

YOU CAN LET GO

Make Peace with Your Past,
Break Free from Offense,
and Move Forward with God

Alexandra Hoover

“I needed to read this book. Alexandra Hoover brought it all to the table in *You Can Let Go*: her real, her hard, and God’s truth about how to get free from offense. Get ready for some real help where far too many of us get stuck.”

Lisa Whittle, Bible teacher and bestselling author of
Jesus over Everything

“Alexandra Hoover is a strong, gracious leader who women need to hear from. She’s our gentle and firm friend, reminding us of the kingdom truth that we can let go but also compassionately guiding us through that process. This book is full of wise insight, generous stories, and practical tools to help women live free. It’s a must-read!”

Jess Connolly, pastor, founder of Go + Tell Gals, and author
of *Tired of Being Tired* and *Breaking Free from Body Shame*

“This book is raw and real and healing. Holding on to offense can suffocate the life Christ died to give us. There is another way to live, and in this book, Alexandra walks that path with us.”

Sheila Walsh, author and TV host

“This book is the product of great courage. I read Alexandra’s story with my heart in my throat, because she has done the difficult work of excavating her pain in order to understand it, heal it, and guide others through the same journey. If you are struggling with bitterness, unforgiveness, or holding a grudge, this book is going to help set you free.”

Sharon Hodde Miller, author of *The Cost of Control*

“Alexandra is not only my coworker but also my friend. I’ve seen firsthand how the message of this book has shaped her life, her family, and our church. Her wisdom comes from hard-earned experience, and her words carry the weight of real victory. I can’t wait for you to experience the freedom and hope she so powerfully offers in these pages.”

Nick Connolly, author and lead pastor at Bright City Church

“Disappointment, betrayal, and relational pain are unavoidable in this life, but they don’t have to leave us crushed by offense. Alexandra is truthful but gentle with our hearts as she exposes the trap of offense and its maladaptive impact that often goes unaddressed. If you’ve been paralyzed by your pain, *You Can Let Go* is an invitation to break free and loosen your grip on offense so you can more tightly cling to Christ.”

Dr. Sarita T. Lyons, speaker, Bible teacher, church leader,
psychotherapist, and bestselling author

“Alexandra carries a flashlight into the shadows of offense—a topic too often overlooked in faith circles—and leads the way with courage and clarity. Through her storytelling and willingness to go first, she reminds us that healing isn’t some distant, impossible destination but a path we can begin walking today. To know Alexandra is to understand that she shows up to these pages as more than an author; she is a grace-filled leader, a trusted friend, and a steady presence who never sways from the opportunity to guide others toward deeper freedom and wholeness.”

Hannah Brencher, author of *The Unplugged Hours*
and *Fighting Forward*

“*You Can Let Go* is infused with Alexandra Hoover’s trademark honesty for those stuck in pain. The hard-won revelations within these pages are both biblical and practical, making freedom feel accessible again for anyone who has lost hope. With this book, Alexandra ensures that no one must drown in the bitter waters of offense. It is both a kind exhortation for the wounded heart and a bold battle cry against the lies that keep us chained to the past.”

Faith Eury Cho, pastor and author of
Experiencing Friendship with God

“Alexandra gives us a road map for how to handle deep hurt and steward our pain in a way that moves us toward becoming better rather than becoming bitter. I’m so grateful she’s chosen to use her wounds to help others heal. I pray that God does the same for you as you read this book.”

Debra Fileta, LPC, author, speaker, and founder of the
Debra Fileta Counselor’s Network

“The question isn’t *if* you will get hurt or offended. The reality is that you *will* get hurt and offended, so what will you do with all the emotions that come along with that? *You Can Let Go* by Alexandra Hoover is such a helpful guide in processing these emotions, living out of the freedom found in Christ, and not being trapped by the burden of resentment. If you’re tired of letting others control your emotional well-being and ready to reclaim your God-given joy, this book will be the catalyst for profound change in how you respond to life’s inevitable disappointments.”

