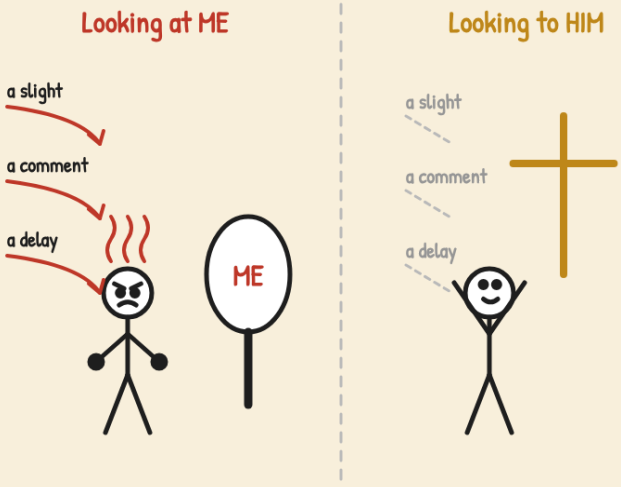
A BIBLE STUDY FOR THE HEART

Anger and the Heart

It's almost never about me



Whatever comes at me, I can look in the mirror — or look to the cross.

Hollis McGehee

Aiming For Jesus

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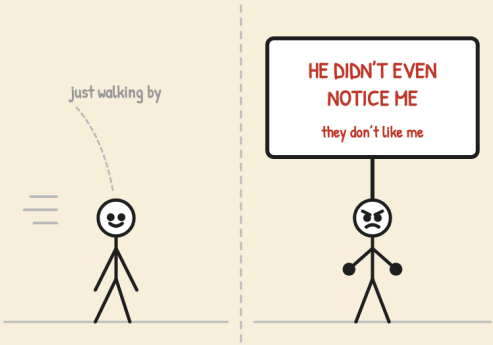
FOR GROUPS

How to use this book in a class

Do You Know Jesus?

BEFORE WE BEGIN

It's Almost Never About Me



He just walked by. I put up the billboard.

If I am looking at myself in response to anything that comes at me — an event, a comment, a slight — I am seeing it wrong.

It is almost never about me. And even when it is, I don't want to let it become about me in my mind.

My job is to honor God — always — to make right choices. And it is never the right choice if it dishonors God!

This whole study comes down to one choice, made over and over: **a me-centered life or a Christ-centered life.** Humility, trust in God and obedience are the road out of anger — because the biggest struggle is always about *me*.

Every Scripture reference in blue is a link: tap or click it to read the passage in the ESV, then come back to the book. The contents page is linked too, so you can go straight to any lesson.

Work through one lesson at a time. Write in the book. Be honest. Ask God to show you your own heart before you think about anyone else's.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Settling the big questions

QUESTION 1

Who Is God?

Read Romans 12:9–21

Before I can deal with my anger, I have to settle a bigger question. Who is God? Everything else in this study rests on the answer.

God is sovereign. He rules. He does whatever He pleases, and nothing reaches me that has not first passed through His hands. Not the diagnosis. Not the traffic. Not the cutting remark at the dinner table.

> *"Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases."* **Psalm 115:3**

God is sovereign. God is good. I can trust Him.

It is easy to trust God when life goes my way. The promotion comes through. The children call. The test comes back clear. The real question is whether I trust Him in the circumstances I don't like. Especially those. That is where trust is tested, and that is where anger is either born or defeated.

When I get angry, I am usually saying, "This should not be happening to me." But God has not lost control of my day. His thoughts are not my thoughts. His ways are not my ways. He sees what I cannot see.

> *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."* **Isaiah 55:8–9**

Picture the pharmacy line that hasn't moved in twenty minutes. The clerk is new. The man ahead of me has a long story. I feel the heat rising. But who put me in this line today? If God is sovereign, this line is not an accident, and the people in it are not obstacles. They are people He loves, and this moment is one He is using.

And He is not only in control. He is good. He takes even the hard things and works them together for the good of those who love Him.

> *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."* **Romans 8:28**

Notice what that verse does not say. It does not say all things are good. It says God works all things together for good. The hurt is real. So is the God who rules over it.

James says the same thing from the other side: trials are not wasted. God uses them to make me steadfast, mature and complete.

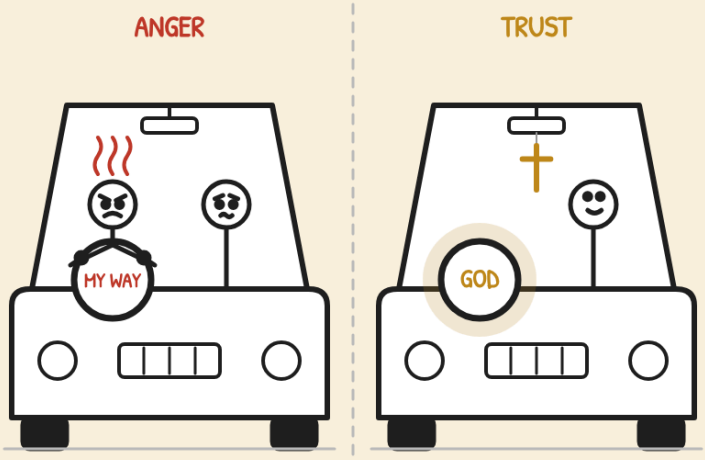
> *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."* **James 1:2–4**

So what does trusting a sovereign God look like on an ordinary Tuesday? Paul shows us in Romans 12:9–21, the marks of a true Christian. Read it slowly. Love without pretending. Hate what is evil and hold on to what is good. Honor others ahead of myself. Keep hoping, keep enduring, keep praying. Bless the people who hurt me. Refuse to pay back evil for evil. Leave vengeance with God. Overcome evil with good.

> *“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”*
> **Romans 12:12**

Every one of those marks requires trust. I can leave vengeance with God only if I believe He is just. I can be patient in trouble only if I believe He is in charge of the trouble. I can bless the person who cursed me only if I believe God is bigger than what that person did.

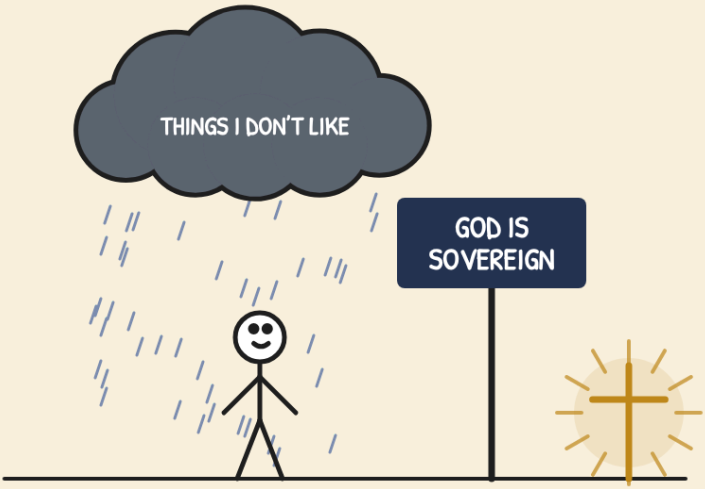
Anger says, “I am in charge.” Trust says, “God is.”



Anger says, "I'm in charge." Trust says, "God is."

This is where the study starts. Not with my anger, but with my God. If He is sovereign and good, then nothing that comes at me today is outside His reach, and I don’t have to take the wheel back from Him.

Your turn



Not just in the sunshine. Especially in the storm.

Where do I find it hardest to trust God right now? (check all that apply)

- ☐ my health
- ☐ my family
- ☐ money
- ☐ my work
- ☐ how people treat me
- ☐ the news
- ☐ other:

When life does not go my way, how quickly do I turn to God instead of to anger? (circle one)

Rarely Sometimes Often Almost always

Sort these responses into the right column.

	Trusting God	Taking control
Praying before I answer		
Replaying the argument at night		
Blessing someone who insulted me		
Getting even “just a little”		
Waiting patiently in a long line		
Telling everyone how I was wronged		
Leaving justice with God		
Insisting on the last word		

The circumstance I most need to trust God with this week is _____.

Marks of a true Christian

Re-read Romans 12:9–21. The mark that is hardest for me right now is:

_____

One way I will practice it this week:

_____

Think it through: Name one hard circumstance from your past that God worked for good. What did you learn about Him?

_____

_____

_____

Hide it in your heart

> *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”*
> **Romans 8:28**

Let’s pray

Father, You are sovereign. You rule over my day, my family, my health and every word spoken to me. I confess that I trust You easily when things go my way and fight You when they don’t. Forgive me for acting as if I were in charge. Teach me that Your ways are higher than mine. Grow in me the marks of a true Christian: genuine love, patience in trouble, and a heart that blesses instead of curses. When life goes the way I don’t like, help me trust You most of all. In Jesus’ name, amen.

God is sovereign and good — especially in the circumstances I don’t like.

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Next: Question 2 →

QUESTION 2

Who Am I?

Read Ephesians 2:1–10

If God is sovereign and good, the next question is harder. Who am I?

I am a sinner.

Not a sinner compared to the people around me. A sinner before a holy God. I can always find someone whose anger is worse than mine. That doesn't help me. God does not grade on a curve.

> *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* **Romans 3:23**

All means all. The judge and the man in the courtroom. The chaplain and the patient. The preacher and the person who hasn't been to church in thirty years. Me.

Sin is not just the bad things I do. It is me sitting on the throne that belongs to God. My way instead of His way. That is why anger matters so much. When I explode, or when I go cold and silent, my anger is showing me what is on the throne of my heart. The biggest struggle is always about me.

And sin does something terrible. It separates.

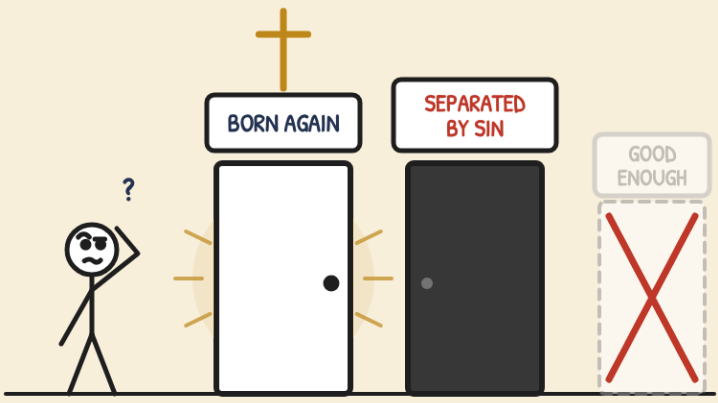
> *"but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear."* **Isaiah 59:2**

That is the honest truth about every one of us. There are only two places I can stand. Either I have been born again, or I am still separated from God by my sin. There is no third place. Being a good

neighbor is not a third place. Going to church is not a third place. Being nicer than my brother is not a third place.

Either I have been born again, or I am separated from God by my sin.

Paul does not soften it. He says we were dead. Not sick. Not struggling. Dead. A dead man cannot clean himself up, try harder or turn over a new leaf. He needs life from outside himself.



Two doors. There is no third.

Then come two of the most beautiful words in the Bible: “But God.”

> *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—”* **Ephesians 2:4–5**

Picture a man who has spent his life keeping score. He pays his bills, mows his lawn, and has never been arrested. Yet he is impatient with his wife, harsh with the waiter, and quietly sure he is better than most.

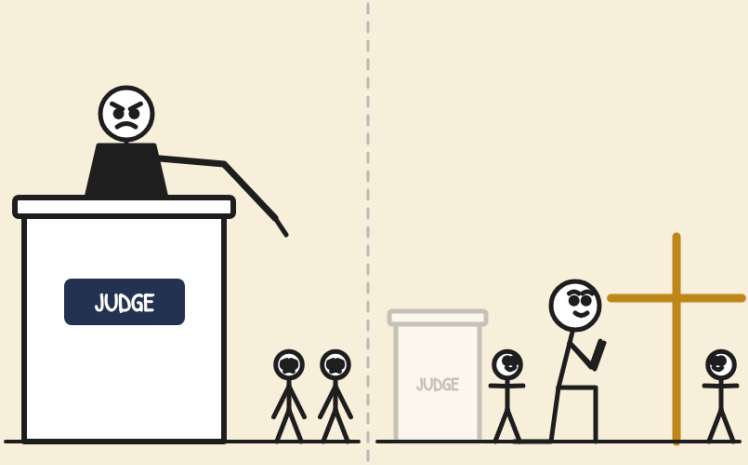
Good manners have covered a heart that is still on its own throne. That can be any of us.

God, rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ while we were still dead. By grace. Not because we earned it. Because He loved us.

Here is why this belongs in a study about anger. When I truly see myself as a sinner, I lose my seat as the judge of everyone else. I am slower to be outraged at someone else's sin when I remember how much of mine God has carried. The person who hurt me is not my enemy to punish. He is a sinner like me, who needs the same mercy I need.

So I have to answer for myself. Not for my spouse, my parents or my pastor. Where do I stand?

Your turn



I lose my seat as judge at the cross.

Ways I have tried to feel right with God on my own (check all that apply)

- ☐ going to church
- ☐ being better than someone else
- ☐ doing good deeds
- ☐ my family's faith
- ☐ keeping the rules
- ☐ being sincere
- ☐ other:

When I am being honest with myself and God, do I see myself as a sinner before a holy God? (circle one)

Rarely Sometimes Often Almost always

Sort what I tell myself into the right column.

	Excuse	Confession
"I'm not as bad as some people."		
"I put myself on the throne."		
"They pushed me to it."		
"I need God's mercy as much as anyone."		
"That's just how I am."		
"My anger showed what is in my heart."		

Say it better: rewrite this as an honest confession.

"At least I'm not a sinner like THAT person."

Better:

I am a sinner. Today, honestly, I believe I am _____ (born again / separated from God / not sure).

Think it through: When my anger flares, what does it show me is sitting on the throne of my heart?

Hide it in your heart

> *"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved —"* **Ephesians 2:4–5**

Let's pray

Holy God, I confess that I am a sinner. Not just a person who makes mistakes, but someone who has put myself on Your throne. I have compared myself to others to feel better. I have judged people for sins I carry too. Thank You that You are rich in mercy, and that You make dead people alive in Christ. Show me honestly where I stand with You. Take me off the judge's bench, and make me humble and grateful. In Jesus' name, amen.

I am a sinner — so I am not anyone else's judge.

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Next: Question 3 →

QUESTION 3

Am I Born Again?

Read John 3:1–21

One day Jesus asked His disciples what people were saying about Him. They had answers. A prophet. John the Baptist come back. Then Jesus made it personal.

> *"He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.""* **Matthew 16:15–16**

"Who do you say that I am?"

That question is the most important one I will ever answer. Not what my parents believed. Not what my church teaches. Who do I say Jesus is?

