EQUIPPING, SELF-MASTERY PART 3
NOVEMBER 8, 2023

Let's pray: Father we bless Your name, we love you. We thank you for your joyful intentionality towards each one of us. No one understands us like you understand us. No one is so geared to making us triumphant as You.

No one is so enthusiastically ready and willing and able to lift us into a better lifestyle than You. We love You, Lord. We bask in Your love all the time. It is amazing to us that You see us so perfectly and love us so well.

Our response is, we love you. Holy Spirit give us the feeling of betting shut-in with Jesus, and put something into our whole heart tonight that will set us free and transform us. Thank you Lord. Amen.

love us so well, that You see us so perfectly. Our response, Lord, is just to say, "We are coming. We are coming. Make sure You have enough food in because we are coming." In Jesus' name, Amen.

Welcome to our continuing discussions on what it looks like to walk with Jesus as a Christ-follower, who is first an apprentice, then a disciple, and then one who becomes exactly like Jesus.

For the past two months we have been dialoging about the subject of self-mastery, of ***building an internal structure created for a prosperous soul, created to live with success and triumph.***

When we choose to live with self-mastery we are choosing to build an internal structure that shapes us so powerfully on the inside, we are powerful over every external circumstance we will face.

Tonight I want to talk about four of the greatest weapons the enemy uses to attempt to ***weaken*** our internal structure: ***bitterness, disappointment, offense and unforgiveness.***

One of the greatest conflicts to ***ruling and reigning in our internal world*** is unresolved pain, caused by disappointment, that we allow to lodge in our heart.

If we do not deal with that disappointment, ***in a redemptive way,*** if we ***deny it, ignore it, or shove it way down deep inside of us,*** we become very vulnerable to mental, emotional and spiritual setback.

That is exactly what the write of **Proverbs 13:12-**is telling us when he writes: *hope deferred makes the heat sick.*

I cannot stress enough how important it is to make certain you have dealt in a **redemptive manner** with all disappointment, because if all you have done is shoved it deep down inside and ignored it, that ***destructive spirit,*** is still impacting your ***internal and external worlds.***

You may not even be aware that the reason you are unable to live in prolonged peace, joy and contentment, is because of that **unresolved pain** that is lodged in your heart.

The Scripture tells us, *out of the heart, the mouth speaks,* and when you are saying all the right things externally, but internally there is this *bitterness, or offense,* the spirit world immediately recognizes-that's a lie, and that right there is an open invitation for on-going spiritual conflict-because it opens the door and invites in the spirits of **confusion, deception and chaos.** We unconsciously we end up contributing to the conflict, and then we wonder why we have such turmoil in our life.

So, let's take a look at these dark-realm weapons, and we will start with bitterness.
BITTERNESS-

The dictionary defines the word 'bitterness' as: *one who is angry and disappointed at being treated unfairly; one who is extremely unhappy because of the inability to forget bad things that have happened to them.*

Bitterness may be the most destructive weapon in the arsenal of our **adversary. Bitterness is like committing suicide. It is like drinking poison. In fact, somebody once said: *Bitterness is like drinking poison, and hoping somebody else dies, that being the person who hurt us.***

One of the most difficult people to help is a bitter person, because the way to deal with bitterness involves forgiveness, and bitter people view forgiveness as a weakness.

I do not know if you have dealt with bitterness within yourself, or been around others who are bitter, but bitterness is all-consuming. It becomes the only emotion you feel. Everything in your life is seen through this lens of bitterness.

Bitterness almost always comes because we have been offended. Someone has betrayed us, or wounded us, and we get offended, our hearts fill up with bitterness and unforgiveness.

So let's look at the **second weapon** of the enemy which is 'offense'.

OFFENSE
In **Luke 17:1-** Jesus told the disciples: *Then he said to the disciples, 'it is impossible that no offenses should come.*

The Passion Translation says: *Betrayals are inevitable.* We all will face betrayals, and those betrayals will always test us.

Joseph is definitely one of my favorite Bible characters. You remember Josephs story, how he shares the dreams the Lord has given him with his brothers, and part of that dream reveals that Joseph one day will be ruling over his older brothers, and they are not happy.