Joel Muddamalle, PhD, author of *The Hidden Peace*

“In *You Can Let Go*, Alexandra Hoover writes with the kind of wisdom that can come only from someone who’s let God meet her in the depths of pain and offense and who’s chosen to live in freedom anyway. This book is a balm for anyone who feels stuck in the ache of relational wounds. With spiritual insight and pastoral tenderness, Alexandra gently guides us toward the kind of emotional healing that only Jesus can offer. Every page feels like a sacred invitation to release the past, trust God more fully in the present, and walk unburdened into the future He has for us.”

Cassandra Speer, bestselling author, Bible teacher, podcast host, and vice president of Her True Worth

“We often find ourselves drawn to watching videos and following instructions to build and create things that are both beautiful and meaningful to us. But what if we applied that same level of commitment and intention to healing the wounds and deep disappointments in our lives? *You Can Let Go* offers a candid guide with practical steps for moving toward healing. Alexandra’s personal stories of pain and struggle serve as a guide to a process that isn’t instantaneous but is within reach.”

Noemi Chavez, pastor at Revive Church

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Alexandra Hoover



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To my mom.
Your tears weren't wasted,
and mine won't be either.

To the heart and mind reading this book.
This is the beginning of the rest of your life.
Stay the course.

To my family.
Each book and Bible study I write is a sacrifice
of your time, a moment slipped away from you,
given to the world. Thank you for your support
and joyful yes. For encouraging me in ways I
never could have imagined.

And to my kids.
I hope you read this in your older age and it helps
you make sense of your offense and hurt, even if
just a little. I love you.

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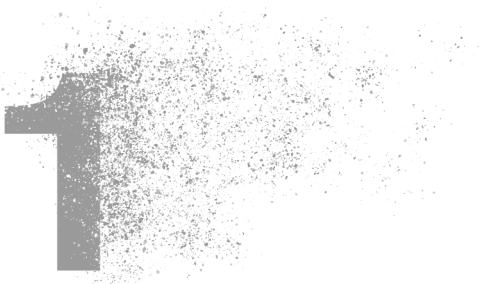
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Make Peace with Your Past

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The Pain That Shapes Us

I've been trying to heal from hurt for what feels like a lifetime.

It was a meeting at work, and I'd prepared for it for weeks.

I was ready and excited to share my ideas with a roomful of people whose approval held more power over me than I cared to admit. The stakes were high, and I knew that being heard was about more than just career advancement; it would be validation, a chance to prove I belonged.

I began my presentation with a steady voice, carrying all the weight of my effort and hope. But before I could finish my thought, a coworker—someone known for steering conversations in his direction—interrupted with a dismissive tone. “We’ve already tried that,” he said, finality and irritation in his voice, his words landing like a stone on my chest. This wasn’t his first time showing this kind of behavior toward me or others. I rolled back my shoulders and caught my breath.

The silence that followed felt suffocating. I glanced around, seeing the polite, indifferent expressions on everyone’s faces,

and in that instant, I felt the ground shift beneath me. The meeting carried on, and the conversation turned away from my idea as if it had never mattered. I sat there nodding, pretending the sting hadn't reached me, pretending the dismissal didn't chip away at the confidence I fought so hard to build.

Later, when the office emptied and the echo of my colleagues' voices faded, the weight of that moment settled in. I replayed it over and over, dissecting every word and every pause. That night, when I was back at home, the memory replayed itself, looping in my mind. The hurt wasn't just about the interruption or irritation toward me—the rejection and constant posture of disapproval was something I had gotten used to. It was about feeling small, overlooked, and invisible in a moment when I had longed to be seen. I thought about all the things I could have said, the ways I should have defended myself. Their rejection left a mark, as much as I didn't want it to.

Moments like this have a way of reminding us of the wounds we've left unhealed for far too long. And it did. I sat there in my living room while the kids tried to share their day with me, and I felt the weight of offense overwhelm me. Every other unhealed wound and carried offense in my life showed up. Every memory where I felt unseen, silenced, or dismissed came rushing back, weaving itself into a narrative that whispered, "See? You don't matter. You never have."