My answer doesn't define Jesus — He is God. But my answer reveals everything about who Jesus really is in my life.

Peter answered: the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus told him that answer did not come from flesh and blood but from the Father. That is how it always works. God opens our eyes to see who Jesus really is.

A religious leader named Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. He was moral, educated and respected. Jesus told him he still needed to be born again.

> *"Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.""* **John 3:3**

Nicodemus did not understand. How can a grown man be born a second time? Jesus explained that this birth comes from above, by the Spirit of God. I did not choose my first birth, and I cannot produce my second one. It is God's work.

Being born again is not turning over a new leaf. It is new life from God. Here is how it happens.

First, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We saw that in the last lesson. Second, sin earns a wage, and the wage is death. But God offers a free gift: eternal life in Christ Jesus.

> *"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* **Romans 6:23**

Third, God did not wait for me to clean up. While I was still a sinner, Christ died for me. He took the punishment my sin deserved.

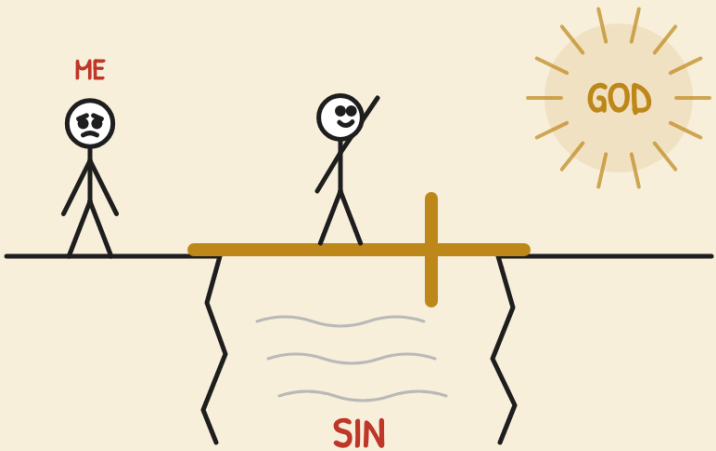
> *"but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* **Romans 5:8**

Fourth, I cannot earn it. It is by grace, through faith. Not my works, not my church attendance, not my good intentions. A gift is received, not earned.

> *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."* **Ephesians 2:8–9**

Fifth, I respond. I confess with my mouth that Jesus is Lord, and I believe in my heart that God raised Him from the dead. That is not a magic formula. It is a heart turning from my way to His way, trusting Jesus alone to save me.

> *“because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”* **Romans 10:9–10**



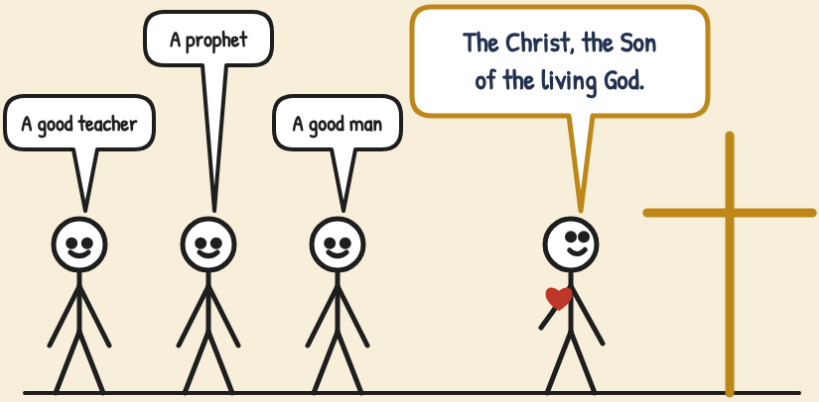
The cross is the only bridge.

Born again is not something I achieve. It is something God gives.

Here is why this matters for anger. A person who is not born again can manage anger for a while. But only a new heart can change the root. When God gives new life, His Spirit comes to live in me, and the fruit of the Spirit begins to grow where my anger used to rule.

If you have never trusted Jesus, you can do it today. You don’t need special words. Tell God you know you are a sinner, that you believe Jesus died for you and rose again, and that you want Him as your Savior and Lord. The prayer at the end of this lesson is one way to say it. If you already know Him, thank Him again for the gift. And if you want to talk with someone, visit aimingforjesus.com/how-to-know-jesus/.

Your turn



Who do YOU say that I am?

Who do I say Jesus is? In my own words:

Sort these into the right column.

	Trying to earn it	Receiving it as a gift
Being a good neighbor		
Trusting that Jesus died for me		
Going to church every week		
Believing God raised Jesus from the dead		
Being baptized as a child		
Confessing Jesus as Lord		
Giving money to the church		
Being better than I used to be		

How sure am I that I have been born again? (circle one)

Not sure at all | Somewhat | Mostly | Completely sure

I know I can be right with God not because of what I have done, but because _____.

My response today (check the one that fits)

- ☐ Today I trust Jesus as my Savior and Lord for the first time.
- ☐ I have already been born again, and today I thank Him.
- ☐ I am not ready yet, but I want to keep asking.
- ☐ I want to talk with someone about this.

My response to Jesus

Date:

Who I say Jesus is:

One person I will tell:

Questions I still have:

Hide it in your heart

> *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”* **Ephesians 2:8–9**

Let’s pray

Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and that my sin has separated me from God. I cannot save myself. I believe You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. I believe You died on the cross for my sins and that God raised You from the dead. I turn from my way to Your way. I trust You alone to save me, and I receive Your free gift of eternal life. Be my Savior and my Lord. Make me new. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Who do I say Jesus is? Everything turns on my answer.

My answer doesn't define Jesus — He is God — but it reveals who He really is in my life.

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Next: Question 4 →

QUESTION 4

What Does Jesus Require of Me?

Read Matthew 18:21–35

If I am born again, I am no longer my own. I belong to Jesus. So what does He require of me?

I am a follower.

A follower doesn't set the direction. He goes where the leader goes. Jesus said it plainly: deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow Me.

> *"And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."* **Luke 9:23**

Denying myself is the exact opposite of a me-centered life. And it is daily. Yesterday's surrender does not cover today's insult.

As a follower, I have to trust and obey. Trust is believing God is sovereign and good when life doesn't go my way. Obedience is doing what He says when I don't feel like it. Jesus ties obedience to love.

> *""If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* **John 14:15**

I don't get to say I love Jesus and then keep my grudges. To trust and obey requires forgiveness without measure.

Peter thought seven times was generous. Jesus said seventy-seven times. Then He told a story. A servant owed the king ten thousand talents, a debt he could never repay in many lifetimes. The king forgave

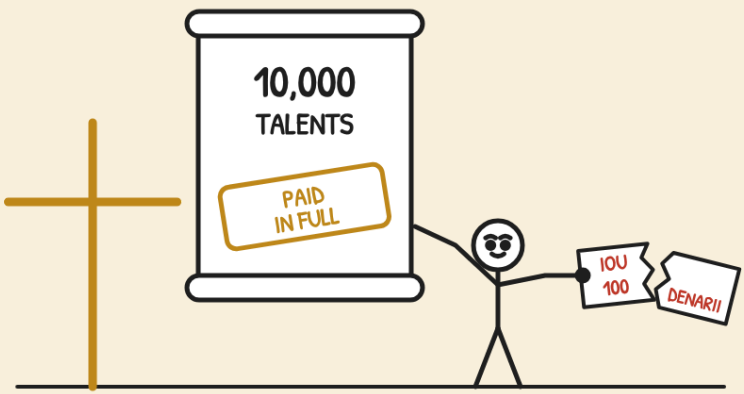
it all. That same servant found a fellow servant who owed him a few months' wages and had him thrown into prison.

When the king heard what the forgiven servant had done, he called him wicked. The man who had received so much mercy refused to show any. Jesus ended the story with a sober warning: forgive your brother from the heart. Not just with our lips. From the heart.

We are the servant with the ten-thousand-talent debt. Jesus paid it in full at the cross. We do not forgive in order to be saved; we forgive because we have been. Think of all God has forgiven us. How can we not also forgive whatever has been done against us? No matter what.

Forgiven much. Forgive much.

Forgiveness is not forgetting, and it does not always mean trusting again right away. Trust is rebuilt over time. If someone is harming you, forgiving them does not mean staying in danger; get to safety and get help.



Forgiven much. Forgive much.

And more than anything, it is my job to glorify God in my thoughts, my words and my actions. Not just some of the time. In whatever I do.

> *"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."* **1 Corinthians 10:31**

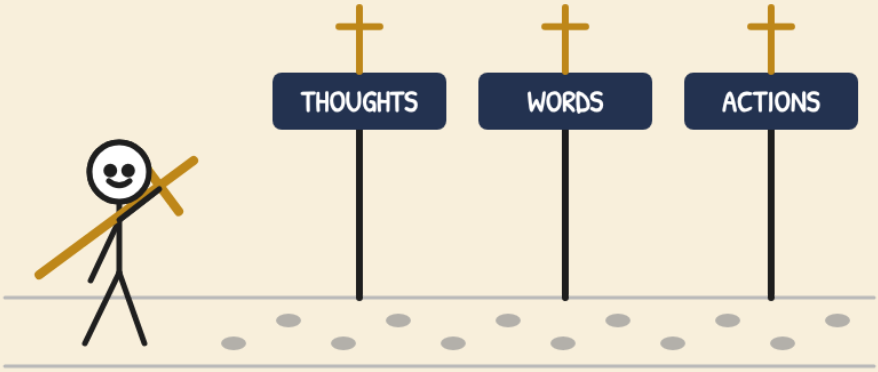
Paul tells the Colossians the same thing: everything I say and everything I do belongs to the Lord Jesus, offered with thanks to the Father (Colossians 3:17). Every word and every deed is a chance to make Jesus look good.

Anger lives in all three places. It starts in my thoughts, the replay, the story I tell myself about what they did. It comes out in my words. It shows up in my actions: the slammed door, the silent treatment, the getting even. God wants all three.

> *"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer."* **Psalm 19:14**

That is the standard for the rest of this study. Not, "Did I keep from yelling?" but, "Did I glorify God in what I thought, what I said and what I did?"

Your turn



Trust and obey — in thoughts, words and actions.

Where does each of these happen? Write T (thoughts), W (words) or A (actions).

	Thoughts	Words	Actions
Replaying the argument			
A sarcastic answer			
Slamming the door			
Imagining what I should have said			
The silent treatment			
Telling others what they did			
Keeping score			
Driving too close behind someone			

How freely do I forgive the same person for the same thing? (circle one)

Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Almost always

Debt cancelled

What God has forgiven me (my ten thousand talents):

What I am still holding against someone (their hundred denarii):

Today I cancel this debt and leave justice with God. Signed:

Say it better: rewrite this the way a follower of Jesus would say it.

"I forgave you once. Don't expect it again."

Better:

This week I will glorify God in my words by _____.

Where do I most need to glorify God this week? (check all that apply)

- ☐ my thoughts about someone
- ☐ my words at home
- ☐ my words at work
- ☐ how I drive
- ☐ what I post or text
- ☐ my reactions when I'm tired
- ☐ other:

Hide it in your heart

> *“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.”*
> **Psalm 19:14**

Let’s pray

Lord Jesus, I am Your follower. Help me deny myself today, take up my cross and follow You. Teach me to trust You and obey You even when I don’t feel like it. You have forgiven me a debt I could never pay. Give me a heart that forgives without measure, again and again. Let my words and the quiet thoughts of my heart please You. In my thoughts, my words and my actions, may I glorify You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

My job is to glorify God in my thoughts, words and actions.

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Next: Lesson 1 →

PART 1

It Starts in My Heart

LESSON 1

Anger Is a Choice

Read James 1:19–20; James 4:1–10

Anger is a choice.

If I choose anger, then I have first chosen my way rather than God's way.

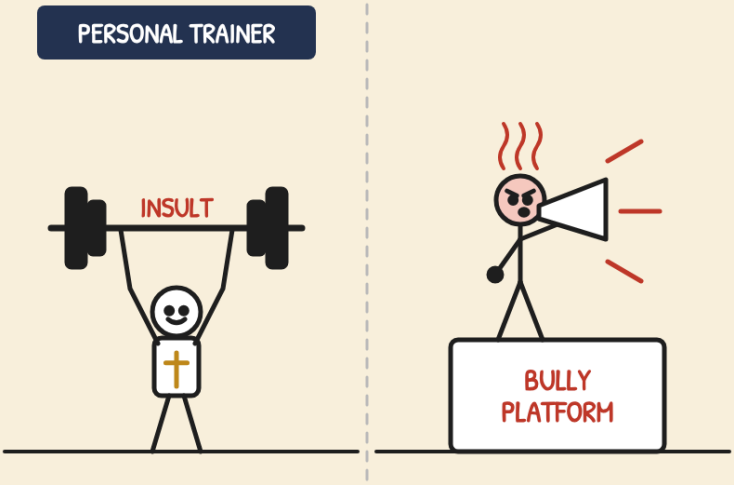
> *"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."* **James 1:19–20**

Instead of checking whether something is going the way I want it to go, let me ask the better question:

God, what do You want me to learn from this?

From this insult. This slight. This verbal assault. What are You teaching me?

Is it more important for me to trust God and let my immediate circumstance be my personal trainer? Or will I make it my bully platform, a stage to act out my childish, self-centered response to the world around me?



Personal trainer or bully platform? I choose.

Here is what is so crucial:

No one can ever make me mad.

No one can make me angry, or sad, or bitter. Those are choices I make in response to life happening around me. People may hurt me. They may be wrong. But they do not get to choose my response. I do.

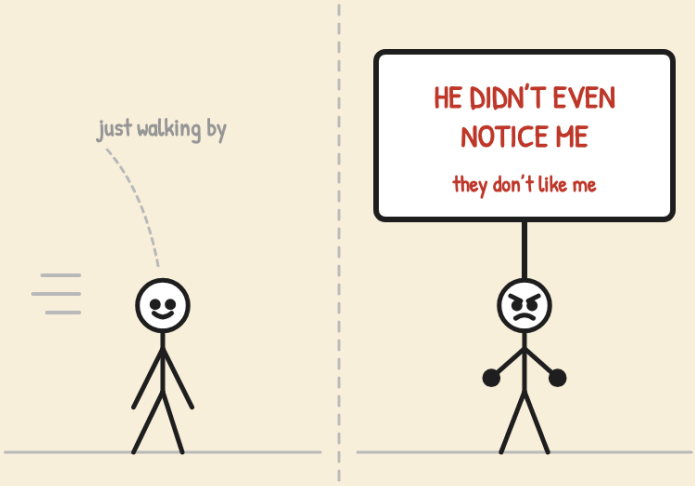
James tells me where my anger really comes from.

> *"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"* **James 4:1**

I want something. I don't get it. And I fight. Picture the family running ten minutes late for church. Dad is behind the wheel, and everyone in the car hears about it. Being on time is a good thing. But the moment he is willing to wound his family to get it, a good desire has become a demand. He chose his way.

