

THINGS TO STOP AND START STUDY FOUR

Stop Blaming and Start Forgiving

Matthew 5:23–24; 18:21–35

Forgiveness 101 is not an elective in the Christian life. It's a required course.

—Charles R. Swindoll

IN the school of Christian 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 can 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 Jesus, the world's leading expert on forgiveness, who prayed for His enemies, “Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). His exams can be tough when we're asked to follow His example.

Our natural tendency is to hold grudges rather than forgive. And when we're the offender, we tend to blame others rather than seek forgiveness. However, neither holding grudges nor blaming can heal a wounded relationship, unite a divided family, or build up a community that is torn apart. Seeking and giving forgiveness can do all that and more. It restores our soul!!

Let's join our teacher, Jesus, on the hillside by the Sea of Galilee where He is delivering the Sermon on the Mount and His first lecture on the topic of *stop blaming and start forgiving*. This lesson is for those who have wounded another person and who need to ask that person to forgive them.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

As we imagine spreading our blankets and taking our seats on that Galilean hillside, let's prepare our hearts to receive Christ's message. His subject reaches into the most tender parts of our hearts, where our deepest wounds reside. We may hesitate to invite our Savior into these areas, and yet, we can trust Him to be a skilled physician who heals and never harms. Pray the following prayer and invite the Lord to reveal areas of your life that need His tender touch.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.
Point out anything in me that offends you,
and lead me along the path of everlasting life. (Psalm 139:23–24)*



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Read meditatively the following verses, hearing the Lord's voice as He teaches on seeking forgiveness from those we've offended.

Lesson One: Seeking Forgiveness from Those We've Offended

"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)



Observation: When Someone Has Something against You

Let's use our *Searching the Scriptures* skills of observation, interpretation, correlation, and application.¹ First, imagine yourself as the person making an offering at the temple. List the action words that you *observe* in Jesus' teaching.



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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?

Friction between individuals may smolder as resentment or flame up as anger, spark as name-calling or ignite as out-of-control rages. 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.



Interpretation: Go and Be Reconciled

Next is interpretation. What is the meaning of Jesus' teaching? What does He say about the issue of priority?

The issue of urgency?



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The issue of taking responsibility?

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 Strongest 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 *diallasso* and its meaning, “change, exchange,” and the number of times the word occurs in the New Testament.² Interestingly, it appears only once—here, in this verse.

Now use the online tool, *NET Bible*, at netbible.org. Locate Matthew 5:24 in the NASB, and 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.”³

Fascinating! Reconciliation includes *change*. Hostility changes to friendship as we reconcile through forgiveness. Based on your study, how would you explain *diallasso*? How does this meaning enhance your understanding of Jesus’ command?

Instead of turning to blame, instead of rationalizing—go! The command is not, “Think about.” It’s not, “Pray.” Jesus said, “Go and be reconciled to that person” (Matthew 5:24).
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Correlation: Reconciliation with God and Others

Now, correlation. Paul applied the concept of reconciliation to our relationship with God in *2 Corinthians 5:18–20*. Read these verses in the New American Standard Bible 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 attempt at *diallasso*. 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?



Application: Do You Need to Seek Reconciliation?

Finally, application. Are you in conflict with someone because you've offended him or her? Is God leading you to seek reconciliation? What steps do you need to take with God's help?

This is difficult. It's difficult to make arrangements to be with someone who doesn't want to talk to you because of your offense. You have to plan it carefully. The time has to be right. Your wording has to be delicate, sensitive, caring, without condemnation. You go to make reconciliation, to turn enmity into amity. I can tell you in a personal testimony today, it works. —Chuck Swindoll



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Lesson Two: Forgiving Those Who've Offended Us

Jesus not only taught about forgiveness in His Sermon on the Mount; later, He gave a second lesson focusing this time on *offering forgiveness*. Peter had asked Jesus about the frequency of forgiving: “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” (Matthew 18:21). Jesus’ answer must have shocked Peter, “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!” (18:22). Then Jesus offered a lesson on forgiving that Peter never forgot. Read His words in *Matthew 18:23–35*.

Observation: When You Have Been Offended

Let’s *observe* this passage. 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. He illustrated God’s grace in His parable, which contained three parts: the king’s forgiveness of the servant’s tremendous debt (Matthew 18:23–27); the servant’s unforgiveness toward his companion and his small debt (18:28–30); the king’s response when he found out (18:31–34).

Forgiving is truly a matter of the heart. 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?



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Summarize Jesus' point about how receiving God's forgiveness can free our hearts to forgive others.



Interpretation: “The Torturers”

What does it mean, “handed him over to the torturers” (Matthew 18:34 NASB)? Chuck explains it as the torment of unforgiveness. It is the gnawing resentment and bitterness, the awful gall of hate or envy from which we can't escape because we won't let go of a grudge toward someone who hurt us.

If the pain of an offense has taken root as bitterness in your heart, take a moment to express your feelings to the Lord. Acknowledge the heartache as well as the difficulty of forgiving and moving on.



Correlation: Christ's Forgiveness Enables Us to Forgive

Who can help us forgive? Our Teacher not only instructs us but through His transforming power enables us to forgive. Paul's instructions based on Jesus' teaching reveal the source of our forgiving power.

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:31–32)



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We can't offer the cup of forgiveness if our inner well is dry. God's forgiveness must first flood our soul, and then we have the resources to "get rid of bitterness" and forgive "one another." How does this truth encourage you to take the next steps of forgiving your offender?

I choose not to blame the other person but to forgive and to go from there to the next step, which is a life of harmony and relief and release. Plus, I sleep a whole lot better! The relief is palpable. I long for that in your life. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: Do You Need to Forgive?

Let's wrap up Jesus' teaching on forgiveness with two principles on forgiving those who have offended us:

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

Close this study by drawing near to our teacher, Jesus, in prayer. 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.



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Jesus gave two lessons on forgiveness, one to those who've wounded and the other to those who've been wounded. Whether you're the one who is seeking forgiveness or the one who needs to forgive, be assured our Lord is walking with you on your journey of forgiveness. He will help you each step of the way!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, sleepless nights and restless days are the plight of the tortured soul who 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. To learn about Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the Web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. *The Strongest NASB Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 902, 1520.
3. Greek note on Matthew 5:24, *Net Bible*, Bible.org, netbible.org/bible/Matthew+5.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

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Tools for Digging Deeper



Things to Stop and Start
by Charles R. Swindoll
CD series



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**Rules for Running a
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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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