The truth is, I wanted to believe my coworker's words didn't matter. I wanted to pretend that the hurt dissolved with each passing moment. Instead, they rooted themselves into the corners of my mind and built a home there.

I feel like this may have been the last offense that did it for me, the one that numbed me to love, to life, to healing. I became more cautious with my words and more guarded with

my dreams. I had spent years trying to believe God would fight my battles, but I felt safer when I took matters into my own hands. That wound, ignored and untended, joined others in shaping the way I perceived everything that came after it. I took up offense, and it held me hostage.

Where Has Offense Led You?

Carrying offense has led me only to insecurity, defeat, and anger. Where has offense led you?

The hurt I've been carrying around has left me more:

- resentful
- impatient with others
- critical
- harsh
- callous
- emotionally reactive
- envious

And it's left me less:

- hopeful
- secure
- patient
- forgiving
- soft
- confident

But how offense has left you is not the end.

I'm not here to explain your pain away. I want you to feel seen and deeply loved. I want you to know that Jesus offers a way in and through your wounds. Every ounce of offense you're carrying is safe with Him, even if it doesn't feel that way right now.

Hurt is universal. None of us escape the effects of living in a fallen world. Disappointment, rejection, and unmet expectations are inevitable. Wounds are among the hardest parts of life, second only to grief and death. But they are not the end of our story. They do not define us.

The thing about offense is that it isn't just found in a passing moment. It's a collection of stories our minds and hearts hold on to, a library that catalogs each moment we are misunderstood, overlooked, or deeply hurt. Faces we once trusted become tinged with pain whenever we recall them. Places that once brought joy now carry an ache, a reminder of conversations that should have gone differently. Offense is made up of more than just what was said or done; it is also about what was left undone. The words we wish we had said keep us up at night.

Offense is the quiet mourning of a version of ourselves we wanted to protect—the person who would have stood tall, known better, said the right words, or walked away sooner. But life is rarely that clean. We collect these offenses, replay our responses, and, without realizing it, allow them to shape us. Each unspoken defense, each moment we wish we could rewrite, becomes part of who we are and how we see the world. And we continue to hold on to all of it, even when everything in us wants to let go.

My whole life, I have wanted to pretend that people's words and actions don't hurt me, but they do. I want to be someone

who can easily let go of moments, feelings, and experiences. I want to move past the past. But it chases me in the present. I am made of flesh and bones, and each time I've let a wound go untended, it has become part of the framework from which I see my life. A hurt left untended becomes an offense I pick up.

Wounded? I feel it.

Betrayed? I carry it.

Rejected? I live it.

Belittled, overlooked, undervalued? I hide because of it.

Offended? I embody it.

I used to avoid confessing when someone hurt me and downplayed any offense that crept into my heart. Honestly, there are still moments when I resist owning up to it. I get tangled up in the hurt, caught in its trap, and tied to its lies. The offended heart knows what it needs to thrive: pride, resentment, bitterness, insecurity, and an unforgiving spirit. These are the weeds and vines that choke out new life, and they have been my wilderness.

Offense has a way of following you around once you pick it up. It's everywhere you go.

- The comment from your friend that didn't sit well.
- The belittling remark your coworker made.
- The statement from your spouse that cut deeper than ever before.
- The wound you received from the severing of a friendship that couldn't be repaired.
- The unforgettable pain from your childhood.
- The rage you carry, passed down from the hurt others handed you.

- The apology you never received.
- The invite you never got.
- The “I’m sorry, but we decided to go with someone else.”
- The silence that followed when you needed someone to speak up.
- The feeling of being unloved or overlooked by the very people you thought were safe.
- The kind of betrayal that doesn’t just break your heart—it breaks your trust in people.

I can understand, for the most part, why things happened the way they did for me. I can even process the reasons behind the hurt. But making peace with my pain? Finding true acceptance in it and learning to move forward? That’s the challenge. It’s as if living unoffendable is an impossible dream, an existence that feels out of reach, especially when the wounds run this deep. I want to be able to experience hurt without letting it define me. And I want to honor my experiences without allowing them to victimize me.