A trainer doesn't make me comfortable. He makes me strong. He adds weight on purpose. The rude driver, the sharp email, the relative who always knows best: each one is weight on the bar. I can lift it with God's help and grow, or I can drop it on someone else's foot. Either way, I am choosing.

When I choose anger, I let someone put up a billboard in my brain. I read it every time I drive past. I don't have to give anyone that space. That space belongs to Christ.



He just walked by. I put up the billboard.

Isn't some anger right? Jesus was angry at hard hearts (Mark 3:5), and Scripture speaks of an anger that does not sin (Ephesians 4:26). Even then, anger is a choice: choosing to be grieved by what grieves God, and to respond His way, without sin. Right anger never needs my revenge.

And if someone is threatening or abusing you, choosing not to rage does not mean staying in danger; get to safety and get help.

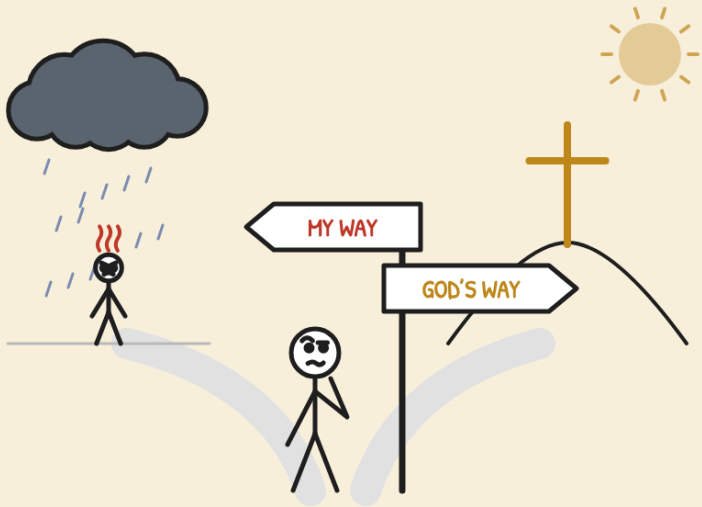
I need to make God-honoring choices. I must. And not just in my words and actions, but deep inside. That is where the Holy Spirit works. Paul lists the fruit He grows in a heart surrendered to God.

> *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."* **Galatians 5:22–23**

Opposite every fruit of the Spirit stands something that grows when I am on the throne. Love or self-centeredness. Joy or what I want. Peace or having things my way. Each one is a choice.

Will I choose God's way or my way?

Your turn



Anger is a choice. So is trust.

Fruit of the Spirit — or the fruit of me?

The fruit of the Spirit	What grows when I am on the throne
Love	Self-centeredness
Joy	What I want
Peace	Having things my way
Patience	Wanting it now
Kindness	Getting even
Goodness	Looking out for me
Faithfulness	Only when it suits me
Gentleness	Forcing my point
Self-control	Giving in to the moment

Looking at the chart, which of the right-hand column grew in me this week? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Self-centeredness
- ☐ What I want
- ☐ Having things my way
- ☐ Wanting it now
- ☐ Getting even
- ☐ Looking out for me
- ☐ Only when it suits me
- ☐ Forcing my point
- ☐ Giving in to the moment

Say it better: rewrite this so I own my choice.

“You made me so mad!”

Better:

Personal trainer

The insult, slight or circumstance I faced this week:

God, what do You want me to learn from this?

The God-honoring choice I will make next time:

How often do I blame someone else for my anger? (circle one)

Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Almost always

The next time _____ happens, I will stop and ask, "God, what do You want me to learn from this?"

Hide it in your heart

> *"Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."* **James 1:19–20**

Let's pray

Lord, I confess that I have blamed other people for choices that were mine. No one made me angry. I chose my way instead of Yours. Forgive me. When the next insult or slight comes, help me ask, "What do You want me to learn from this?" Make my hard circumstances my personal trainer, not my bully platform. Grow Your fruit in me deep inside: love instead of self-centeredness, joy instead of what I want, peace instead of having things my way. Make me quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. In Jesus' name, amen.

No one can make me mad. Anger is a choice — and so is trust.

↑ Contents

Next: Lesson 2 →

LESSON 2

The Demand to Have My Way

Read Philippians 2:3–8; Matthew 26:36–42

In Lesson 1 we saw it plainly: if I choose anger, I have first chosen my way rather than God's way. So let me look hard at those two words. My way.

My plan. My schedule. My seat. My way of doing it. Under most of my anger sits a quiet demand: things should go the way I want. When someone crosses that line, I choose the steam.

A preference is fine. A demand is something else. A preference says, "I would like this." A demand says, "I must have this, and someone will pay if I don't get it."

When a preference becomes a demand, I am on the throne.

Picture a husband whose wife gently points out a mistake. He doesn't hear help. He hears an attack. So instead of asking whether she is right, he goes after her tone, brings up something she did last year, and turns the conversation to her faults. His anger is doing a job. It protects him from admitting he was wrong. He chose his way.

We do it at church too. Someone changes the order of service, the room, the way it has always been done, and we talk as if faithfulness to God depends on keeping our preference. Sometimes a real biblical issue is at stake. Often we simply don't like losing control. Honesty means knowing the difference.

Paul points me in the opposite direction.

> *“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”* **Philippians 2:3–4**

Selfish anger treats the other person as an obstacle. Humility treats him as someone who matters. Then Paul shows me Christ.

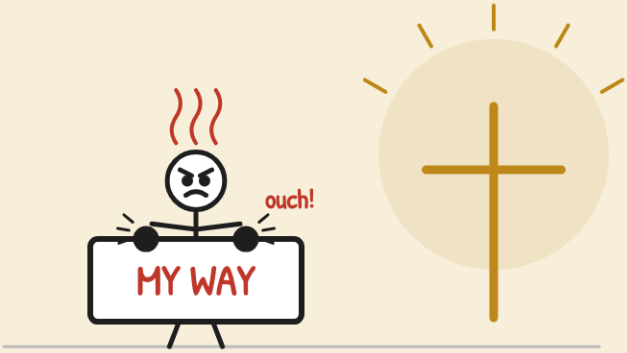
> *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”* **Philippians 2:5–7**

Jesus had every right to His way. He is God. He did not grip it. He let go, took the form of a servant, and humbled Himself all the way to a cross. The night before, in the garden, He prayed the prayer that ends every demand.

> *“And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.””* **Matthew 26:39**

Not as I will, but as You will.

That is trust and obey in a single sentence. It is not a shrug. Jesus prayed it in agony. But He put His will under His Father’s, because He knew who His Father is. God is sovereign and good. If that is true, His way is better than mine, even when mine looks better from where I stand.



Hold it loosely, or it hurts when God pries it out.

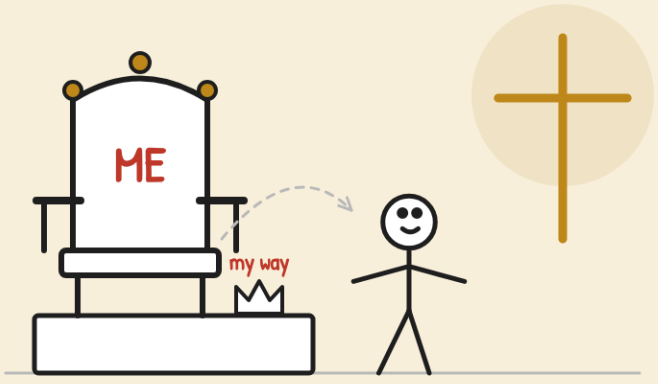
It matters how I hold things. If I hold my way too tightly, it will hurt my fingers when God pries it out of my hands. So here is a fair question: does it flow from my hand easily, or must it be pried out?

Whatever comes at me, I can look in the mirror or look to the cross. In the mirror, every correction feels like an insult and every change feels like a loss. At the cross, I see Someone who gave up far more than a seat in the third row.

Here is a test. If God's Word shows me I am wrong, am I willing to yield? If I expect everyone around me to give way, but I never do, I need to ask whose will I am really defending.

This doesn't mean my needs don't matter. It means I don't get the final word. A follower doesn't set the direction. It's almost never about me. And even when it is, I don't want to let it become about me in my mind. My job is not to get my way. My job is to glorify God.

Your turn



The throne of my heart was never mine to keep.

Sort these. Which are God's commands, and which are my preferences?

	God's command	My preference
Be kind to one another		
Church starts exactly on time		
The thermostat stays at 68		
Speak the truth in love		
My seat in the third row		
Forgive as I've been forgiven		
Dinner at 6:00 sharp		
Look to the interests of others		

Where do I most often demand my way? (check all that apply)

- [ ] how things are done at home
- [ ] being on time
- [ ] my seat, my spot, my parking place
- [ ] how other people drive
- [ ] being heard first
- [ ] winning the argument
- [ ] how church is run
- [ ] my schedule and my plans

How easy is it for the people closest to me to disagree with me? (circle one)

Very easy | Fairly easy | Hard | They've stopped trying

Say it better. Rewrite this so it makes room for the other person's interests:

"We've always done it this way, and I'm not changing now."

Better:

Lord, about _____, not as I will, but as You will.

Open hands

What am I gripping too tightly right now?

Is it a command of God or my preference?

What would it look like to hold it with open hands?

One person whose interests I will put ahead of mine this week:

Hide it in your heart

> *"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."*
> **Philippians 2:3–4**

Let's pray

Lord Jesus, You had every right to Your own way, and You laid it down for me. In the garden You prayed, "Not as I will, but as You will." I confess how tightly I hold on to mine. Forgive me for the times I made people pay because I didn't get what I wanted, and for dressing up my preferences as Your commands. Open my hands. Give me Your mind, so I count others more significant than myself. When I am corrected, help me listen instead of defending myself. Not my will, but Yours. In Jesus' name, amen.

My way or God's way? Lord, not as I will, but as You will.

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Next: Lesson 3 →

LESSON 3

Anger Before a Word Is Spoken

Read Matthew 5:21–26

Anger is a choice, and the first place I make it is in my thoughts. Long before I raise my voice, I have already decided what I think of you.

Most of us will never murder anyone. So it is tempting to nod at the Sixth Commandment and move on. Jesus won't let us.

> *""You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."*
> **Matthew 5:21–22**

This is the first of six times in this chapter Jesus says, "You have heard… but I say to you." He isn't setting aside God's Law. He is showing how deep it always went. Clean hands do not mean a clean heart. Murder starts somewhere: in the angry heart and the contemptuous tongue.

The word Jesus uses points to anger that keeps going, anger I hold, nurse and feed. "Raca" meant empty-headed, worthless. "Fool" went further: a lost cause. Both write off a person who bears God's image. Jesus climbs from the local court, to the high council, to the fire of hell, to show how seriously God takes it.

By this standard, none of us is innocent. All of us need the mercy He came to give.

That is who I am: a sinner, not a judge. So I have no business writing anyone off.

Picture a man who says nothing during an argument. He looks calm. But that night he lies awake rehearsing a cutting remark and picturing the other person embarrassed in front of friends. He never raised his voice. But he put up a billboard, and he reads it again and again. He chose anger before a word was spoken.

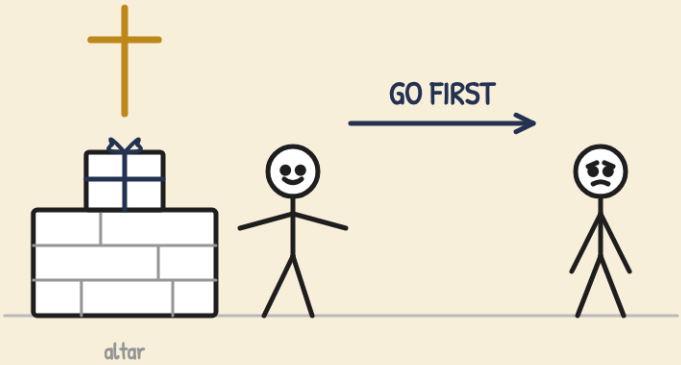
When we asked what Jesus requires of me, we saw that God wants my thoughts, my words and my actions. Not just the last two. The question is not only, “Did I keep quiet?” It is, “Did I glorify God in what I thought last night?”

Then Jesus makes it practical, with two pictures.

> *“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”* **Matthew 5:23–24**

A worshiper stands at the altar, gift in hand, and remembers. Notice the direction. Jesus doesn’t say I have something against my brother. He says my brother has something against me. The problem may be mine, something I did or failed to do. God often uses worship to bring it to mind. When He does, I listen.

My heart must be right before God for anything to work right. An anti-neighbor deal is an anti-God deal. God is not impressed with offerings that come from a divided heart. So I leave the gift, go first and make it right. Then I come back and worship with a whole heart. God went first with me. While I was still a sinner, Christ died for me.



Leave the gift. Go first. Then come back.

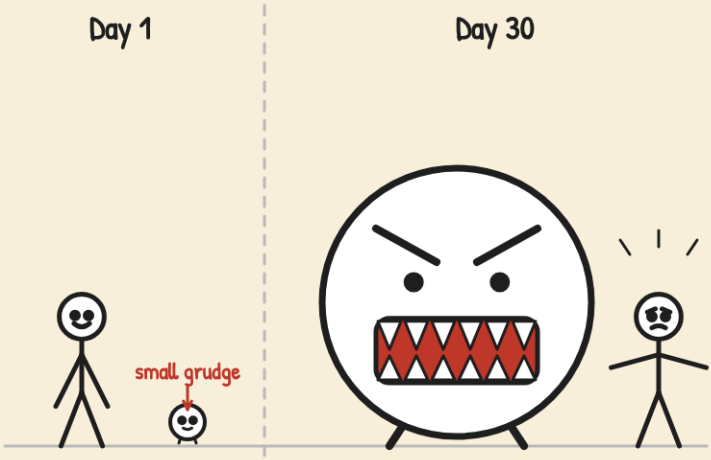
The second picture is the road to court. Settle it on the way, while there is still time. Don't wait. Time hardens hearts. Small things grow teeth. Unresolved conflict doesn't just sit there. It moves somewhere, and it will cost me.

To trust and obey requires forgiveness without measure. It also requires going first. I can't control how the other person responds; peace depends on me only so far (Romans 12:18). If someone is not safe to approach alone, take wise help with you. But I can take the first step, own my part and seek peace.

Go first. Make it right. Then come back and worship.

Let today be the day to mend fences with the cement of love: forgiving and being forgiven.

Your turn



Time hardens hearts. Small things grow teeth.

Anger can work long before a word is spoken. Which of these do I do? (check all that apply)

- ☐ replay the offense at night
- ☐ rehearse a cutting comeback
- ☐ picture them embarrassed or put in their place
- ☐ quietly write them off as hopeless
- ☐ go cold and silent to make a point
- ☐ tell myself I'm fine because I didn't yell

The thought about someone that I keep replaying — now rewritten as a prayer for that person:

Before the altar

Who comes to mind who may have something against me?