So, Joseph's they discuss killing him, but then change their mind and sell him into slavery, and he ends up in Egypt.

He is absolutely betrayed by the people he should have trusted the most. Joseph was devastated. **Psalm 105:18** says that his soul was held by irons. In other words, his soul was heavy, weighed down. He was deeply wounded. This betrayal went deep into his soul.

So, while in slavery, with these promises of the Lord over his life, Joseph is betrayed two more times, once by Potifars wife, and once by the baker he befriended in prison. But Joseph, just like Caleb, was a man of a different spirit. He lived with self-mastery.

He knew that God, in his wisdom, will often allow events and circumstances into our life that he could have easily prevented by his power, but he allows them for a purpose. What was happening in Joseph's life was allowed by God to develop that internal structure that could handle the weight of his dream, his assignment.
At the end of this part of Joseph's life, the dream is coming into fruition. There is a famine in the land, but because of the wisdom of Joseph, Egypt is flush. They have way more than enough, and people are coming to Egypt to get food. Joseph is over the whole project.

Eventually, dad sends the brothers to Egypt and they are reunited with Joseph, and they broke down crying and asking for forgiveness, Joseph said, *I forgive you, but in reality, it wasn't you, it was God. What you meant for evil God turned for good. All this was part of God's plan.*

Three times Joseph said to his brothers, everything that happened was all part of God's plan.

And I want you to hear this: Joseph knew that the betrayal of his brothers was a big part of building this internal structure built to hold the dreams of God for his life.

Now that does not excuse their acts. They will have to deal with their choices with God, but we have to come to a place of forgiveness and kindness towards them.

I think back to all the times that I did not respond the way Joseph did when I found myself ***betrayed, hurt or wounded.*** And one time the Lord spoke to me and said, *ya know Gary, one of the things that really hurt my heart was never discovering all the* ***gifts*** *and* ***treasures*** *that I wanted you to discover in this process.*

He said, *you got so consumed with your anger, your pain, and the person who hurt you, that you missed all these opportunities to connect with me, and become more like me, and pick up the gifts and treasures available to you.*

And you missed such a brilliant opportunity to experience me in a fresh way and experience new levels of intimacy with me.

Everything is always about you and the Lord becoming best friends. It is always about you submitting to His Lordship. It is always about you finding God in a way that you never thought possible.

Sometimes our greatest breakthroughs come, when we are offended.

I found that to be true with the Syrophoenician woman found in **Matthew 15.** This woman approached Jesus and asked for help to see her daughter healed, and Jesus responded by saying: *It is not right for a man to take bread from his children and throw it to the dogs.*

Now, that right there has every opportunity for offense. Jesus calls her a dog. She could have been offended, but she is not. She said, *but even puppies get the crumbs that fall from the table*

Her faith amazed Jesus and her daughter was healed from demonic torment. She asked for crumbs, she got exactly what she came to Jesus for. **The opportunity to choose self-mastery. The opportunity to say no to the spirit of offense lead to her greatest breakthrough.**

This woman was determined to see her daughter get delivered, and there was no way she was going to let what **said or did to her, carry the power to rob of her purpose.**

She stepped past offense and stepped right into her miracle. Sometimes being offended offers us a pathway into our greatest miraculous breakthroughs.

Maybe, just maybe, the place of your greatest disappointment is your invitation to a great breakthrough.

We have a second illustration, in the book of Acts: When the disciples needed to replace Judas the choice came down to two men: Joseph, called Barsabbas, and Matthias, and they could not decide, so we read in **Acts 1:24:**

Lord, you know the heart of every man. Please give us clear revelation to know which of these two men you have chosen to be an apostle and take Judas' place. They cast lots and determined that Matthias was the Lord's choice, so he was added to the eleven apostles.