One challenge in facing our hurt is to stop numbing it long enough to actually see it for what it is. But we are terrified of pain, so we medicate it. We numb it by whatever means we can find, whether through distractions, avoidance, or simply shutting down. We are constantly looking for ways to escape the hurt. Defensive, guarded, angry, resentful, bitter, exhausted, suspicious—we wear it all like armor, thinking it will protect us, but in reality, it only makes us more vulnerable.

Here’s the hard truth: Medicating pain doesn’t heal it. Numbing hurt doesn’t remove it. Bitterness won’t heal on its

own. Anger won't heal the wound; it will only trap us beneath more layers of offense, building up resentment, bitterness, and exhaustion. We often try to explain away our hurt, thinking it's easier to just move on. But this merely masks it, allowing offense to remain, grow, and begin to define us.

Acknowledging the hurt might feel like admitting defeat, as if facing it makes it more real or permanent. We fear that if we look too closely, we might unravel everything we've worked so hard to maintain. But the more we guard our hearts from pain and close ourselves off to healing, the more we will continue confused and defensive. We must be brave enough to face our offense.

Offense, My Copilot

When I was in kindergarten, my mom dressed me in what I now realize was peak nineties fashion: velvet dresses with bows and shoulder pads, the kind you'd see in a JCPenney holiday catalog. But these weren't just for Christmas or Easter—we wore them year-round. In my family, appearances were everything. No one could know how deeply we were hurting. Whatever was happening on the inside, we made sure the outside looked perfect.

But before those dresses and our move to the US, my earliest memories were rooted in Caracas, Venezuela. I can still feel the warmth of the breeze, the kindness of the people, and the vibrancy of the culture. It was a place where I felt a sense of belonging so deep it still lingers. Joy lived there—unshaken, untouched by the storms that would come later. Sometimes I wonder what life might have looked like if we had stayed. Venezuela held my happiest memories, my purest joy.

Everything shifted when we moved back to the US. My parents had been separated, living in different countries, but I missed my dad deeply. I longed for his love—for a chance at family again. My mom said yes to leaving behind the life we knew, even though it terrified her. She made the move with hope in her heart—hope that maybe, just maybe, something could be restored. She wanted more for me. A father. A family. A future we could reclaim. But her sacrifice unraveled quickly. My dad chose himself over us—preferring another woman and, above all, alcohol. The betrayal cut deep. It didn't just hurt; it hollowed. And pain like that doesn't stay contained. It spills into everything. It steals vision, chokes out hope, and leaves you grasping for meaning.

For my mom, the pain became her identity. I saw it in the way it drained the light from her once playful and charismatic spirit. And I learned from her. As a little girl, I fought to protect her and myself, but in doing so, I picked up the same offense she carried. It became my lens, distorting how I saw the world. All I could see was that no one was coming to love me or save me.

My dad's choices rewrote how my mom saw herself—her worth, her value, her security. She gave everything she had to hold us together, but offense is a venom that poisons everything it touches. Her depression became a silent storm that swept through both of us, shaping my life in ways I'm only now beginning to untangle.

That first week back in the US was heavy with tension and unspoken disappointment. Life doesn't wait for you to catch your breath. I started school, and my mom and I became actors, masking our brokenness with tidy exteriors. I remember gripping her hand tightly as we walked down the school

halls on that first day. Neither of us knew how to navigate the trauma we were stepping into. We had no support, no resources. We had felt so brave leaving Venezuela, so hopeful that this time would be different. But it wasn't.

My mom regretted the move almost immediately. The weight of what we had left behind, coupled with the pain of what we had returned to, became too much to bear. She blamed everyone—my dad, herself, and even me, questioning why I ever thought coming back to him was the right choice. But I was just a little girl, and I wanted a dad. I couldn't see the truth of what was happening; all I knew was that I longed to be loved by him, to have him there. Her regret felt suffocating, leaving no room for us to feel settled or safe. The pain she carried shaped everything, and I could feel it shaping me too, though I wasn't yet old enough to understand the depth of it.

Offense and hurt have a way of clouding our ability to love and live with empathy, making us the most selfish and prideful versions of ourselves. My mom's bitterness and regret weren't just her personal struggles; they became a filter through which I saw everything. It was hard to love when it felt like we were both drowning in the same weight of pain.