What did I do — or fail to do?

My first step to go and make it right:

When I will take it (a day, not “someday”):

When I know someone has something against me, how quickly do I go first? (circle one)

Right away | Within a week | Eventually | I wait for them

Say it better. Rewrite this thought the way God sees that person:

“He’s an idiot. He’ll never change, and I’m done with him.”

Better:

Small things grow teeth. The small thing I need to settle before it grows is _____.

Hide it in your heart

> *“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”* **Matthew 5:23–24**

Let’s pray

Father, I confess that I have kept my hands clean and let my heart get dirty. I have chosen anger in my thoughts, nursed it, rehearsed it, and written off people You made in Your image. Forgive me. I want to glorify You in what I think, not just in what I say. Bring to mind anyone who has something against me, and give me courage to go first. Don’t let me hide behind worship while I refuse to make peace. Thank You that You came to me first in Christ, while I was still a sinner. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Anger starts in my thoughts. So does obedience. Go first.

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Next: Lesson 4 →

LESSON 4

God Is Slow to Anger — and I Should Be Too

Read Exodus 34:6–7; Proverbs 16:32; James 1:19–20

Who is God? When He showed Moses His glory, He answered that question Himself. He proclaimed His own name.

> *"The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.""* **Exodus 34:6–7**

Of all the things God could say first about Himself, He says merciful, gracious, slow to anger. He is also just. He does not pretend sin is harmless. But His anger is never wounded pride, never a loss of control, never a misunderstanding. It is holy, and it is patient.

And who am I? A sinner. My anger is a different animal. Even when I care about something right, my anger carries pride, impatience and a wish to see someone pay. Calling it righteous doesn't remove the mix.

God is slow to anger with me. I can choose to be slow with others.

In Lesson 1 we met James's guardrails: quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger. The order matters. Most of my angry words come out before I have heard the whole story.

Picture a church member who hears a troubling report about someone. Within minutes he forwards it to ten friends with an angry comment. He believes he is defending the truth. But he hasn't checked the facts, hasn't talked to the person, and hasn't counted the damage. His zeal has outrun both truth and love.



A loud alarm doesn't prove a big fire.

Think of a smoke alarm. It does a good job: it gets my attention. But it screams just as loud over burnt toast as over a house on fire. My anger works the same way. How loud it is proves nothing about how big the problem is. Before I act, I go and look.

Slowing down is where I make the God-honoring choice. In the gap between what happens and what I do, I can ask the better question: God, what do You want me to learn from this? Then the plain ones. What actually happened? What did I hear, and what did I assume? What does obedience ask of me right now? Answering before I listen is folly and shame (Proverbs 18:13).

Slow to anger does not mean not caring about evil. If someone is in danger, I move quickly to protect them. What I refuse is contempt, exaggeration and revenge.

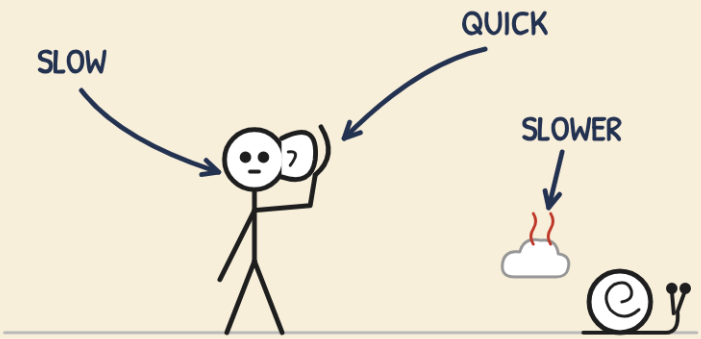
What makes me slower? Remembering how patient God has been with me. He has not dealt with me as my sins deserve (Psalm 103:10). I have tested His patience for years. How can I blow up at someone over a late arrival or a careless word?

And because His Spirit lives in me, self-control is not something I produce alone. It is fruit, and He grows it.

> *"Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."* **Proverbs 16:32**

That is real strength. Not the loud man who wins the argument, but the quiet one who rules his own spirit, because he trusts God to rule everything else.

Your turn



Quick to hear. Slow to speak. Slower still to anger.

How quickly does my anger usually come? (circle one)

Slowly | In a minute | In seconds | Before I know it

What usually speeds my anger up? (check all that apply)

- ☐ being tired
- ☐ being hungry
- ☐ running late
- ☐ feeling disrespected
- ☐ a screen in front of me
- ☐ people watching
- ☐ pain or worry
- ☐ other:

Picture this: a friend walks right past you at the store without saying hello. Sort what you know from what you might assume.

	Fact	Assumption
She didn't say hello		
She's upset with me		
She walked past me		
She thinks she's better than me		
She was looking at her phone		
She did it on purpose		

God has been patient with me about _____. Because of that, I can be patient when _____.

My slow-down plan

The first sign my anger is rising (voice, jaw, face, hands):

What I will do first (pause, pray, walk, listen):

The sentence I will say: “Let me think before I answer.”

Who can remind me when I forget?

Say it better. Rewrite this text before you hit send:

“Can you believe what he did? Everybody needs to know about this!”

Better:

Hide it in your heart

> *“The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,”* **Exodus 34:6**

Let's pray

Lord, You are merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. I am not, and I need You to change me. I confess how quickly my anger comes and how long I let it stay. Forgive me for mistaking loudness for truth and zeal for faithfulness. When something comes at me, slow me down long enough to ask, "What do You want me to learn from this?" Remind me how patient You have been with me, so I can be patient with others. Grow self-control in me, so I rule my spirit instead of being ruled by it. In Jesus' name, amen.

God is slow to anger with me. I can choose to be slow with others.

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Next: Lesson 5 →

LESSON 5

When Anger Is Right

Read Mark 3:1–6; Nehemiah 5:1–13

In Lesson 1 we asked, “Isn’t some anger right?” Yes. Jesus Himself was angry. But even right anger is a choice: choosing to be grieved by what grieves God, and to respond His way, without sin. Let’s look closer.

In the synagogue there was a man with a withered hand. The religious leaders watched Jesus, hoping He would heal on the Sabbath so they could accuse Him. Jesus asked them a simple question: is it right on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm? They said nothing.

> *“And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.”* **Mark 3:5**

Look at what is joined together: anger and grief. Jesus was angry at hard hearts, and grieved by them. His anger did not make Him lash out. It moved Him to do good. He healed the man.

Right anger grieves what grieves God, stays under control, and does good.

Nehemiah gives another picture. Poor families had mortgaged their fields to buy grain, and some had to let their own children be taken as slaves by their own countrymen. When Nehemiah heard it, he was very angry. Look at what he did next.

> *“I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them, “You are exacting interest, each from his brother.” And I held a great assembly against them”* **Nehemiah 5:6–7**

He took counsel with himself first. Then he confronted the wrong, named it, and called for the fields and the interest to be given back. His anger aimed at a real wrong and worked for real repair.

Notice what neither of them did. Jesus didn’t insult the Pharisees or plot against them; they went out to plot against Him (Mark 3:6). Nehemiah didn’t take revenge or keep a list. Both let anger serve the good of others and the glory of God, not the satisfaction of self.

ANGRY + GRIEVED → HELP



Right anger grieves the wrong and reaches out to help.

So yes, some things should stir me. Abuse. The weak being exploited. Truth twisted on purpose. Being the one who was hurt doesn’t keep me from seeing a wrong clearly. If I am in danger from someone’s anger, the right thing is to get to safety and get help.

But here is the hard truth. Most of my anger isn't about God's honor. It's about my plans blocked, my pride bruised, my comfort disturbed. I like to call that righteous. It isn't. And anger turns to sin when it comes too fast, stays too long, or aims at people instead of wrongs.

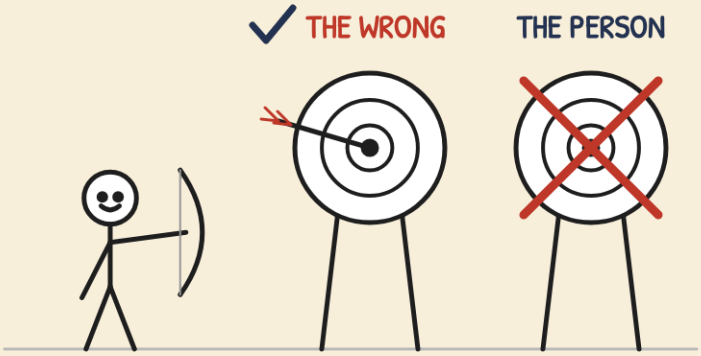
Being right about the wrong does not make my response right.

So I check myself. Is my judgment true, or have I filled in the gaps? Is my response in proportion? Do I want correction, or do I want someone hurt? Are love and self-control in charge? Could I accept a just outcome that gives me no personal satisfaction? Will my response glorify God, or me?

When Jesus cleared the temple, He acted with the authority of the Son of God. That is not a permission slip for me to turn over tables whenever I feel offended.

And remember this. Jesus is the only person whose anger was always right. When people mocked Him and nailed Him to a cross, He did not answer in kind. He prayed for them. On that cross He took the righteous anger of God against my sin, so that I could have peace with God. If He carried that, I can leave vengeance with God. I can aim my anger at the wrong, not the person, and let it move me to protect, to help and to speak up.

Your turn



Aim at the wrong, not at the person.

Where does each one belong? Be honest about the gray areas.

	About God's honor or someone's harm	About my pride, plans or comfort
A child is being bullied		
Someone took my parking spot		
A widow is cheated out of her savings		
My idea was ignored at the meeting		
My coffee order was wrong		
A friend is being lied about		
The referee made a bad call		
A coworker got credit I deserved		

Before I call my anger righteous, which of these questions do I usually skip? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Is my judgment true?
- ☐ Is my response in proportion?
- ☐ Do I want correction — or someone hurt?
- ☐ Are love and self-control in charge?
- ☐ Could I accept a just outcome that gives me no satisfaction?

When I say my anger is righteous, how often is my own pride mixed in? (circle one)

Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Almost always

Something that grieves God that I have stopped grieving over is _____.

Aim it well

A real wrong I see:

Who is being hurt by it?

One good thing I can do — protect, help, or speak up:

What I will not do (insult, threaten, take revenge):

Say it better. Aim at the wrong, not at the person:

"People like you make me sick. You'll get what's coming to you."

Better:

Hide it in your heart

> *"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."* **Ephesians 4:26–27**

Let's pray

Lord Jesus, Your anger was always right. You were angry at hard hearts and grieved by them, and then You healed. And on the cross You carried the anger my sin deserved. Mine is so often about me. Show me the difference. Give me a heart that grieves what grieves You — cruelty, lies, the weak being crushed — and keep me from using that as cover for my pride. When I am right about the wrong, keep my response right too. Aim my anger at the wrong, not at people, and turn it into protecting, helping and speaking up. In Jesus' name, amen.

Even right anger is a choice: grieve what grieves God, and respond His way.

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Next: Lesson 6 →

LESSON 6

When I Am Angry at God

Read Psalm 13; Jonah 4; Psalm 73; Job 38–42

Sometimes my anger isn't pointed at a person. It's pointed up. A prayer that seemed unanswered. A diagnosis. A loss that never should have happened. If I am honest, I'm not only sad. I'm angry at God.

This is where the first question of our study gets tested. God is sovereign and good, and I can trust Him in the circumstances I don't like. Especially those. Anger at God says, "You are in control, but You are not good." Trust says, "You are both, even now."

Grief is not sin. Tears are not unbelief. Scripture gives me words for my pain.

> *"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?"* **Psalm 13:1–2**

David doesn't hide. He brings it straight to God. That is lament: honest pain spoken to God. And by the end of Psalm 13, David is trusting God's steadfast love and singing. Nothing in his circumstances has changed yet. Something in him has.

Lament talks to God. Accusation walks away from Him.

Jonah chose another kind of anger. God spared Nineveh, and Jonah was furious, not at sin, but at mercy. Then the plant that shaded him withered, and he was angry about that too. God answered him with a question.

> *“And the LORD said, “You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?””* **Jonah 4:10–11**

Jonah cared more about his shade than about a city full of people. His anger at God was really about Jonah: his comfort, his idea of who deserved what. When I am angry at God, I am often saying, “My way was better than Yours.” That is the me-centered life at its peak.

Asaph watched arrogant people prosper and decided that keeping his heart pure had been for nothing. Bitterness was setting in. Then something changed.

> *“But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.”* **Psalm 73:16–17**

He went into God’s presence and saw things from God’s side. He admits he had been brutish, like a beast before God, and yet God was still holding his hand (Psalm 73:21–24).



Lament talks to God. Accusation walks away from Him.

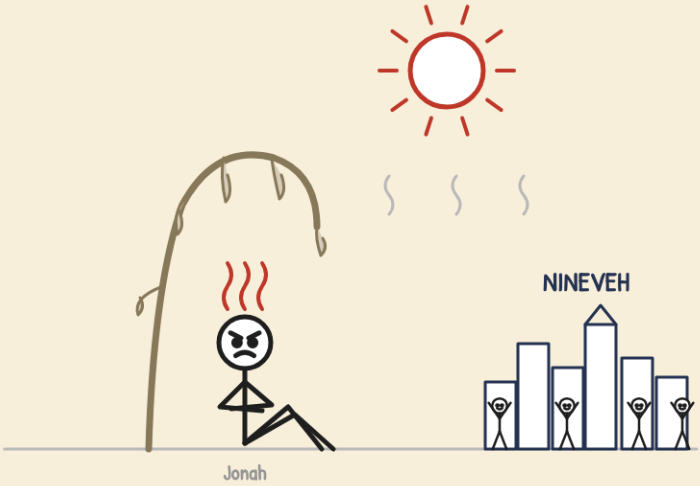
Job lost nearly everything and asked hard questions. When God answered, He didn't explain His reasons. He asked Job where he was when the world was made. Job put his hand over his mouth and humbled himself (Job 40:4; 42:1–6). Yet God said Job had spoken rightly of Him, unlike his friends (Job 42:7). Honest questions brought to God are not the problem. God gave Job no explanation. He gave Job Himself.

So I can trade my question. Not, "Why are You doing this to me?" but, "God, what do You want me to learn from this?" I may not understand what He is doing. But I have seen His heart at the cross. He gave His own Son for me (Romans 8:32). He is not careless with me.

Naomi came home after burying her husband and sons and asked to be called Bitter. She said the Lord had brought her back empty. But Ruth was standing right beside her. Bitterness makes me blind to the grace already at my side.

So I bring it to Him: the hurt, the questions, even the anger. I bring it to Him, not away from Him. Then I trust and obey. I let Him be God.

Your turn



Sometimes I care more about my shade than His mercy.

