

FINDING HEALING THROUGH FORGIVENESS

Looking Back: Clearing Away the Trash We Regret

Joel 1:2–20; 2:12–27



LET'S BEGIN HERE

God designed our souls to thrive when we connect in loving ways with other people. The psalmist delights in the beauty of healthy community:

How wonderful and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in harmony! (Psalm 133:1 NLT)

Conversely, how miserable it is when people live in discord—people like the family members who haven't spoken in years or the spouses who bicker incessantly. When our relationships suffer, the beauty of God's design fades like a rose that turns brown and brittle when cut from its stem.

For a moment, survey the landscape of your closest relationships. Do you see a garden thriving with affection and mutual encouragement? Or maybe you see thorns of unresolved offenses and angry words choking the once healthy relationships.

This series is designed to help you examine your relationships from all angles—looking back, ahead, within, and around—and then apply the principles gleaned from God's perspective. He is the Master Gardener who knows best how to restore relationships to their intended beauty. His Word contains the keys to a flourishing garden, and the first key is *repentance*.



DIGGING DEEPER

When studying the Scriptures, a helpful first step is to gather resources that will guide you in your study. Make certain you have handy a Bible dictionary and a concordance, as well as a reliable commentary on the book of the Bible you're studying. For this study, we recommend you get a copy of *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* and *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. You'll find a description of that and other resources in the "Bible Study Tools" section of our online store.

When we've blown it in a relationship, the right response is repentance, which usually isn't our first response. Many times, we'd rather sweep our mess under

Quotable

*Repentance is
complete when your
life is an open book
before the one you
have wronged.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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the rug or blame our trash on someone else. To repent we must deal with our sin honestly and be willing to bear the pain of regret and guilt—like David did when he dug through the debris of his past sins.



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

To clarify a biblical concept, such as repentance, a helpful study tool is to see it modeled in Scripture and then draw principles from the person's example. David's repentance is on display in Psalm 31:9–16. Read these verses, and note some of the characteristics of true repentance.

From David's example, what feelings are associated with repentance (Psalm 31:9–10)?

David took ownership of his sin, “my iniquity” (31:10 NASB). What characteristic of repentance can you draw from his example?

What consequences did David endure (31:11–13)?

Finally, to whom does a repentant person turn for help (31:14–16)?



Consolidate these points in a description of true repentance. From David's example, repentance involves . . .

David didn't move on with his life hoping his sins would be forgotten; he stopped. He looked back. He admitted his wrongs. And he took responsibility for the trash that littered the roadside—the splintered trust, dashed promises, and rotting pile of problems that his sin caused. Most important, rather than hide from the Lord as did Adam and Eve in their shame and regret, he drew close to the Lord to receive mercy.

Our acts of repentance—confessing our sin, taking responsibility for the consequences, and drawing near to God for mercy—please the Lord with the sweet aroma of heartfelt sacrifice (Psalm 51:16–17). The Lord longs for our repentance because He longs for a closer relationship with us. The process of *confession*, *forgiveness*, and *restoration* deepens our devotion to Him and bonds us with others like nothing else can. Shame separates us, but repentance connects and restores.

So vital is repentance to the health of our soul and our relationships that the Lord will do whatever it takes to produce its fruit—as He did to the nation of Judah in the days of the prophet Joel.

A Divinely Designed Disaster

Calamity struck the farming culture of Judah in three waves of natural disasters. Can you identify them in Joel 1:5–7, 12, and 19–20?

These disasters were devastating, but the most destructive was the locust plague that stripped the spirit of the people as bare as the landscape, leaving them in complete ruin. Write down the descriptions of locusts in Joel 1:4, and then note the catastrophic impact to the food source in Joel 1:10, 16–18.



Further Study

For an explanation of the shocking effects of a locust swarm, read the description under the heading “Locust” in the Animal Kingdom article in *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*. A copy of this classic Bible study resource can be obtained at the Insight for Living Ministries Web store. What strikes you about the devastation of a locust plague?

In chapter 2, Joel compares the locust swarm to an army of soldiers who “leap along the mountaintops” (Joel 2:5 NLT) and “break through defenses without missing a step” (2:8). As they charge, “the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars no longer shine” (2:10). It’s an apocalyptic scene, and who is leading the advance?

The LORD is at the head of the column.
He leads them with a shout.
This is his mighty army,
And they follow his orders.
The day of the LORD¹ is an awesome, terrible thing.
Who can possibly survive? (2:11)

Why was the Lord’s discipline so severe? What does the extent of the discipline say about the severity of the people’s sin?

Only a heavy battering ram could break through the defenses of the people’s stubborn will. God’s purpose, however, was not to destroy but to call His people to repentance and set them on a new path of restoration.



Three Principles of Restoration

After God's judgments comes the hope of restoration, which descends like refreshing showers on a parched landscape. What blessings does Joel describe in 2:23–24, culminating with this wonderful promise: "The LORD says, 'I will give you back what you lost to the swarming locusts'" (Joel 2:25)?

Have the locust-like consequences of sin stripped some of your relationships to barren stalks of terse, bitter exchanges? God can breathe new life into these damaged relationships as you apply three principles from Judah's example.

Start Immediately without Rationalization

Read Joel 2:12, and notice that the Lord urged the people to repent right away and be genuine: "Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead" (Joel 2:13).

Don't put off your repentance, and don't rationalize the wrong. Get specific in your confession. Have you been selfish, stubborn, prideful? Has a demanding tone laced your words? Have you been more willing to point blame than show grace? List the sins and how they've harmed others.

Return Completely without Reservation

Reread Joel 2:13 for the second principle. God's complete mercy is available in exchange for complete repentance. As Chuck says:

No hidden clauses. No inner reservations. No closed doors. No carefully kept secrets. Repentance is incomplete when there are areas that are held back or protected or left unaddressed and unaccountable. Repentance is complete when your life is an open book before the one you have wronged.



Opening your heart and life to the one you've offended often begins with a frank conversation with a trusted confidant. Whom can you talk to about your secrets, and when can you schedule a meeting?

Repent Openly without Hesitation

The urgency of repentance rings like a freedom bell in Joel 2:14–17. Read these verses, and write down the expressions of repentance. What do you learn from Judah's openness to guide your repentance process?



Bring It Home

Specifically, resolving offenses in our relationships includes this process:

- Sit down with the individual or individuals you've injured because of your behavior, and work through the list of wrongs one by one.
- Confess your sin and own the consequences.
- Describe your new course of change and accountability.
- Ask the person to forgive you.

Granting forgiveness may take time . . . which Chuck discusses in his next message. For now, we've done our part to clear away the trash and sow seeds of repentance in anticipation of a beautiful garden!



Close this study by writing a prayer asking the Lord for His forgiveness and receiving His grace, for He is “merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love” (Joel 2:13).



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I will not rationalize my sin but ask Your Spirit to do a work in my heart, to restore joy in my home, and to rebuild broken relationships. Give me the integrity and courage to come to terms with the things that require attention. May good come from my repentance. Relief. Freedom. Deliverance. And the free flow of peace. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Joel's theme of “the day of the Lord” echoes through the canyons of prophetic literature in various forms until its complete expression when Christ returns in judgment at His second advent (Revelation 19:11–20:15).



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

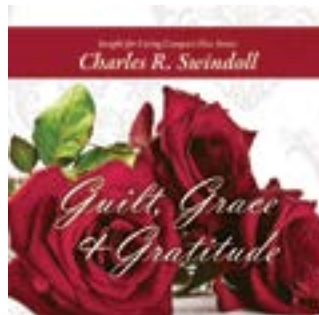
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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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