Layers to Healing

There are layers to healing. Sometimes our genesis stories don't look the way we envisioned or would have wanted, and yet God does something only He can do in them and in us. He reaches back into our past to heal our present. There's always a way forward when God invites us into a new life with Him. It's never too late. If we allow it, facing the immense challenges of life can lead us through a deep process of healing. It has the

power to unlock strength, peace, and hope we never knew were possible. Ultimately, it can guide us to the place we've always longed for—a place of true acceptance, security, and wholeness.

One of those layers that needed to be healed began to form in the cold hallways of my new school. My mom had dropped me off, and I was scared for a million reasons. I felt my stomach twist and my chest tighten, my body signaling its anxiety and fear. My throat was dry as if it were closing up, and each breath was difficult to draw. At that moment, I thought, *This is my new life*. Despite the unease, I was excited for recess to arrive. I knew just enough English to get by, and I had my kindness—something my mom had gifted me, along with her smile. She had an incredible ability to bring joy and gentleness wherever she went, loving people so deeply. Suffering can either soften the heart or harden it. It hadn't totally taken hers yet.

On that cold, gray fall day, the playground structure loomed before me, the red metal sharp against the chill. I climbed up the bars, eager to go down the slide. But as I reached the top, an overwhelming awareness washed over me: I was wearing a dress. Behind me, a group of girls waited their turn to slide down. They didn't have dresses on.

"Hi!" I said. Despite my embarrassment, I couldn't wait to make new friends. A few girls were kind and waved back. We went down the slide, one by one, until my dress got caught on the side. I scrambled down and clumsily met the mulch on the ground. Brushing myself off, I got up and stood to the side, waiting for the other girls to slide down after me. My heart raced with anticipation. I wanted to ask if they would play with me.

As I think back to that moment, I see a willing, openhearted girl, one who reached out first with hope and bravery. What

I didn't know then, and what I would learn much later, was that this kind of vulnerability, this openness, would one day feel like weakness to me. An invitation for betrayal. The sting of past rejections would try to convince me that guarding my heart was safer and that protecting myself was survival.

Before I knew it, one of the little girls was mocking me. "You don't speak English!" she said. Tears filled my eyes, but I was too embarrassed to cry, so I just stood there. Kids will be kids, but no one warns you how much words shape who you become. I ran to my teacher, hoping for comfort. Instead, she brushed me off and told me to stand by her until recess ended. I didn't fully understand what was happening, only that the feeling was familiar. I had felt this shame before. My mind flashed back to the first time I heard my dad say he didn't want us around anymore—just that week. The shame and sense of being unwanted washed over me. My body tensed, and my defense mechanisms kicked in. I had learned what rejection felt like before that day, and this fresh pain only added to my wounds.

Our origin stories give us a framework through which we view the rest of life. My story began with the grueling reality of my dad's alcoholism and betrayal. I picked up that hurt and met offense early on. I became friends with it. I learned to live offended with people and life, and God.

Living offended happens when we make the choice to live from a place of hurt. And it's a choice not just to live with the hurt but to live with the resentment and bitterness that accompany it.

Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies show that when we experience rejection, there is a physical response in our brains that imitates the reaction of physical

trauma to the body. Rejection physically manifests as pain in our bodies. Offense *hurts*. I know this firsthand, and I want us to finally learn to heal from it. I want our hearts to experience a new sense of freedom in Christ, one that breeds forgiveness and compassion for both ourselves and others.

God made us to be people free from the chains and the weight of always living offended. He desires for us to have the confidence to live life as He designed it, with love, patience, kindness, self-control, and joy. Through Jesus, He calls us to live in the security of His love so that no matter what comes our way, we will be like a tree, rooted and firmly planted by streams of living water (Ps. 1:3).

We all have defining moments of pain in our lives. But young or old, we have a choice. We can either live offended or release our grip on bitterness. We can't control whether people hurt us. We will sin and be sinned against. Our ability to let go of offense begins with God, with Him as our compass and guide. Because time alone won't heal our wounds, but time with God will.