So, the Lord chooses Matthias. Matthias is stoked. Everyone is like—*yea Matthias!* And the disciples gather around him, and say-*C'mon on-we are going to have a disciples-only lunch.*

And you are Barsabbas—how do you feel in that moment? I mean, you are happy for Matthias, but look, I mean, they prayed: *Lord you know the hearts of these two men—which one should we choose.* And the Lord did not choose you.

I promise you, this is the very moment the ***dark realm spirit of rejection*** is going to come rushing in.

This is a moment where his heart is ripe for 'offense', especially towards God, who did not choose him, or maybe towards himself, is there something wrong with me? This is a moment ripe for ***anger, bitterness and offense.***

Barnabas proved he lived with **self-mastery,** and handled this rejection with great trust in God, and that led directly to his promotion, which we find in **Acts chapter 15.** Paul and Barnabas are heading to a church in Antioch that was struggling with the spirit of offense, and look who they took with them:

The apostles, elders and the church of Jerusalem chose Judas, called Barsabbas and Silas, both leaders in the church, to accompany Paul and Barnabas, to the church in Antioch to address the issues with offense.

How great is that? The man who passed the test of rejection and offense is being sent to a group of people under the devastating power of the spirit of offense. Who better to send?

In both instances—the mother of the child, and Barsabbas, we see that both exercised self-mastery in their internal world, to overcome disappointment and to ignore offense—and that put them on the pathway to breakthroughs in their life.

FORGIVENESS

Okay, one last area I want to hit and that is forgiveness.

Sometimes our pain is caused by people so we direct that pain towards them through un-forgiveness.

Sometimes that pain is caused by our own choices, and we end up aiming unforgiveness towards ourselves, we are unable to forgive ourselves.

And sometimes that pain is caused by delays to breakthroughs, unanswered prayers, things not working out the way we though they should and we direct that pain towards God.

So, lets first look at: **OFFENSE AIMED AT GOD**

Our example here is found in **Luke 1,** and it is the story of John the Baptists dad, Zechariah. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth had been promised a child by God, but here they are very, very old and they still have no children.

Zechariah is disappointed. He has allowed that disappointment to abide, unresolved in his heart for many years, and now he is now an angry and bitter man, offended at God.

He is angry, bitter and offended at God, because he believes God has let him down. And the story of this man shows how powerfully destructive bitterness is, because Gabriel, an arch-angel is sent by God to speak with Zechariah, and Zechariah argues with the angel.

Zechariah is startled and overwhelmed with fear as the angel Gabriel shows up, by Gabriel says-do not be afraid Zechariah! God is showing grace to you. For I have come to tell you that your prayer for a child has been answered, and your wife, Elizabeth, will bear you a son, and you are to name him John.

It is funny, when you look at the original language here, Gabriel actually says to Zechariah-*God is answering the prayer you no longer pray.*

Well, good old Zech overcame his fear quickly, because he begins to argue with Gabriel. And he says: *Do you expect me to believe this? I am an old man and my wife is too old to have a child. Are you out of your mind?*

And Gabriel says: *Dude, I am Gabriel, I stand in the presence of God. This is going to happen. But since you are consumed with bitterness and unbelief, you are not going to be able to speak until your son is born. We do not want you polluting the atmosphere with unbelief.*

The spirit of negativity and unbelief wars against the supernatural. That is why so often you would see Jesus clear a room of people, before he would heal someone.

In **Mark 6** Jesus came into his home town and began to teach in the synagogue. The Scripture says that everyone one who heard his teaching was overwhelmed with astonishment at his words, and the Spirit was moving powerfully.

Then one person said, *Wait a minute, isn't this Jesus, Mary and Joe's boy? We know him. We have known him his whole life. He's nothing special.* And **Mark 6:3** says: *They all took offense at Jesus.*

And that spirit of unbelief shut everything down and we read in **Mark 6:6-***Jesus was amazed at the depth of their unbelief.* Unbelief shut down the miraculous, and Jesus was unable to do any great miracle in Nazareth, except to heal a few sick people.

Zechariah was angry and offended at God. Hey it happens. It actually happened with me, a long time ago. I was going through a very difficult experience, and I blamed God, I felt he left me down, and I was very angry and offended at him. In fact I remember going to him and railing at him, throwing all these accusations at him. I unloaded on him, and then just walked away.

