a lack of forgiveness with imprisonment, hurt and pain in the human heart.

How is this hurt produced? We are hurt through taking offense. How does the offense imprison our heart? Our heart is imprisoned by building fences: walls of perceived security. These walls not only trap the pain inside, but they often keep out troops sent to rescue the prisoner. When we take the bait of the Enemy's offense, we become offended and imprisoned in a cycle shown in the illustration.

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## The Cycle of Offense



This cycle is common to each of us. Because we live in a fallen, broken, and imperfect world, experiencing hurtful emotions is inevitable.

*We become wounded* by peoples' mistakes, misunderstandings, mistreatments, betrayals, injustices, abuses or even crimes.

## THE CYCLE OF OFFENSE

*We nurse the wound* by rehearsing in our minds what coulda', woulda', shoulda' been done to avoid the pain. Many times our anger becomes directed at God for allowing bad things to happen to us. Some blame self, and become imprisoned by self-rejection.

We make ungodly judgments and behave in ways that offend God, us, and other people. Thus, *we become an offender*. Bitterness, resentment and blame become an accepted way of life. Without God's help we try to rectify situations in many ways including revenge, obsessing for justice, forgetting, excusing, "moving on," self-inflicting condemnation, or finding some other way of replacing the negative feelings with positive ones.

In our quest of human effort we may even find some relief, and so *we justify our offense*. Unable to surrender to (trust) God the sole right to judge our offender, we reject God's provision through Jesus to break the cycle. Having agreed with the lie that holding offense solves our problem, we become offensive to someone else who becomes offended, and the cycle spirals hopelessly on.

There is hope! Our hope is in Jesus and what God has done through Him.<sup>1</sup> Through God's Gift of forgiveness, we not only have hope to redeem this cycle in our own lives, but we can reverse this spiral in the lives of others as well. You do not have to be enslaved by this victim/predator cycle. Stress, anxiety, and depression no longer have to remain when you allow Christ Jesus into the deepest parts of your heart to break this cycle down.

The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus is the only true jailbreak for unforgiveness. Therefore, a significant portion of this book will discuss the fundamentals of God's purpose and plan through

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salvation in Jesus Christ. Before that, in Part One, we must discuss some background and rationale for a Christian handling of the topic of forgiveness.

In Part Two we will discuss the human response to Christ's accomplishments. The greatest hindrance to breaking free seems to be recognizing the imprisonment. Sometimes we have become so well-adjusted to imprisonment, it seems hard to imagine what true freedom is really like. Some of us like the comforts in prison. Some of us like the security it provides. Some like the decisions made for them and some are apathetic about change. Some doubt their ability to succeed at a better way, and many are just simply in denial about their condition or unwilling to change their perceptions. We all choose living in illusion over reality to some degree. Breaking free occurs from the inside out. As you walk out of the inner most cell, you come to the next barred gate. As you break free of the next courtyard and the next and so on, you eventually come to the outer court and can maneuver to leap the outer fence. This is when you realize that the offense that took you to prison (whether self-inflicted or inflicted by another offender) no longer has a grip on your life.

In Part Three we discuss how this new freedom in the inner man can change your relationships with other people. God made mankind for community. Relationship with other people can only be experienced in the deepest way God meant for them to be shared when each individual has broken free of his own prison experience. Each person's receiving God's love and giving that love to others is our mission as we journey in the freedom of forgiveness.

## THE CYCLE OF OFFENSE

Appendix A contains some additional resources for the reader's equipping and edification.

Appendix B shares a small portion of the author's personal story and how practicing forgiveness has transformed his life.

Appendix C is the contents of a pamphlet written by the author and his wife many years ago. The pamphlet was widely distributed across the U.S. and around the globe in an effort to help women (and men) struggling with abortion.

The Endnotes at the end the book for Parts One, Two, and Three contain references to Bible portions and books and articles further cited in the Bibliography at the end of this book.

### **How to Use this Book**

- Read the three chapters in Part One and then read and process the Follow up and Practice material for Part One.
- Then read the chapters in Part Two and do the Follow up and Practice for Part Two.
- And then Part Three in the same manner.
- Return to the book weeks or months later to re-process the Follow up and Practice material or process the remaining material not finished in the initial reading.
- A Study Guide is provided at the end of the book to be used as a ten session small group or individual study.

The journey to healing is often like peeling an onion: to arrive at the core, the outer visible layers must be taken off first. The Follow up and Practice material provides some exercises for processing the material in each part for deeper understanding and application. You will understand why this is as you read. My

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suggestion is that you adopt a “long haul” and “forever growing” perspective of allowing God to change your heart. As you do, you will increasingly see fruit in your relationship with God and with others around you. As you grow, asking yourself the same questions as before may elicit different answers, reflecting your expanding and deepening perceptions, healing, and maturity.

Our understanding and practice of forgiveness holds the key to freedom. Before we consider what releases freedom, let us look at some of the obstacles and misunderstandings.