In the following chapters, we're going to take a look with God at our hurts and hearts. We're going to reach down into the bags of our lives and empty out even the smallest of unhealed hurt. We will look at the ways we have let our hurt become our offense and learn how to respond to our discomfort and pain from a secure and safe place in Jesus. We'll be free to forgive, free to stop living from the offense, safe enough in Christ to trust that He is Lord over all and He will fight for us. We'll finally begin to live *from* love and not *for* it. This is where we'll find true acceptance and true healing. When we can let go.

You may have picked this book up because your heart is tired of living constantly wounded and offended. Maybe you haven't been betrayed but have been widely disappointed and

discouraged by someone you trusted. Or maybe you have been betrayed, and the idea of forgiving that person still feels impossible. Perhaps you're tired of feeling constantly insecure and isolated in your pain. You're stuck in the symptom of offense, and it's crippling you. You're weary, wondering how on earth you'll ever love, trust, or walk in victory again. You're tired of living for the consistent need to be loved by people because that previous wound left you empty—looking for love in all the wrong places. Instead of living securely, you're living resentful and angry. You're waiting for the apology, but it's been years and nothing yet. Maybe you're bitter and can't stand who you've become. You've tried being the bigger person, but turning the other cheek is starting to hurt more than the hurt itself. You won't forgive, but you'll think about it. You won't let go, because being right and justified in your pain feels better than you'd like to admit. You want to believe the best, but every time you do, you're constantly let down.

For me, picking up the offense has felt more justifiable than letting it go. I have become more accustomed to a life of offense than a life of peace and acceptance. I learned how to live offended for most of my life. It may sound dramatic, but it's the truth. Until recently, I didn't know a life without that nagging companion, that terrible copilot, constantly whispering lies about my lack and my inability to be loved.

Offense feeds on my doubts, deepening the cycle of self-criticism and hesitation. In my mind, no one seems safe enough because I'm not sure anyone will ever truly love me. Offense keeps me just far enough away from those I care for that real intimacy feels impossible. It feels too costly. This mindset clouds my judgment, making me question my worth, and anchors me in fear and shame.

When we've been walking too long on the path of offense, it's like stepping through wet cement—fresh, heavy, and clinging to everything. At first, we think we're moving forward, but over time, our feet sink. The longer we stand in it, the harder it is to move. Eventually it hardens around us, and we find ourselves stuck—trapped in the very things we never meant to carry this long.

Friend, we have a choice to make. We can continue to hold on to the hurt and offense we are carrying, despite it breaking our backs, or we can choose freedom. This doesn't mean excusing sinful behavior—ours or theirs—but rather healing from it. We are allowed, along with Jesus in Gethsemane, to ask God to let this cup pass from us while we process the pain to make peace with it. We will walk with God on this journey of learning to let go. We won't deny our pain or minimize the hurt, but rather, we will let the hurt hurt. And as we do, we will notice where we need God most.

Weeds and Vines

What resonates with you as you read this is important. The Spirit reveals the things that need His touch and our attention. We can't outrun hurt, but with God, we can prepare ourselves for the inevitability of offense. We can understand, grow from, and even be freed from its symptoms. Living offended is a choice, and we have the power to let it trap us or to free ourselves from it.

When I first began thinking about this idea of letting go, I couldn't help but picture vines. Despite my collection of houseplants and trips to the garden section at Home Depot, I am no gardener. When my oldest daughter was around five years

old, she was obsessed with having flowers in our backyard. She wanted a planter, so naturally, I didn't take the easy route. I didn't just buy one off Amazon. Instead, I looked up "DIY planters" on Pinterest, found the most straightforward plan, and built my girl her planter. A few weeks later, we purchased and planted the easiest flowers to keep alive. We were thrilled to see the first sprouts emerge, but a few months later, we noticed some unexpected visitors—weeds. We figured our feathered friends must have carried seeds from their travels, giving the weeds a new home to grow. At first, some of the weeds seemed pretty, but they quickly took over the planter. They choked out the flowers, leaving little room for anything else to thrive.