Toward God, I have sometimes felt... (check all that apply)

- ☐ confused
- ☐ disappointed
- ☐ hurt
- ☐ angry
- ☐ forgotten
- ☐ afraid to admit it
- ☐ distant
- ☐ other:

When life goes a way I don't like, how quickly do I bring it to God? (circle one)

Right away | After a while | Only when I'm desperate | I pull away from Him

Which of these talk to God, and which walk away from Him?

	Lament (talks to God)	Accusation (walks away)
“How long, Lord? I don’t understand.”		
“Why pray? He never listens.”		
“I’m hurting. Please don’t leave me here.”		
“I’m done with church.”		
“Help me trust You when I can’t see.”		
“God owes me an explanation.”		

Write your own “How long?” to God. Make it honest, say it to Him, and end with one thing you know is true about Him.

I don’t understand _____, but I know God is _____.

Going into the sanctuary

What looks unfair to me right now:

Instead of “Why me?” — God, what do You want me to learn from this?

What I see differently when I come into God’s presence:

The “Ruth” beside me — grace God has already given me:

Hide it in your heart

> *“But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.”* **Psalm 13:5–6**

Let’s pray

Father, You know what I have felt toward You, even the things I was afraid to say. Thank You that I can bring them to You instead of carrying them away from You. Forgive me where my anger has really been about my plans, my comfort and my idea of what is fair. You are sovereign, and You are good, even in the things I don’t like. I don’t understand everything You are doing, but I have seen Your heart at the cross, and I choose to trust You. Open my eyes to the grace already standing beside me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

I may not understand His ways, but I have seen His heart at the cross.

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PART 2

How It Comes Out

LESSON 7

The Excuses I Make

Read James 1:19–27

Picture a man on the freeway. Someone cuts him off. He leans on the horn and says things his grandchildren should never hear. At dinner he tells the story, and it ends the same way it always does: “What was I supposed to do? He cut me off.”

Every one of us has a sentence like that ready. It comes out fast, and it always points away from me.

An excuse is how I deny that anger was my choice.

As we saw in Lesson 1, no one can make me mad. Anger is a choice. An excuse is my attempt to give that choice to someone else. James calls it walking away from the mirror.

> *“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.”* **James 1:22–24**

I saw something. I just didn’t stay long enough to deal with it. Here are the excuses I know best.

“They made me angry.” They may have done something wrong. But their wrong does not choose my response. I do. I can name what they did honestly and still confess what I did, with no “but” attached.

“That’s just how I am.” No. That is how I was. Galatians 5 lists fits of anger among the works of the flesh, and in the same chapter it lists gentleness and self-control as the fruit of the Spirit. If I am born again, “how I am” is not the end of my story. Christ is still writing it.

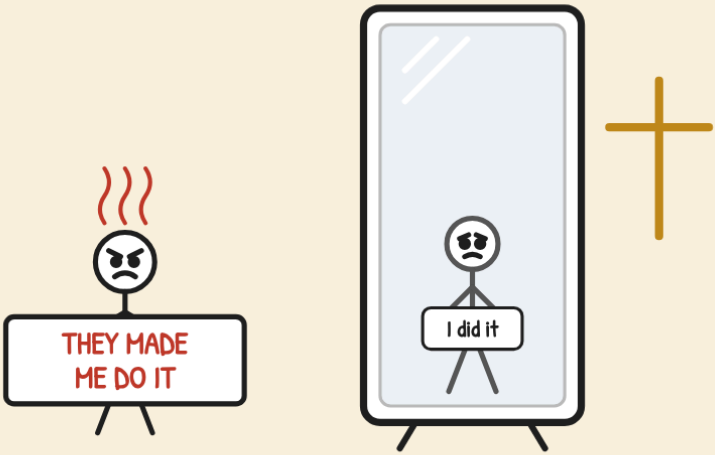
“I’m only telling the truth.” Truth doesn’t need cruelty to be true. Paul tells me to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Love is not optional wrapping paper.

“At least I got it off my chest.” Picture someone tossing trash out the car window because it makes his car feel cleaner. Someone else has to pick it up. My venting leaves a whole home picking up after me.

> *“A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.”* **Proverbs 29:11**

“I apologized. They should be over it.” An apology is not an order for someone else to feel safe again. If my anger has hurt them more than once, trust will take time. Real repentance is willing to wait.

Being right about the wrong does not make my response right.



The mirror doesn't take excuses.

Every excuse has the same center: me. My feelings, my reasons, my reputation. That is the me-centered life wearing a lawyer's suit. But I already know who I am. I am a sinner saved by grace. I don't need a defense. I need mercy, and there is plenty of it at the cross.

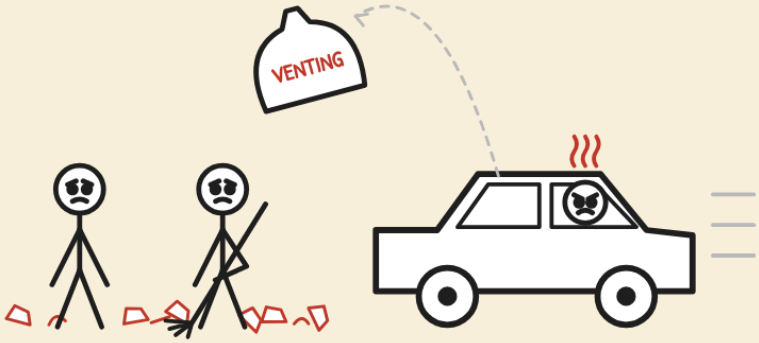
> *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* **1 John 1:9**

Whatever comes at me, I can look in the mirror or look to the cross. The mirror shows me the truth. The cross shows me what to do with it.

So I will stop asking, "Who caused this?" and ask the better question: "God, what do You want me to learn from this?" Often the answer is simple. Own it. Confess it. Make it right. Glorify God by telling the truth about myself.

What would my confession sound like if I left the excuse out? Maybe just this: "I was wrong. Please forgive me."

Your turn



Somebody always cleans up after my venting.

The excuse I reach for most (check all that apply)

- ☐ “They made me angry.”
- ☐ “That’s just how I am.”
- ☐ “I’m only telling the truth.”
- ☐ “At least I got it off my chest.”
- ☐ “I apologized. They should be over it.”
- ☐ “I was tired / rushed / stressed.”
- ☐ other:

Excuse or confession? Sort each sentence.

	Excuse	Confession
“I yelled because you never listen.”		
“I yelled. That was wrong.”		
“I’m sorry you were upset.”		
“I spoke harshly and hurt you. Will you forgive me?”		
“Well, somebody had to say it.”		
“I said a true thing in a cruel way.”		

Say it better: rewrite this apology so I own my choice and there is no excuse left in it.

“I’m sorry I lost my temper, but you know how you get when you push me.”

Better:

When someone points out my anger, how often do I explain instead of own it? (circle one)

Rarely Sometimes Often Almost always

The next time I hear myself say “_____,” I will stop and say instead: “I chose that. _____.”

Write the confession I need to make, to God and maybe to someone else, with no excuse attached.

Hide it in your heart

> *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."* **James 1:22**

Let's pray

Lord, You know how quickly I explain myself. I have blamed other people, my mood, my past and even the truth for choices that were mine. Forgive me. No one made me angry. I chose my way. Keep me standing at the mirror of Your Word long enough to see what is really there, and then lead me to the cross, where I find mercy instead of excuses. Teach me to confess without a "but." Give me patience while trust is rebuilt. Make me a doer of Your Word and not a hearer only. In Jesus' name, amen.

An excuse defends me. A confession sets me free.

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LESSON 8

Quiet Anger and Stored Resentment

Read Ephesians 4:25–32; Romans 12:17–21

Not all anger is loud. Some of it whispers. A cool “Fine.” A door closed a little too firmly. Warmth held back for days. An old offense dropped into a brand-new argument. A calm voice can carry a cruel intention.

Quiet anger is still a choice. I may never raise my voice, and still choose my way over God’s way, deep inside, where only He sees. God wants my thoughts, not just my words and actions.

Paul knew anger would come. So he puts two fences around it.

> *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”* **Ephesians 4:26–27**

First, don’t sin in it: no cruel words, no revenge, no punishing silence. Second, don’t let the sun go down on it. Not every hard conversation has to be settled by bedtime. But I stop feeding it now, and I move toward peace as soon as I wisely can.

There is a pause that serves peace: “I’m too stirred up to speak well. Give me a little while, and I’ll come back to this.” And there is a silence that serves punishment. One aims at my self-control. The other aims at making someone else suffer.

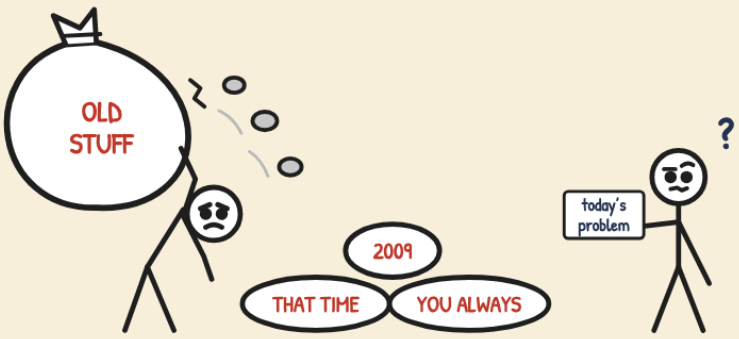
Anger that is nursed becomes resentment. Resentment is anger I decided to keep. A hurt I replay until it becomes part of me.

Resentment does not punish the person who hurt me. It takes root in me.

> *“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;”* **Hebrews 12:15**

A root works underground. It starts as a private grievance nobody knows about. Then it springs up into homes, friendships and churches. And it hands the devil the foothold Paul warned about.

Picture a man carrying a sack of stones. Each stone is an old offense. Every time there’s a disagreement, he reaches in and throws one from years ago. Soon nobody can see today’s problem under the pile.



Today’s problem, buried under yesterday’s stones.

Why do I keep the stones? Because I don’t trust God to handle them. Resentment says, “If I let go, they get away with it.” But Romans 12, the passage we started with, tells me never to avenge myself but to leave room for God, because vengeance belongs to Him (Romans 12:19). God is sovereign. He sees. He will judge rightly. I don’t have to.

And I am the forgiven servant. As we saw in F4, Jesus asks for forgiveness without measure. How can I keep a sack of stones when God emptied mine at the cross?

Remembering is not the same as bitterness. Sometimes I need an accurate record for safety or accountability. If I have been seriously hurt or abused, letting go of resentment never means walking back into danger. Get safe, and talk with your pastor and a qualified counselor.

After great loss, Naomi told her friends to call her Mara, “bitter.” She said she came back empty. But Ruth was standing right beside her. Bitterness blinds me to the grace already at my side.

So Paul doesn’t just say to put bitterness away. He tells me what to put in its place.

> *“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”* **Ephesians 4:31–32**

Jesus had every reason for resentment. Instead, He kept entrusting Himself to the One who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23). That is my way out too: trust and obey. Hand over the scorecard. No one gets to rent space in my mind. That room belongs to Christ.

Your turn



Hand over the scorecard.

Quiet anger I recognize in myself (check all that apply)

- ☐ the silent treatment
- ☐ one-word answers
- ☐ holding back warmth or affection
- ☐ bringing up old offenses
- ☐ sarcasm with a smile
- ☐ replaying the conversation at night
- ☐ telling others instead of the person
- ☐ other:

Pause or punishment? Sort each one.

	A pause for peace	A punishing silence
“I need twenty minutes. Then let’s talk.”		
Not speaking until they apologize first		
Taking a walk to pray before I answer		
Answering every question with “Fine.”		
Setting a time to come back to it		
Leaving the room so they’ll worry		

How often do I replay an old hurt in my mind? (circle one)

Rarely Sometimes Often Almost always

Hand over the scorecard

The hurt I keep replaying:

What it has been growing in me:

Why I haven't trusted God with it:

Lord, I give this person and this wrong to You. Vengeance is Yours, not mine. Signed:

One kind act I will do in its place this week:

Like Naomi, I have been calling myself _____. But God has put _____ right beside me.

Is there an old stone in my sack that I keep ready for the next argument? What would it mean to trust God with it and put it down for good?

Hide it in your heart

> *“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”* **Ephesians 4:31–32**

Let’s pray

Heavenly Father, show me the anger I have chosen to keep: the hurts I replay instead of release, and the quiet ways I make others pay. You see what no one else sees. Pull up any root of bitterness before it springs up and troubles the people I love. I trust You to judge rightly, so I hand You the scorecard. Vengeance is Yours, not mine. Open my eyes to the grace You have placed beside me. Make me kind, tenderhearted and forgiving, as You in Christ have forgiven me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Resentment is anger I decided to keep, and I can decide to give it to God.

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LESSON 9

Before a Word Becomes a Wound

Read James 3:1–12; Proverbs 18:21; Ephesians 4:29; Proverbs 15:1

Picture this. It's late. A text comes in that stings. My thumbs start moving fast. The reply is sharp, clever and true enough. My thumb hovers over Send.

That moment, between the thought and the word, is a choice. Once a word is out, I can apologize for it. I can't unsay it. Words can be forgiven, but a wound can stay tender long after the apology.

More than anything, my job is to glorify God in my thoughts, words and actions. This lesson is about the middle one, and about catching it while it is still in the first.

> *"So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell."* **James 3:5–6**

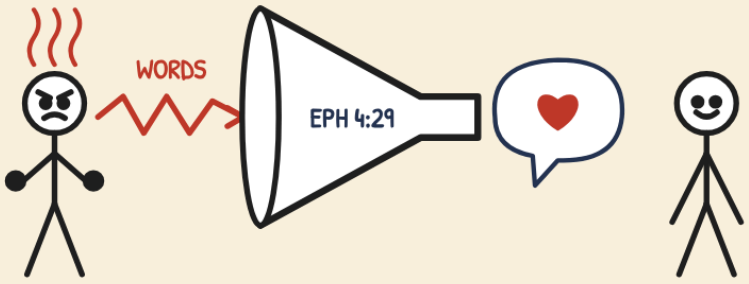
The tongue is small, like a bit in a horse's mouth or the rudder of a ship. Small, but it steers everything. A small spark can burn a whole forest.

Then James says the thing that should stop every one of us. Blessing and cursing come out of the same mouth. I praise God on Sunday and cut someone down on Monday. James says plainly: this should not be.

> *"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits."* **Proverbs 18:21**

Words carry life or death. Jesus put contempt right next to murder (Matthew 5:21–22). Calling someone a fool writes them off as worthless, and every person I speak to bears God's image.

Before a word becomes a wound, it is only a thought. That is where I can stop it.



Run it through the filter first.

That stinging text is weight on the bar. It can be my personal trainer, or it can be my bully platform. Before I type, I can ask, "God, what do You want me to learn from this?" And then, "What do You want me to say?"

