

FINDING HEALING THROUGH FORGIVENESS

Looking Back: Finding Healing through Forgiveness with Cynthia Swindoll's Testimony

Matthew 5:23–24; 18:21–35

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In the school of life, all of us must take a course on forgiveness. No one has the option to bypass this class, because we all need to forgive someone or to seek forgiveness from someone we've offended. The only student who might opt out of Forgiveness 101 is the one who has never hurt anyone or been hurt by anyone—and because that person doesn't exist, everyone must enroll!

Our teacher is the world's leading expert on forgiveness. No one has more experience in forgiving than Him. His exams can be tough when we're asked to put into practice what we've learned; however, when we pass the test, the feeling of relief that follows is healing to the soul.

Let's join our teacher, Jesus, on the hillside by the Sea of Galilee where He is starting His first lecture on the topic of *seeking forgiveness*.



DIGGING DEEPER

“So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.” (Matthew 5:23–24 NLT)

Seeking Forgiveness from Those We've Offended

This teaching comes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). For the immediate context, read Matthew 5:21–22, in which the subject is relationship conflict. What infractions did Jesus say were just as much a violation of God's law as murder?

Quotable

There are not many things that we all have in common, but I can tell you one: we all have someone we need to forgive.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Friction between individuals may smolder as resentment or flame up as anger, spark as name-calling or ignite as out-of-control rage. Regardless the degree of heat, Jesus said the fire must be doused immediately, both in our heart where sin begins and with our feet as we rush to make amends.



Searching the Scriptures Study Tool

Let's study Matthew 5:23–24 using our *Searching the Scriptures* skills of observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. Imagine yourself as the person making an offering at the temple. List the action words that you *observe* in Jesus' teaching.

Next is *interpretation*. What is the meaning of Jesus' teaching regarding (1) the priority of reconciling with people before reconciling with God; (2) the urgency of not waiting; and (3) the importance of taking responsibility for an offense?

Go a little deeper into interpretation by using a concordance to explore the meaning of the Greek word for "be reconciled." First, look up the word *reconciled* in the *Zondervan NASB Exhaustive Concordance*. Beside Matthew 5:24, you'll find the number 1259, which is the key to the Greek word. Look up this number in the back of the concordance to find the root Greek word *diállassō* and its meaning "change, exchange" and the number of times the word occurs in the New Testament.¹ Interestingly, it appears only once—here, in this verse.

Now use the online tool, *Lumina*, at lumina.bible.org. Locate Matthew 5:24 in the NASB, then click "Greek" on the right panel. Slowly move your cursor over the words in the Greek text of this verse. An explanation of each word appears below in a box. Find the Greek word for *be reconciled* and its definition, which is "1) to change 2) to change the mind of anyone, to reconcile 3) to be reconciled, to renew friendship with one."



Fascinating! Reconciliation includes *change*. Chuck Swindoll offers his explanation of being reconciled: “to go through the process of bringing about a change [in the relationship].” Hostility changes to friendship. Based on your study, how would you explain *diállassō*? How does this meaning enhance your understanding of Jesus’ command?

Now, *correlation*. Paul applies the concept of reconciliation to our relationship with God in 2 Corinthians 5:18–21. Read these verses in comparison with Jesus’ teaching on reconciliation. Both are in the passive voice, “be reconciled.” We seek forgiveness, but reconciliation requires a response from the other party. Reconciliation must be *received* to be complete. Although we seek reconciliation, a person may rebuff our *diállassō* attempt. God, however, will always welcome us with open arms.

Through Christ, we can be certain of our reconciliation with God. How does this security stabilize you as you seek reconciliation with others who may not be as willing or able to forgive?

Finally, *application*. Are you in conflict with anyone? Is God leading you to seek reconciliation? Listen to Cynthia Swindoll’s testimony, and note the steps that she took when seeking reconciliation with her father and mother-in-law. How can her actions be a guide for you?

Forgiving Those Who’ve Offended Us

Jesus’ next lesson, *offering forgiveness*, is prompted by Peter’s question about the frequency of forgiving: “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” (Matthew 18:21). Jesus’ answer shocked Peter, “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!” (18:22).



Peter viewed forgiveness through the narrow lens of human limitations. Figuring that our capacity to forgive runs out sooner or later, he sought permission to limit forgiving to no more than seven times.

Jesus, however, broke down all limitations! Rather than restrict forgiving to a certain number, he set us free to forgive anytime in any relationship. For Jesus, the issue wasn't frequency but freedom, and the measure wasn't a human standard but the limitless grace of God—as illustrated in the following story, which contains three parts.

First, read Matthew 18:23–27 about the king's forgiveness of the servant's tremendous debt—"millions of dollars" (Matthew 18:24 NLT). Second, read Matthew 18:28–30 about the servant's lack of forgiveness toward his companion and his small debt. Third, read Matthew 18:31–35 about the king's response when he finds out.²

What does the magnitude of the debt forgiven say about the heart of the king who forgave it? Likewise, what does the small debt that the servant refused to forgive say about his heart?

Summarize Jesus' point about forgiving.



Bring It Home

Let's wrap up Jesus' teaching on forgiveness with two principles on asking for forgiveness:

- *Immediate obedience honors God.* Jesus said plainly, "Go and be reconciled" (Matthew 5:24).
- *Vulnerable confession heals others.* Sincere apologies soften those we've offended and restore broken relationships.



And two principles on forgiving those who have offended us:

- *To refuse to forgive is hypocritical.* How can we not forgive the sins of others when our King has freely forgiven us?
- *To refuse to forgive inflicts inner torment on the offended.* A lack of forgiveness makes our bad situation worse; it multiplies the pain of the offense with the torment of bitterness.

Let's close this study by drawing near to our teacher Jesus. If you need to reconcile a relationship, ask Jesus for the *courage* to seek forgiveness. Or if someone has injured you, ask the Lord for the *grace* to extend forgiveness.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, sleepless nights and restless days are the plight of the tortured soul that will not forgive. I submit myself to the authority of Your Word that marks the path to healing. Help me to seek forgiveness from those I've offended. Help me to forgive, even as I have been forgiven by Christ. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Reuben A. Olson, and others, eds., *Zondervan NASB Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 1520.
2. What does “handed him over to the torturers” mean (Matthew 18:34 NASB)? Chuck explains it as the torment of unforgiveness: “It is an accurate description of gnawing resentment and bitterness. The awful gall of hate or envy. It is a terrible feeling. We cannot get away from it.”



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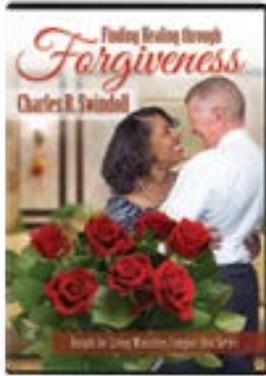
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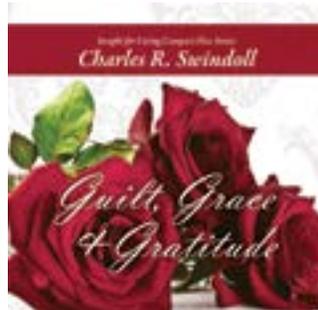
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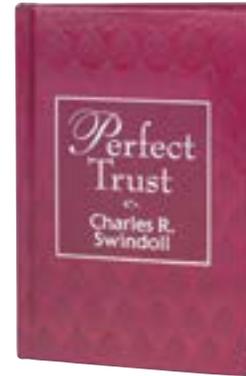
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For the 2017 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by the Pastoral Ministries Department in collaboration with Mark Tobey, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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