But the Holy Spirit continued to move on my heart, and my heart softened, and I went back before the Lord, and here is what I learned from that experience: When you realize that you have opened the door and let the enemy come in and build a case against God and offense had filled your heart here is what you do:

- Get alone with the Lord and be GUT-LEVEL honest with Him.

Don't accuse Him. Don't go right into the Throne Room and spew all these accusations at Him, and then turn around and leave. We don't have that right.

Now God is big enough to take that. He did not have an issue with me unloading on him. What hurt his heart was when I simply left, that I did not stay around and be with him and give him an opportunity to respond. **So I did, and I was brutally honest but in a respectful way.**

And the one thing I did not do, was demand to know why this happened? We always believe if we knew why something happened, or did not happen, we could live in peace. But that is simply not true.

God says-*my peace passes all understanding,* so when you are holding your peace hostage to having the why question answered, you are going after an INFERIOR peace. Now I am not saying God won't tell you why, I am just saying, do not demand it.

Now when I went back in, in a spirit of humility, I would love to say that Jesus manifested himself physically in the room, but that did not happen. However, the room

filled up with such a tangible sense of peace, that I could not even stand. I was overwhelmed with such a love that I cannot describe.

So, that is offense aimed at God, the second one is offense aimed at people, that manifests in UNFORGIVENESS.

First of all, forgiveness is not an option. Even in the model prayer of Jesus, we read: forgive me to the degree I forgive others.

But I also understand it is very difficult to forgive at times. Again, I have been there, where I had zero desire to forgive some people, but I knew I had to, and the Lord was so good and gracious to me. He spoke very clearly to me and gave me two keys:

- Key #1-The Holy Spirit will help you. When I told the Lord, I just am struggling to forgive, the Lord said to me: *I know, you are very stubborn, you have a very powerful will that does not like to submit. So, we are going to live out* ***Philippians 2:13-****I am going to work in you and in your will for my good pleasure. You just simply invite me into that wound and I will influence your will. Can you do that? YES.*

- Key #-Forgiveness is an act of faith. When you sincerely, from the heart, truthfully forgive, it is a done-deal. And that forgiveness begins a process within you where you will be able to see the fruit of forgiveness in your life.

It is a process and at the beginning when you see the one who offended or wounded you, you get this tight feeling, this anger will rise up, and the enemy will come into your head and say-*see, you cannot forgive. You will never be able to forgive this person*.

However, that is a lie, from the liar, from the accuser; you have forgiven, it is an act of faith and the feelings will follow. You will know you have truly forgiven because there will be fruit of forgiveness manifesting in your life.

- You will be able to rejoice with them if they are rejoicing. You will be happy for them

- You will be able to feel for them if they are going through a difficult time. Wow, I'm really sorry to hear that is happening, not YES, finally , you are getting what you deserve ☺

- You will be able to be at peace and rest around them. You should be able to live in that place in your spirit-man. Seeing them should not launch you into your emotions and your feelings.

- You will be able to converse with them.

Let me say this though, and this is really important: **Forgiveness does not mean that I have to trust the person I am forgiving. You see, trust has to be earned forgiveness doesn't**.

Let's finish up by looking at the last one: Unforgiveness aimed at yourself.

The enemy loves to exploit our poor choices and our failures. He loves to **infect** our souls with guilt and shame, when we fail. Guilt is I have done something bad. Shame is-I am that person.

For years I was paralyzed with guilt and shame each time I failed, and believe me, I failed a lot.

It wasn't until the Holy Spirit showed me how Jesus responds to me in my failure that set me free and allowed me ***to live with self-mastery over failure.***

I used to have a vision of Jesus, arms across his chest, shaking his head, disgusted with me when I failed, then he would walk away. The reality is, he is never disgusted with us, and he always moves in closer when we fail.

Let me give you a quick illustration of this using the story of the woman caught in adultery. I won't go into great detail, this will be a short version of this. The story is found in **John chapter 8** where a woman, is set-up by a group of horrible men, who used her as a human pawn to try to trap Jesus into making a mistake.