Paul gives me a filter for the mouth.

> *"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."* **Ephesians 4:29**

I run every heated sentence through four questions. Is it good, or is it corrupting? Will it build this person up? Does it fit this moment? Will it give grace to the one who hears it? If it can't get through the filter, it

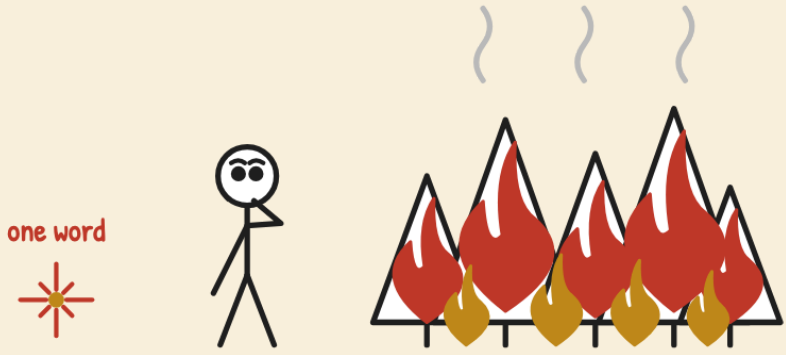
doesn't get out of my mouth. That doesn't mean I never say hard things. It means I say them in a way that builds.

And when the other person's voice is rising, Solomon hands me the simplest tool there is: a soft answer turns away wrath (Proverbs 15:1). A soft answer is not a weak answer. Lowering my voice on purpose is strength under control. It can still be clear and firm. Picture two people shouting, and one deliberately drops to a quiet voice. Very often the other voice drops too.

Most of my sharpest words come from the same place. I feel slighted, and I want them to feel it too. But it's almost never about me. And even when it is, I don't want it to become about me in my mind. When my words are about me, they wound. When they are about Christ and the good of the person in front of me, they heal.

If you'd like to go further, I wrote a little book on this very verse, EP-429™ — Before A Word Becomes A Wound. It turns Ephesians 4:29 into a filter for the mouth and makes a good companion to this lesson.

Your turn



A small spark, a big forest.

The 4:29 filter

The sentence I almost said (or did say):

Is it good, or corrupting?

Will it build this person up?

Does it fit this moment?

Will it give grace to the one who hears it?

What I could say instead:

Say it better: rewrite this so it passes the filter, still tells the truth and glorifies God.

“You never think about anyone but yourself. Typical.”

Better:

Words I choose when I’m angry (check all that apply)

- ☐ “always” and “never”
- ☐ sarcasm
- ☐ name-calling
- ☐ bringing up the past
- ☐ a raised voice
- ☐ needing the last word
- ☐ a cutting text or email
- ☐ other:

Builds up or tears down? Sort each one.

	Builds up	Tears down
“Help me understand what happened.”		
“What were you thinking?”		
“I was wrong about that.”		
“Here we go again.”		
“Thank you for telling me.”		
“Whatever.”		

How often do I say something in anger that I later wish I could take back? (circle one)

Rarely Sometimes Often Almost always

When my thumb is over Send and I’m upset, I will wait _____, ask God what He wants me to say, and run my words through the 4:29 filter.

Hide it in your heart

> *“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”* **Ephesians 4:29**

Let's pray

Lord, You know the words I have said that I can never unsay. Forgive me for the times my mouth has blessed You and then cut down someone made in Your image. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight. Catch my words while they are still thoughts. Help me ask: Is it good? Will it build up? Does it fit? Will it give grace? When voices rise, give me a soft answer. Let my words glorify You. In Jesus' name, amen.

If it can't get through the filter, it doesn't get out of my mouth.

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LESSON 10

What My Anger Teaches Others

Read Proverbs 15:1–4; 2 Timothy 2:22–26

Picture a kitchen table. A young child reaches for the milk, and the glass tips over. Before anyone moves, the child looks up. Not at the milk. At a parent's face.

The spill is one problem. That look may be telling me about another. Correction is part of loving a child. Humiliation never is.

My anger is always teaching someone something.

The question is what. If mistakes around me bring an explosion, people learn to hide their mistakes. If disagreement brings a sharp comment or a roll of the eyes, they learn to stop telling me what they really think. Then I mistake the quiet I have created for agreement, or even for respect.

The quiet I create is not the same as peace.

Children aren't the only ones watching. Coworkers, grandchildren, the server at lunch, the person in the next pew all read my face when something goes wrong. They learn what I value most by what makes me angry. If I explode over being late, my schedule is on the throne. If I explode over being questioned, my pride is.

And there is a bigger lesson. If I say I belong to Jesus, my anger is teaching people about Him. More than anything, my job is to glorify God in my thoughts, words and actions. That means making Jesus look

good. My temper can make Him look harsh, impatient and hard to approach. That isn't who He is at all.

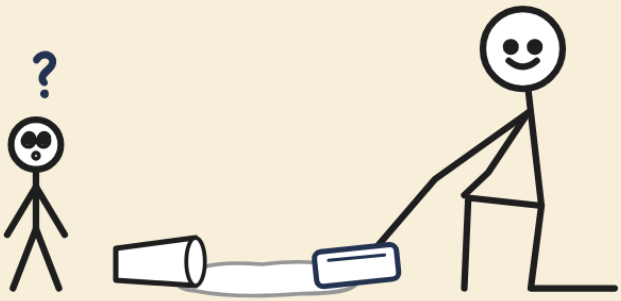
> *"A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit."* **Proverbs 15:4**

Gentle words are like a tree people can rest under. Twisted, harsh words can break something inside a person, and not just for the moment.

Anger also shrinks a conversation. When I'm stirred up, only winning matters. I interrupt. I pick the facts that help me. I forget there is a person in front of me. Even when my complaint is fair, the way I carry it can make repair harder.

This reaches church and screens too. A believer can defend a true teaching with mockery. The teaching stays true. But the people watching learn something about our Lord that isn't true.

> *"And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,"* **2 Timothy 2:24**



They're watching my face, not the milk.

So here is a brave step: ask. Choose someone you trust, a spouse, a grown child or a close friend, and ask, “How does my anger affect you?” Then listen. Don’t explain. Don’t defend. Don’t correct their memory. Just say thank you. This is the better question in its most practical form: “God, what do You want me to learn from this?” Sometimes He answers through the people who live with me.

If I learn that my anger has made someone afraid of me, that is serious. I don’t wait. I talk to my pastor and get qualified help now. And if you are the one living with someone else’s frightening anger, get to safety.

This is not a call to beat myself up. It is a call to look to the cross instead of at me. Jesus was firm with wrong and gentle with sinners, and the weak and broken were never afraid to come near Him. As I follow Him, my table, my home and my church can become safe places to tell the truth. That is the lesson I want my life to teach.

Your turn



Ask. Listen. Just say thank you.

Around me, people might be learning... (check honestly)

- ☐ it's safe to admit a mistake
- ☐ it's better to hide a mistake
- ☐ they can disagree with me kindly
- ☐ it's easier to just agree
- ☐ I will listen to the whole story
- ☐ to walk on eggshells
- ☐ other:

How often do the people around me seem to brace for my reaction? (circle one)

Rarely Sometimes Often Almost always

The milk is on the floor. What does each response teach?

	Teaches “You are safe here”	Teaches “Hide it next time”
“Accidents happen. Grab a towel.”		
“How many times have I told you?”		
A sigh and a slammed cabinet		
“Let’s clean it up together.”		
Silence and a hard look		
“Thanks for telling me right away.”		

The brave question

Who I will ask:

My question: “How does my anger affect you?”

What I heard (no defending):

What God may be teaching me through it:

One thing I will change:

Say it better: this correction is true, but it humiliates. Rewrite it so it corrects without crushing and shows what Jesus is like.

“Can’t you do anything right? Look at this mess.”

Better:

When people watch how I handle frustration, I want them to learn that Jesus is _____.

Hide it in your heart

> *“A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.”* **Proverbs 15:4**

Let’s pray

Father, my anger is always teaching someone something, and I don’t always like the lesson. Show me what the people closest to me have learned from my face, my voice and my silence. Forgive me for the times I have made it easier to hide than to tell me the truth, and for the times my temper made Jesus look harsh. Give me courage to ask how my anger affects others, and humility to listen without defending myself. Make my words a tree of life. Let my life make Jesus look as gentle as He is. In Jesus’ name, amen.

My anger is always teaching someone something, including what Jesus is like.

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LESSON 11

Lessons from People in Scripture

Read 1 Samuel 25:2–35; Genesis 4:3–8; Jonah 4; Numbers 20:1–13; Nehemiah 5

Scripture doesn't hide its people's tempers. It shows them to us so we can see ourselves. Every one of these five stood where I stand: something came at them, and they had to choose. My way or God's way. At every stop, I want to ask: Which one looks most like me?

David and Abigail. David's men had protected Nabal's shepherds. When David asked for a little food in return, Nabal insulted him. David strapped on his sword to wipe out Nabal's household. Then Abigail met him on the road with food and wise words. And David listened.

> *"And David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand!"* **1 Samuel 25:32–33**

Wounded pride can make revenge look perfectly reasonable. David turned the insult into a lesson instead of a massacre. Thank God for the Abigails He sends. The question is whether I will listen when one shows up.

Cain. God did not accept Cain's offering, and Cain was very angry. God came to him and named the choice in front of him.

> *“The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, and you must rule over it.”” **Genesis 4:6–7***

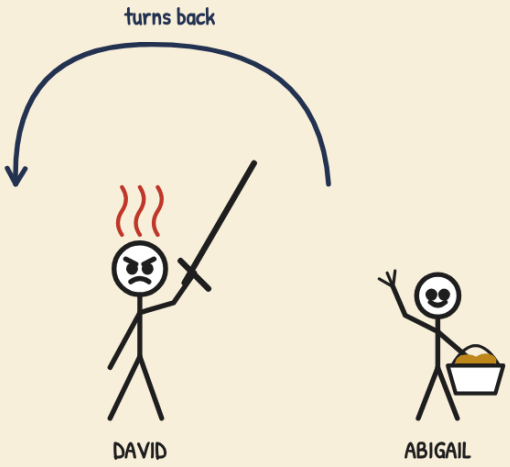
“You must rule over it.” Even then, anger was a choice. Cain chose his way and killed his brother. Abel had done nothing to him. Abel’s life simply exposed his own. When God puts His finger on my heart, the danger is turning on the person whose life makes me look bad.

Jonah. God spared Nineveh, and Jonah was angry enough to want to die. He was angry that God was merciful. Then God gave him a plant for shade and took it away, and Jonah was angry again. He cared more about his shade than a city full of people. God asked him a question I need to hear too.

> *“And the LORD said, “Do you do well to be angry?”” **Jonah 4:4***

Moses. The people were complaining again, and the provocation was real. But Moses spoke harshly and struck the rock instead of speaking to it as God said. God’s verdict was plain: Moses did not believe Him (Numbers 20:12). His anger was a failure to trust and obey. Other people’s failures did not excuse his.

A real provocation is never a permission slip.



Thank God for the Abigail on the road.

Nehemiah. Here is anger done right. He heard that the poor were being exploited by their own people, and he was very angry. But he stopped and thought it through. Then he confronted the leaders and called for the wrong to be repaired. He chose to be grieved by what grieves God, and to respond God's way: under control, for the good of others.

Put them side by side. David was rescued by listening. Cain was ruined by refusing to. Jonah wanted his comfort. Moses let other people's sin become his excuse. Nehemiah stopped, thought and acted for others. The difference wasn't how angry they felt. It was what they chose, and who their anger was about: themselves, or God and the people in front of them.

The biggest struggle is always about me. And every one of these stories points past itself to the only One whose anger was always right. When they mocked Him and nailed Him to a cross, He didn't answer in kind. He prayed for them. He trusted His Father, and He obeyed all the way.

Your turn



Which one looks most like me?

Which story most exposes my own danger? (check all that apply)

- ☐ David: revenge feels reasonable when I'm insulted
- ☐ Cain: I resent someone whose life makes me look bad
- ☐ Jonah: I'm angry when God is kind to people I think don't deserve it
- ☐ Jonah: I care more about my comfort than about people
- ☐ Moses: I let others' failures excuse mine
- ☐ Nehemiah: I want to learn to aim anger at real wrong

What was driving each choice?

	My way (about me)	God's way (about God and others)
David heading out with his sword		
David listening to Abigail		
Cain's anger at Abel		
Jonah grieving his plant		
Moses striking the rock		
Nehemiah calling for the poor to be repaid		

My Abigail

Who in my life is wise enough to stop me on the road?

Have I given them permission to speak up? How?

What I will say to them this week:

When God puts His finger on something in my heart, how often do I listen the first time? (circle one)

Rarely Sometimes Often Almost always

Say it better: picture Moses at the rock today. Rewrite this so it deals with the problem, trusts God and strikes no one.

"I have had it with all of you. You never stop complaining!"

Better:

God told Cain, "You must rule over it." The anger I need to rule over right now is _____.

Nehemiah stopped and thought before he acted. Name a real wrong that stirs me. What would aiming my anger at the wrong, God's way and not at people, look like?

Hide it in your heart

> *"Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."* **Proverbs 16:32**

Let's pray

Lord, I see myself in these stories more than I want to. Like David, I have been ready to strike when my pride was hurt. Like Cain, I have resented people whose lives exposed mine. Like Jonah, I have cared more about my comfort than Your mercy. Like Moses, I have let others' failures excuse my own failure to trust You. Send me Abigails, and make me humble enough to listen. Teach me, like Nehemiah, to stop, think and act for the good of others. Help me trust and obey, like Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen.

The difference was never how angry they felt. It was what they chose, and who their anger was about.

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PART 3

The Way Out

LESSON 12

What to Do When Anger Rises

Read Proverbs 15:28; Proverbs 29:11

Anger is a choice, and the choice comes fast.

Something is said. A door slams. A message lights up my phone. Before I have thought one clear thought, I am halfway into a reply. As we saw in Lesson 1, no one can make me mad. But the choice arrives in a heartbeat, so I need a plan before the moment comes, not in the middle of it.

Solomon draws two pictures. One person stops and thinks before answering. The other pours out everything at once.

> *"The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things."* **Proverbs 15:28**

Picture this. A man opens an email from a coworker that seems to blame him for a missed deadline. His face goes hot. His fingers are already typing. Every word he writes is true. And every word is built to wound. Being right about the wrong does not make my response right.

Here are four steps for the moment anger rises.