When the COVID pandemic hit, like everyone else, we had to find new ways to fill our days. That was when I decided to become a "gardener" again—for all of five months. You can laugh at me. This time, though, I was prepared for the weeds. I knew how to protect our planters from being overtaken. I covered the potting mix with a layer of mulch, used weed barrier fabric and pre-weed killer, and even tried some home remedies like salt and vinegar (though I still don't fully understand how those work). Armed with these tools, I hoped for a better outcome.

But it got me thinking: How do we move forward when our feet are tangled in the weeds of offense? How do we love again when our hearts have grown cold with self-protection? How do we step into lives of abundance when the things that define, defile, and deplete us have such power? How do we rewrite our story to one of freedom when defeat keeps replaying in our minds like a song on a loop?

Unhealed hurt grows like weeds that pop up unwanted in our planter boxes, in a hurry to make sense of what's happened.

And when it doesn't know where to go or what to do, the enemy of our souls does. He's ready to show us a way out of hurt every time, and it's never helpful or good.

The hurt grows and creates a habitable ecosystem in us, and then we notice that breathing through the pain has become almost unbearable, taking the breath out of our lungs and our love. Life begins to seem less and less hopeful, and we begin to demonize everything and everyone. No one is safe. *We will never be hurt like this again.*

It's interesting how vines grow at the same speed as weeds. That was the other picture I got when I began thinking about the power of offense in our lives. Vines compete with trees for sunlight, water, nutrients, air, and space. They want to grow and they will, no matter the cost, choking out the branches and even killing the trees. They grow aggressively, with one goal: to take what they need. Once a vine gets itself around something, pulling it off can be a tedious and exhausting experience.

Most of us have spent our whole lives trying to pull the vines of hurt and offense off our hearts and souls, to no avail. And no matter how hard we try to forgive, grow, move on, walk in confidence, be secure, and find joy and life again, we end back up where we started. It's like we made a bad deal and can't escape it.

If we can't pull the vines out of tall trees or other structures, we're told to concentrate on killing or removing the roots. It's the only sure way we'll get rid of the vines. This goes for weeds too. Pull them up.

When our hurt overgrows like weeds and becomes an offense we've picked up, it paints our lives in gray and tries to take every bit of the color out of it. It touches every good thing in its path and wraps itself around whatever it can find.

Sometimes the wound is so complicated, nuanced, and layered that we don't know where to start. How do we pull the root from something so delicate and intertwined without causing mass destruction?

As I write this, I feel the tension of how complicated and tangled hurt is in my own life. I want to forgive. I want to overlook the offense. I want to look at the people who hurt me and tell them how long it's taken to get over the words they spoke at me and over me. I want to go back six years and address a conversation I should have spoken up about. I long to reconcile with God just how disappointed I am with the amount of loss my family has experienced in the last five years, how much I miss the days when life wasn't so full of grief, and how I can't remember a season of my life without disappointment. I've tried to overlook offense through my best efforts. I stare at it just long enough to deal with the initial wave of discomfort, then find a way to live with it, then push it out of sight. I tell myself I've buried it deep enough, but it's only an illusion.

The trap of offense creates fertile ground for resentment, bitterness, and mistrust to take root—a toxic playground we often find ourselves stuck in. These emotions don't just linger; they multiply, feeding on unresolved hurt and unforgiven wrongs. Over time, they grow into walls that foster division, isolation, and a cycle of pain that feels impossible to break. Resentment and bitterness, born from wounds left untreated, lead to offense and anchor us in it, making freedom feel like a distant hope.

Wounds don't just happen, and they don't just disappear either. It's tough to move on from how someone treated us or to forget the ache their words left behind. We replay the hurt over

and over, and it starts to shape the way we see everything. The fear of future pain keeps us stuck in the past, unsure of how to let go of the words, the moments, or the people that hurt us. And unless we're prepared for it, those words and actions can become our identity—they start to define us.

The longer we carry offense, the more it shapes us, making it harder to see the life we've been called to—one of abundance, love, and release. The hurt hurts, but healing can also be part of our story.