She is caught in the 'act-of-adultery', and dragged down the street of her hometown naked, in front of everyone she knows. And then, when it seems like it could never get worse—it does; because then she is thrown in front of a man named Jesus, naked.

She knows the penalty for this offense is to be stoned to death, and she is like, *awesome, please kill me. I am dead anyway. There is no way I can face anybody again. I am NAKED AND ASHAMED.*

This entire situation—was a complete set-up. It was a choreographed scene, set up by a group of devious, hate-filled, spiteful men—who used this woman as a PROP, to get to Jesus.

The story starts out by telling us Jesus appeared at the Temple court and all these people gathered around Him, as He began to teach them. Now, you would have a really difficult time convincing me that Jesus did not know what was coming. He was here in this moment for this woman.

These guys, drag this woman in naked, they throw her in front of Jesus and they say: *Teacher this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women.*

So—how ridiculous are these guys? They are about to tell Jesus what the LAW says, and not only that, they got it wrong. The Law never states that if a woman is committing adultery that you are to take her and stone her.

The law, according to **Leviticus 20:10** actually says-if a HUSBAND is committing adultery with another man's wife—It seems to imply that there are actually two people involved in this whole issue of adultery.

It also appears that this woman was so creative that she was actually committing adultery all-by-herself ☺.

6 *They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing Jesus.*

What makes me so angry is how callous and inhumane these men were-that they could treat a human being in this manner. **She was nothing more than on object lesson to be used to trap Jesus.**

So Jesus bends down and writes something in the dirt, and suddenly everything changes. There are many theories on what he wrote, but the bottom line is, what he wrote challenged them.

In the Middle East, in such circumstances, people naturally turn to the eldest person that is there, so they all probably turned to the elder to see if he has the courage to respond to the challenge of Jesus. He does not, and the group of accusers leaves.

They could no longer hide behind their hypocrisy. They were exposing this woman's failure—but—they were hiding behind their own. I don't want you to miss what Jesus did for this woman. **He will stand up in your defense, when others want to stone you.**

10 *Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

Now what is kind of surprising is that if indeed she was dragged down the streets with no clothing on—why doesn't Jesus do something about it? Why doesn't He ask James, John, Peter, one of the guys to bring up a garment to cover her?

I mean—like Bartholomew, I mean, he's a disciple. You NEVER read anything about him. Nothing. He never does anything. You would think that one of the guys, John, or Matthew, might say—*Bart—give her your cloak man—do something. You're never going to get into the Bible if you don't do something* ☺ But they don't.

Because Jesus was not concerned about her nakedness, her vulnerability, **he was concerned about her heart and her soul.**

Jesus leans down and makes eye contact with her. Wow. Face-to-face with Jesus. EVERYTHING CHANGES IN THAT MOMENT.

She's still naked, but she is no longer full of shame-she does not care anymore what anyone says about her.

She can now FORGIVE herself, because the only ONE who could judge you, did not judge you. He stepped in and loved you, just the way you are, so you can forgive yourself.

That's what Jesus does-with us-in failure. He doesn't move away He draws near.

If this story shows us anything, it reveals **that the safest place for a person who has failed to go to---- is into the Presence of God.** He is the One who will not condemn us, or leave us in that place of pain, wounding and brokenness.

Believing that truth, embracing that truth and living that truth is the beginning of living in self-master over failure.

Father I thank You that You walk with us through the good and the bad. That you walk with us on the mountain and in the valley. And your commitment is never less than 100% because that is who you are.

Holy Spirit, this week, I ask that you, in that gentle and powerful way you work in our lives, show us if there is any place of bitterness, offense or unforgiveness in our heart. We long to live with self-mastery over guilt, shame, bitterness, offense and unforgiveness.

I pray, that we live in such harmony and love with you, with others and with ourselves, that we live with self-mastery over every external issue, and that we continue to create that internal structure built for triumph, and built for living with a prosperous soul. Thank You Lord. Amen

Thanks for listening.