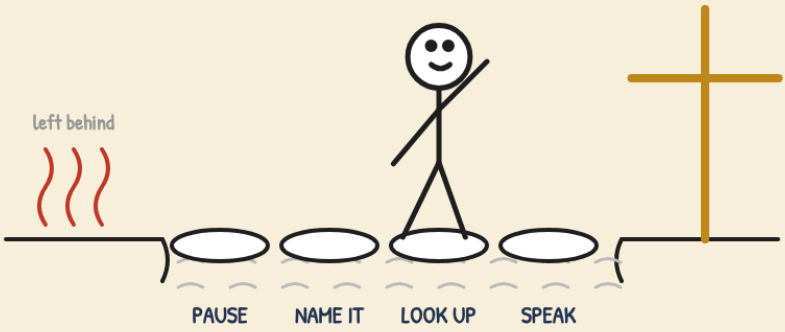
1. Pause. Stop adding harm. Lower my voice on purpose. Put the phone down. Don't hit send. If I need a break, I say so: "I'm too stirred up to speak well. Let me think before I answer, and I will come back to this." A pause that promises to return is self-control. Silence used to punish is not.

2. Name it. Sort out the fact, the assumption and the demand. “The meeting started late” is a fact. “Nobody respects my time” is an assumption. “I must never be inconvenienced” is a demand. The demand is the real problem. It is my way, sitting where God’s way belongs.

3. Look up. I ask the better question: “God, what do You want me to learn from this?” Then I ask, “Is this about God’s honor or someone’s harm, or about my pride, my plans, my comfort?” If I am looking at myself, I am seeing it wrong. So I turn from the mirror to the cross and ask what obedience requires right now. Maybe I need to listen. Maybe I need to correct something false, protect someone or apologize. Maybe I just need to stay quiet a little longer.

4. Speak, specifically and gently. “You never care about anyone” is an attack. “When the plans changed and no one called me, I felt left out. Can we talk about it?” is honest. A soft answer can still be clear and firm. Then I take one next faithful step. I don’t have to fix the whole relationship tonight.

Pause. Name it. Look up. Then speak.



Pause. Name it. Look up. Then speak.

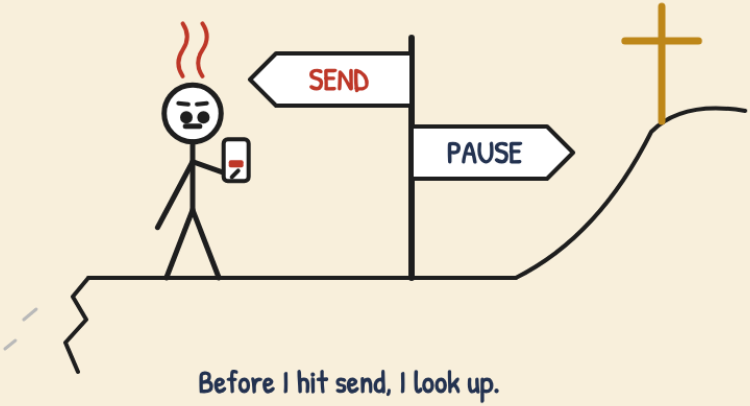
This is not a technique for looking calm. God wants my thoughts, my words and my actions. Naming the demand and looking up deal with my thoughts. The pause guards my words. Speaking gently is an action that glorifies Him.

If anger, mine or anyone else's, turns into threats or violence, I stop, leave, get to safety and call for help. And if my own anger has become frightening to the people around me, I talk to my pastor and get qualified help now, not someday.

> *"A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back."* **Proverbs 29:11**

The wise person doesn't let anger drive. He holds the wheel long enough for God to have the first word. Every time I do, I am trusting and obeying in the most ordinary place there is: my next sentence.

Your turn



When anger starts to rise in me, I usually notice... (check all that apply)

- [ ] my face gets hot
- [ ] my voice gets louder
- [ ] my jaw or fists tighten
- [ ] I start rehearsing what I'll say
- [ ] I reach for my phone to fire back
- [ ] I go quiet and cold
- [ ] other:

Name it. Is each thought a fact, an assumption or a demand?

	Fact	Assumption	Demand
The meeting started 15 minutes late.			
She did it on purpose.			
I must never be kept waiting.			
He didn't answer my text.			
He doesn't care about me.			
Today has to go my way.			
My plan was changed.			
Nobody ever listens to me.			

My pause plan

The words I will say when I need a break:

Where I will go to cool down:

What I will pray there (start with "God, what do You want me to learn from this?"):

When I will come back to the conversation:

Say it better: rewrite this so it is honest, specific and gentle.

“You never care about anyone in this house but yourself!”

Better:

How often do I speak before I have thought it through? (circle one)

Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Almost always

The next time _____ happens, I will pause, name my demand and look up before I say a word.

Hide it in your heart

> *“A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.”* **Proverbs 29:11**

Let’s pray

Lord, You know how fast anger rises in me and how quickly my words run ahead of my heart. No one makes me angry; it is my choice, and I want to choose Your way. Teach me to pause. Help me name what I am really demanding. Turn my eyes from the mirror to the cross, and let me ask, “What do You want me to learn from this?” Give me a soft answer that is still honest and clear. Where my anger has frightened anyone, give me courage to get help. Let You have the first word. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Let God have the first word.

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LESSON 13

Repentance, Forgiveness and Trust

Read Colossians 3:12–17

Three words often get tangled together: repentance, forgiveness and trust. When I mix them up, people get hurt twice. So let me pull them apart.

Repentance is my part.

Picture this. After a hard evening, a man says to his wife, “I’m sorry you got upset.” It sounds like an apology. It isn’t one. It puts the problem on her feelings. Real repentance names what I did: “I spoke harshly and frightened you. That was wrong. Will you forgive me?” No “but.” No accusation tucked in at the end. If anger is a choice, then I own the choice. No one made me do it.

Repentance also changes direction. It may mean correcting what I said in front of others, replacing what I broke or getting help for a pattern that keeps coming back. And I bring it to God first. He is faithful to forgive when I confess. Not because I earned it, but because Jesus paid for it.

> *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* **1 John 1:9**

Forgiveness is a choice too.

Forgiveness releases the debt. Paul says to forgive as the Lord forgave me. That is both the model and the motive. In Question 4 we met the servant who owed ten thousand talents. I am that servant. How can I

not forgive the smaller grievances against me when God has forgiven me so much?

> *“bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”* **Colossians 3:13**

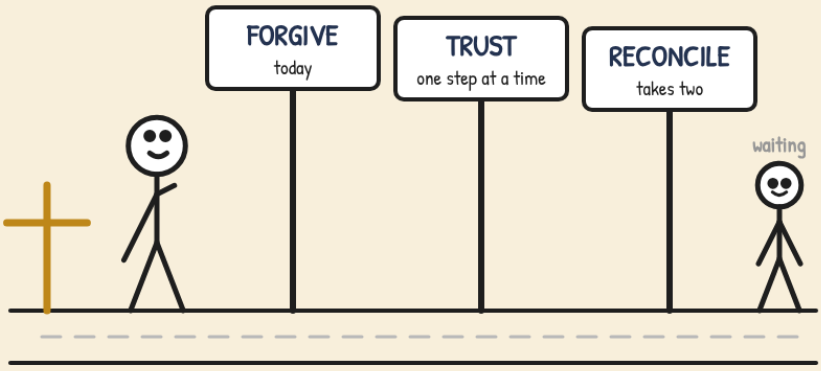
Forgiveness is not saying the wrong was small or okay. It is not forgetting. It is not excusing a crime; some wrongs still need to be reported. Forgiveness is choosing to give up my right to pay the person back, and trusting God with the justice.

Jesus tells me to forgive whenever I stand praying, if I have anything against anyone. I don’t have to wait for the other person. The release can happen in my heart today, between me and God. The relationship is restored as repentance comes.

> *“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.””* **Mark 11:25**

Trust is rebuilt over time. Forgiveness can be given in a moment. Trust is earned back one kept promise at a time. If I hurt someone, I can’t demand that they feel safe again because I apologized. If someone hurt me, forgiving does not mean staying in harm’s way; if I am in danger, I get to safety and get help. Paul says to live at peace with everyone as far as it depends on me (Romans 12:18). Some of it does not depend on me. Reconciliation takes two.

Forgiveness is given. Trust is rebuilt. Reconciliation takes two.

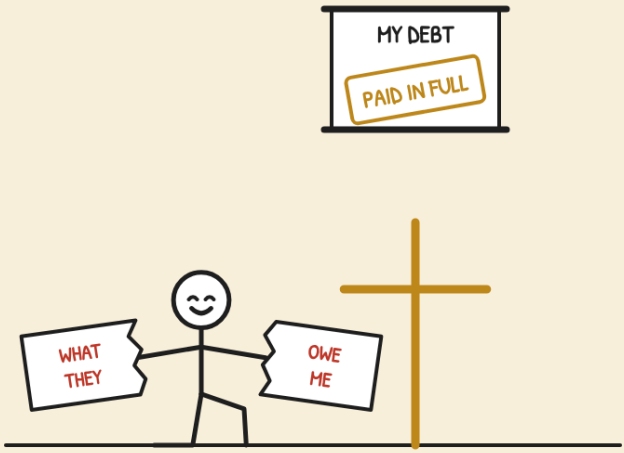


Forgiven today. Trusted over time.

Forgiving a deep wound is often a road, not a single moment. The feelings may take a long time to follow the decision. When it feels impossible, I can pray honestly: “Lord, I can’t do this on my own. I choose to forgive. Please do in me what I cannot.” And when the hurt comes back, I forgive again. That is forgiveness without measure on an ordinary Tuesday.

So here is the honest question: does forgiveness flow from my hand, or does God have to pry it out? I am a follower. I trust and obey. Giving and forgiving must become my living as I die to myself, take up my cross and follow Jesus.

Your turn



Paid in full — so I can let it go.

Sort each statement.

	Forgiveness is...	Forgiveness is not...
saying it was no big deal		
giving up my right to pay them back		
forgetting it ever happened		
leaving justice with God		
trusting them again right away		
praying for their good		
keeping quiet about a crime		
a choice I may need to make again		

Say it better: turn this non-apology into a real confession. Name what I did, with no “but.”

“I’m sorry if you were upset, but you pushed my buttons.”

Better:

What makes forgiving hard for me right now? (check all that apply)

- [ ] the hurt is still fresh
- [ ] I’m afraid it will happen again
- [ ] they haven’t said they’re sorry
- [ ] it feels like letting them win
- [ ] I keep replaying it
- [ ] I forget how much I’ve been forgiven
- [ ] other:

Cancel the debt

What God has forgiven me (be specific):

What this person took from me (be honest about the cost):

My prayer: Father, I release ____. They owe me nothing now. I leave justice with You.

One way I can pray for their good:

When I apologize, how often do I add a “but”? (circle one)

Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Almost always

The thing I feel I could never forgive is _____. Would God forgive me for that?

To whom do I need to go first with an honest confession? What specific change would show I mean it?

Hide it in your heart

> *“bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”* **Colossians 3:13**

Let’s pray

Father, I owed You a debt I could never repay, and Jesus paid it all. Forgive me for the times I have apologized with a “but,” and for the grudges I have held so tightly that You have had to pry them out of my hand. My anger was my choice; help me own it plainly. Give me patience to rebuild trust. Where forgiving feels impossible, I choose to forgive anyway. Please do in me what I cannot. Keep me wise and safe, and teach me to forgive as I have been forgiven. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Forgiven much, I choose to forgive much.

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LESSON 14

Building Walls Before the Storm

Read Proverbs 25:28; Proverbs 16:32

If I wait until I'm angry to decide how I'll act, I've waited too long.

Anger is a choice. But most of my choices are made long before the moment arrives. In the ancient world, a city's walls were its safety. Nobody built them while the enemy was at the gate. You built them in peacetime, stone by stone, so they were standing when trouble came.

> *"A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls."* **Proverbs 25:28**

A person without self-control is a city with its walls down. Anything can walk right in. The time to build is now, while things are calm.

These walls don't replace the Holy Spirit. Self-control is His fruit, not my project. But He works through ordinary obedience, and Jesus said following Him is daily. Here are six stones.

Stone one: surrender in the morning. Before the day gets loud, I give it to God: my plans, my schedule, my preferences. "Lord, this day is Yours. Whatever comes at me, what do You want me to learn from it?" What gift can I give Him in the morning? Myself, first. Giving myself fully to God is the foundation for being free to give in every other way, including patience.

Stone two: keep the Word close. I learn James 1:19–20, Proverbs 15:1 and Ephesians 4:29 well enough that they show up when I need them. When anger rises, I ask what those verses require of my very next

sentence.

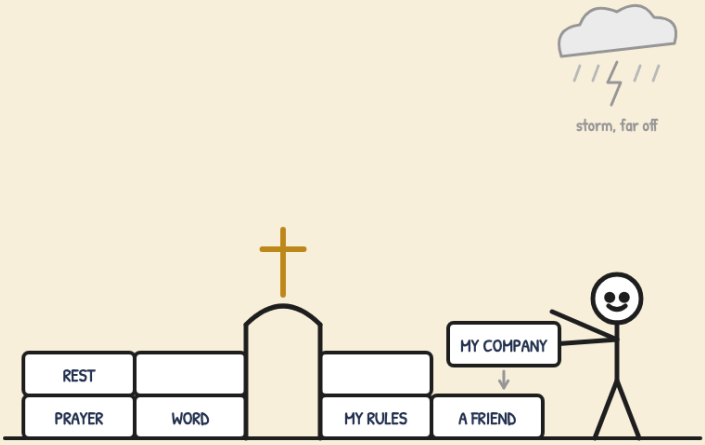
Stone three: set my own rules ahead of time. Not rules for other people. Rules for me. No name-calling. No threats. No humiliating anyone in public. No revenge messages. No using someone's weak spot against them. And a pause-and-return plan I actually use.

Stone four: give someone a key to the gate. I ask a trusted Christian friend to tell me when my tone turns harsh, and I promise not to punish the messenger.

Stone five: watch my company. If I walk with angry people, I will learn their ways. That includes what I feed on: the shows, the feeds and the conversations that keep me stirred up. Whatever I keep company with puts up billboards in my brain, and I read them long after I turn it off.

> *"Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare."* **Proverbs 22:24–25**

Stone six: know my weak hours. Picture this. It's six o'clock. Work ran long, traffic was worse, the kids are hungry, and someone asks a simple question about the bills. If I know I am running on empty, I can say, "Can we talk about that after supper?" Tiredness doesn't excuse sin. But wisdom picks a better time.



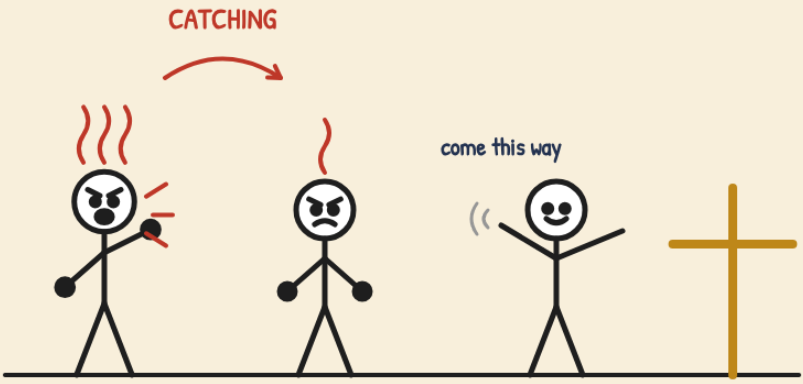
Build the wall before the storm.

