

FAMILY MATTERS: INVESTING IN THE THINGS THAT LAST

Getting Past the Guilt of Your Past

Isaiah 58:1–12



LET'S BEGIN HERE

It's one of those little quirks in life: we can pick our friends, we can pick our spouses, but we can't pick our families! No one asked if we wanted our particular parents or grandparents or siblings or aunts or uncles or cousins, but they're all ours. Being thrown into such a mix inevitably leads to friction because none of them is just like us, and all of us are imperfect. Family relationships are bound to strain at times and in many cases fracture, leading to feelings of failure and guilt, but there is a way to repair and rebuild damaged relationships—whether or not we've chosen them.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Inescapable and Painful Realities of Humanity

All of us live with a double-edged truth: we have suffered wounds from our families, and we have inflicted wounds upon them. But these deep cuts need not be fatal to those relationships, not if we apply four principles of divine truth.

The most basic of all theological truths is our first principle: *we are all imperfect*. Paul couldn't have been clearer when he wrote, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Each and every one of us is a sinner, and sin affects every aspect of our lives—our wills, our minds, and our emotions.

The second principle is a hard one to swallow: *we cannot change the past*. Neither we nor God can change what has been. But God can redeem our past and bring healing.

The third principle can also stick in our throats: *we are personally responsible for our own wrongs*. No excuses here. No blaming mom or dad because they made us eat lima beans when we were 3 years old.

The fourth principle follows on the heels of the previous one: *we are not responsible for another's wrongdoings*. Obviously, there are times in our lives when we've invited pain to come for coffee, through foolish things we've said or done. But often, the pain that comes into our lives kicks down the door because of someone else's foolishness. For these times, we aren't responsible; it isn't our fault.



Quotable

*When you're
ready to come
to terms with
the guilt of
your past,
begin by humbling
yourself.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. Guidelines for Recovery and Renewal (Isaiah 58:1–12)

The Lord, through the mouthpiece of Isaiah, instructs us to put away empty religiosity (Isaiah 58:1–5). When sin infects our lives, God knows our pious exercises of religion are mere lip service. The nation of Judah *looked* righteous, but their hearts were twisted. Their fasts were only a means to receive God’s blessings. A true fast—one that recognizes spiritual poverty—would have led to forgiveness of sin and the restoration of a relationship with God (58:6).

Hollow religious motions may fool others, but they never fool God and they never lead to the healing of broken relationships. For that, we must commit ourselves to true obedience as laid out in five biblical steps.

Step one: when we want to come to terms with the guilt and shame of our past and how we’ve hurt others, we must *humble ourselves* (58:7–8). This is difficult because humility means counting ourselves as nothing before God and as secondary to the one we’ve wronged.

The second step will help with the first step: we must *pray* (58:9). We cannot really pray and be proud at the same time. True prayer is an act of humility. Bowing our heads brings our heart to its knees in recognition that our needs and sins can only be addressed by God.

Step three: in coming to grips with our wrongs, we must “*remove the yoke*” (58:9–10). This step demands we clean up our attitudes and quit playing the blame game and pointing fingers at others. It tells us to “straighten up and fly right,” to give up our rights.

Step four is another difficult one: we must *make ourselves available and vulnerable to the persons we’ve offended* (58:10–11). All the other steps lead to this one. Now it’s time for us to cross the threshold and make right our wrongs. This step will test our humility, because it requires us to confess and to ask for forgiveness.

The final step: we must *trust God to bring changes* (58:12). There is no guarantee that our confessions will lead to restoration of relationships, but confession gives God an opportunity to work in our hearts and the hearts of the offended, so that which was broken has the ability to be restored. God can remove our guilt and shame and heal the other person’s brokenness. God can turn enemies into allies.



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LET'S LIVE IT

Playing the blame game plunges us into the ever-swirling vortex of irresponsibility. Finger-pointing begets finger-pointing, until, eventually, we find ourselves trapped in a vicious cycle of “it’s never my fault,” which is a lie. We are often at fault for the hurt in another’s life. For the follower of Christ, we must break free from immature attitudes of irresponsibility.

First, *freedom is found in following the truth*. One of the marks of a true disciple of Christ is a life plugged into the power of God’s Word. If we are true disciples, we allow Scripture to inform and direct every aspect of our lives. As Jesus said, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine” (John 8:31). If we are living according to the Word of God, then we will come to know the freeing power of truth (8:32). And the first truth we must grasp is the truth of who we are.

Second, *freedom is found in dealing appropriately with anger*. Families can be irritating. And the easiest people to become angry with are the people living under our own roof. Sometimes anger is appropriate, especially if we’re dealing with issues of sin and righteousness (2:13–16). But we dare not let anger fester into bitterness, which is a sign that anger is controlling us. When we lose control over anger, the Devil has an opportunity to lead us to commit other sins.

Third, *freedom is found in being honest*. Christians are especially good at hiding behind a façade of piety, of “faking it,” when in truth we are not delighting or abiding in God’s Word. We are also good at justifying our anger. However, we’re called to complete honesty—“not to hide [ourselves] from [our] own flesh,” as Isaiah put it (Isaiah 58:7). When we are honest with God, honest with ourselves, and honest with others, bonds are loosened, and “the oppressed go free” (58:6). Rather than blaming others, we take responsibility for our actions and attitudes. Honesty shines forth the light of truth, leading to a speedy recovery (58:8). In fact, true righteousness “will go before” us, protecting us in our Christian walk, and the glory of God will protect us from enemies that sneak up from behind (58:8). Then, we’ll no longer be the cause of hurt in our family’s life; rather, we’ll be the cause of rebuilding and restoring family relationships (58:12).

Fourth, *freedom is found in asking for forgiveness*. Forgiveness is one of the most difficult aspects of the Christian life. Forgiveness requires us to be honest with ourselves about the truth of Scripture—that we are often wrong and must own up to our shortcomings. It also requires us to put aside anger and put on humility.

Read Matthew 5:23–24. What, if anything, do you need to do to apply this Scripture to your life? If you need to make a confession and ask forgiveness from someone you’ve wronged in your family, what will you say? Plan a time to ask this person’s forgiveness.



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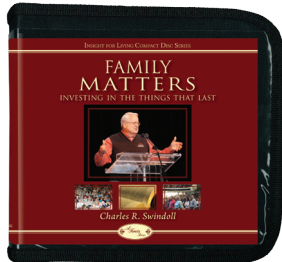
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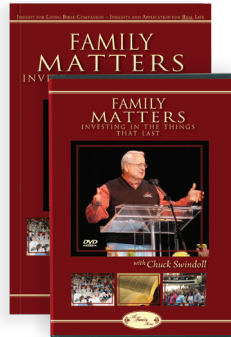
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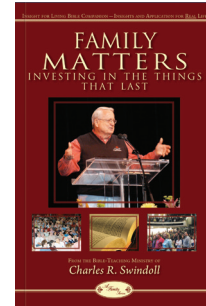
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