Every one of these stones says the same thing: my day is not about me. It belongs to Christ. A wall like this guards all three places anger lives. My thoughts, because I gave them to God first. My words, because I decided my rules before I needed them. My actions, because a friend and a plan stand at the gate.

> *"Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."* **Proverbs 16:32**

That kind of strength is not loud. It is built quietly, one ordinary morning at a time, by someone who has decided to trust and obey before the storm ever shows up.

Your turn



Anger is catching. Choose your company.

My predictable pressure points (check all that apply)

- ☐ running late
- ☐ being interrupted
- ☐ being corrected
- ☐ noise and chaos
- ☐ talking about money
- ☐ being tired or hungry
- ☐ certain news or social media
- ☐ driving
- ☐ other:

Sort each habit.

	Builds my wall	Breaks down my wall
praying before I check my phone		
rehashing the offense with an angry friend		
a verse on an index card		
scrolling outrage late at night		
a pause-and-return plan		
skipping sleep and meals		
asking a friend to call me out		
saying “that’s just how I am”		

My wall

Morning surrender: what I will pray before the day starts:

A verse I will carry this week:

My own rules: what I will not do when I’m angry:

The friend I will give a key to the gate:

My weak hour, and what I’ll do differently then:

How much of what I watch, read or listen to leaves me stirred up? (circle one)

Very little | Some | A lot | Most of it

Who has my permission to tell me when my tone turns harsh? If no one does, whom could I ask this week?

The stone missing from my wall right now is _____.

Hide it in your heart

> *"Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."* **Proverbs 16:32**

Let's pray

Lord, I give You this day before it starts: my plans, my schedule and my preferences. Whatever comes at me today, teach me what You want me to learn from it. You know my weak hours and my pressure points better than I do. Build in me the walls I keep forgetting to build: Your Word close at hand, my own limits set ahead of time, and friends who will tell me the truth. Guard me from the company and the noise that keep me stirred up. Grow self-control in me, so that when the storm comes, the walls are already standing. In Jesus' name, amen.

The choice is made in peacetime, not when the enemy is at the gate.

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LESSON 15

How God Can Bring Good

Read Romans 12:17–21; Genesis 50:15–21

God is sovereign. God is good. We started there, and we come back to it now. Because He rules, God wastes nothing. Not even the moment my anger got exposed.

Let me be careful. My sinful anger is never good, and I never needed to sin so God could work. But God can take what I have confessed and use it to make me more like His Son. That is the good Romans 8 promises. Not that every story ends the way I want, but that God is shaping me into the likeness of Jesus.

> *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."* **Romans 8:28–29**

Joseph knew this. His brothers sold him. He was lied about and forgotten in prison. Years later, with the power of Egypt in his hands, he could have paid them back in full. Instead he looked past them to God.

> *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."* **Genesis 50:20**

Joseph didn't pretend the wrong was small. He called it evil. But he refused to make himself the judge. He trusted the God who rules over evil. He didn't look in the mirror. He looked to God.

Whatever comes at me, I can look in the mirror, or look to the cross.

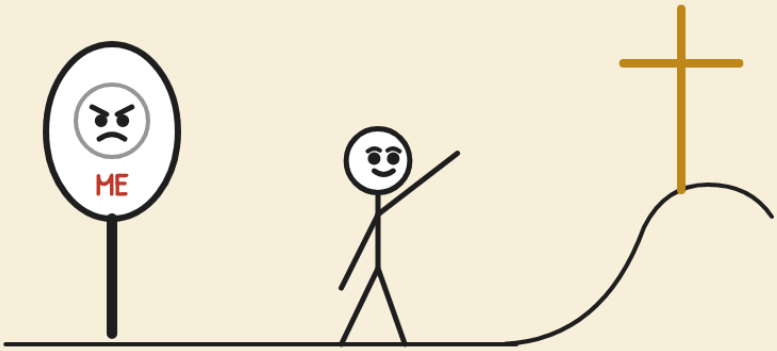
So where can good come from anger? Here are four places to look. Each one is my personal trainer at work.

It can show me what is on the throne. Anger exposes the demand: being respected matters more to me than obeying Christ. Once I confess that, the next interruption becomes a chance to practice humility instead of defending my importance.

It can uncover a real problem. Picture this. Two grown siblings argue about caring for their aging mother. Accusations fly. Later, after each one confesses their own harsh words, they realize no one ever sat down and decided who does what. A fair plan replaces assumptions and resentment.

It can move me to protect someone. Anger at a real wrong can lead me to report misconduct truthfully, help someone get support or fix an unfair practice, without making anyone's suffering my goal. That is choosing to be grieved by what grieves God, and to respond His way.

It can teach others what repentance looks like. Picture a parent saying, "Your disobedience needed correcting. But my cruel words were wrong, and I'm sorry." The child learns that Mom and Dad answer to God too.



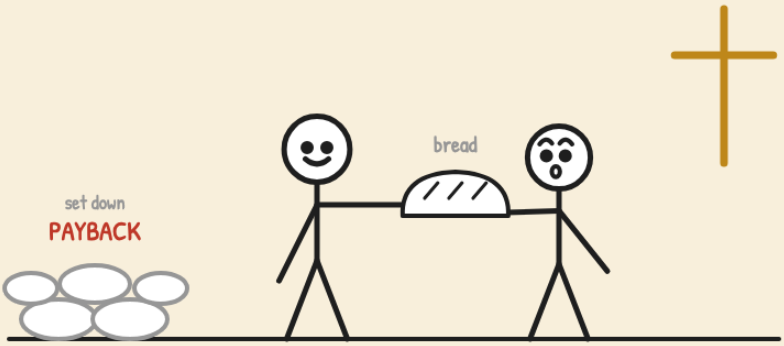
Look in the mirror — or look to the cross.

Paul ends the marks of a true Christian with a plain word: don't repay evil for evil, don't take revenge, leave it to God, and overcome evil with good. I can leave vengeance with God only because I trust that He is just. In everyday terms, each time the old grievance comes back, I pray a blessing over that person and do one kind thing. That never means putting myself back in harm's way. It means refusing to let evil set the terms of my heart.

> *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*
> **Romans 12:21**

Bitterness makes me blind to the grace already standing beside me. Naomi came home and said she was empty, while Ruth stood right next to her. I may not see a repaired relationship this year. But God is still at work, and I can grow in truthfulness, patience, courage and love while I leave the outcome with Him.

Your turn



Overcome evil with good.

Sort each thought. Where are my eyes?

	Looking in the mirror	Looking to the cross
Why does this always happen to me?		
God, what do You want me to learn from this?		
They'll pay for this.		
Justice belongs to God.		
I'll never let them forget it.		
How can I do them good?		
I deserve better than this.		
How can this make me more like Jesus?		

Where might God bring good out of my anger? (check all that apply)

- ☐ it showed me a demand I need to give up
- ☐ it uncovered a problem we need to solve fairly
- ☐ it moved me to protect someone
- ☐ it gave me a chance to model a real apology
- ☐ it drove me back to prayer
- ☐ other:

Think of an angry moment I have confessed. What did my personal trainer show me about my own heart?

Overcome evil with good

The grievance that keeps coming back:

A blessing I will pray for that person:

One kind, safe thing I can do this week:

What I am leaving in God's hands:

When I'm hurting, how easily do I see the grace God has already put beside me? (circle one)

Hardly ever | Sometimes | Often | Almost always

What was meant for harm in my life, God can use to make me more _____.

Hide it in your heart

> *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*
> **Romans 12:21**

Let's pray

Father, You are sovereign and You are good, and You waste nothing. Thank You that You can take even my failures, once confessed, and use them to make me more like Jesus. Help me name evil honestly without making myself the judge. I trust You with the justice. When the old grievance comes back, give me a blessing to pray and a kind thing to do. Open my eyes to the grace You have already placed beside me. Whatever comes at me, turn my eyes from the mirror to the cross. In Jesus' name, amen.

God wastes nothing, not even the moment my anger was exposed.

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PART 4

Where I Live

LESSON 16

Parents and Children

Read Ephesians 6:1–4; Colossians 3:20–21

Home is where anger shows up first and stays longest. The people who see me at my worst are usually the people I love most.

No child can make me mad.

Not the toddler who won't put on his shoes. Not the teenager who rolls her eyes. Not the grown son who won't return my call. Their choices are real, and some need correcting. But my anger is my choice. And my children are watching to see what I choose.

Paul speaks to both sides of the family table. Children are to obey their parents in the Lord. And parents are told not to provoke their children to anger, but to bring them up in the Lord's discipline and instruction.

> *"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."* **Ephesians 6:4**

Colossians adds the reason. A child who is provoked over and over becomes discouraged. A discouraged child is not a better-behaved child. He has just learned to hide.

> *"Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."* **Colossians 3:21**

Picture the kitchen at suppertime. A glass of milk goes over. Before anyone reaches for a towel, the child looks up at Mom's face. That glance tells me what the child expects next. The spill is one problem. The fear may be a bigger one.



The spill is small. The fear may be bigger.

So before I correct, I ask honest questions. Was this defiance or an accident? Did my child understand, or did I never make it clear? Am I correcting the behavior, or unloading my own bad day? And the better question: “God, what do You want me to learn from this?” A spilled glass and deliberate cruelty to a little sister do not call for the same response.

Correction is necessary. Humiliation is not.

I correct the act, not the person. “You left the gate open” can be fixed. “You never think about anybody” can’t. Labels like “useless” or “you ruin everything” don’t teach. They wound. Correcting a child in front of others to prove I’m in charge is about me, not about the child.

If I’m too hot to correct well, I can make things safe right now and decide the consequence later. “We’ll talk about this after supper” is not weakness. It is self-control.

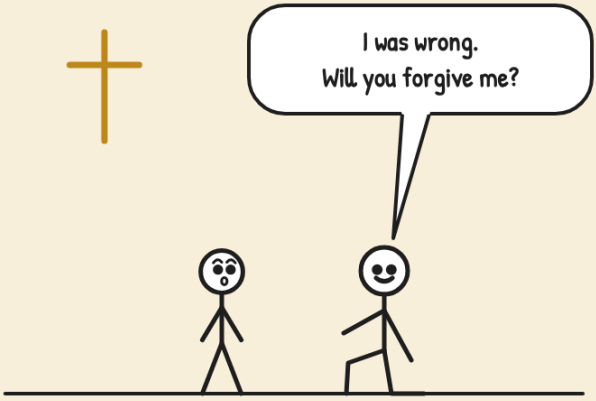
Children feel big things too. I can honor the feeling and keep the boundary: “I know you wanted to stay. We still have to go.” They learn to be frustrated without hurting anyone mostly by watching me. They learn trust and obey the same way.

When I sin against my child, I confess it plainly. “You needed correcting, but the way I yelled at you was wrong. Will you forgive me?” That apology doesn’t cancel the consequence. It shows my child that I live under God’s authority too.

As children grow, the relationship changes. Grown children still honor their parents, and they may set healthy boundaries. Parents can still counsel and speak truth without treating every adult decision like a broken curfew.

Here is the me-centered trap. A child’s mistake can feel like a verdict on me as a parent. It’s almost never about me. And even when it is, I don’t want to let it become about me in my mind. My child’s heart is the point, and God’s glory in my home is the goal.

Your turn



An apology teaches what authority looks like.

When I get angry with my child (or a child in my care), it is usually about... (check all that apply)

- ☐ being embarrassed in front of others
- ☐ being disobeyed
- ☐ being tired or rushed
- ☐ feeling like I'm failing as a parent
- ☐ real danger or a real wrong
- ☐ other:

Correct the act or label the child? Sort these sentences.

	Corrects the act	Labels the child
You left the gate open, and the dog got out.		
You never listen.		
Your room needs to be picked up before you play.		
What is wrong with you?		
You hit your brother. That is not okay.		
You always ruin everything.		

Before I correct

Accident or defiance?

Did my child understand what was expected?

Is this about my child's heart or my frustration?

God, what do You want me to learn from this?

My child feels safe telling me the truth after messing up. (circle one)

Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Almost always

Say it better. Rewrite this so it corrects without crushing.

"You're so careless — you can't even carry a glass without spilling it!"

Better:

The last time I owed my child an apology, the words I needed to say were: "_____ was wrong. Will you forgive me?"

Hide it in your heart

> *"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."* **Ephesians 6:4**

Let's pray

Father, You have been so patient with me. Make me that kind of parent. No child of mine makes me angry; my anger is my choice, and I want to choose Your way in front of them. Forgive me for the times I corrected out of my own frustration, and for words that wounded instead of taught. Help me slow down long enough to tell an accident from defiance. Give me courage to say "I was wrong" to my children, and wisdom to keep the boundaries they need. Bring my children up in Your instruction, and start with me. In Jesus' name, amen.

A child's mistake is not a verdict on me.

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LESSON 17

Brothers, Sisters and Old Rivalries

Read James 3:13–18; Romans 12:15; Genesis 50:15–21

Nobody can push my buttons like a brother or a sister. They were there when the buttons were installed.

But no one can make me mad. Not even family.

As we saw in Lesson 1, anger is a choice. That is hardest to believe at the family table. Old comparisons, a parent who seemed to have a favorite, years of competing for the same attention: they give a small disagreement the weight of a lifetime. A missed phone call becomes the whole story of my childhood. But the old file doesn't open itself. I open it.

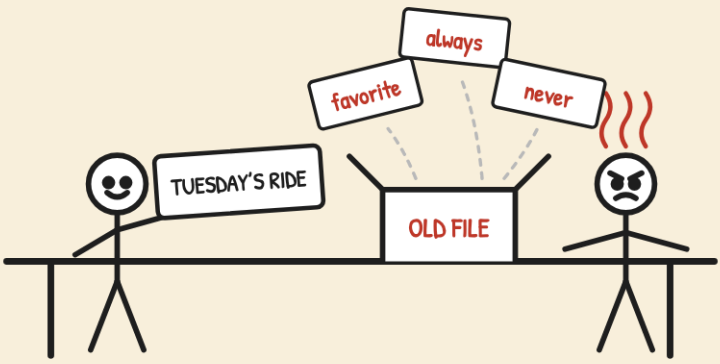
Picture two grown sisters and an aging mother. One misses her turn to drive Mom to the doctor. The other says, "You have always been selfish." The missed appointment needs talking about. But that one sentence just put a whole life on trial.

Am I dealing with today's problem, or retrying my childhood?

James names what is often underneath: bitter jealousy and selfish ambition. That is wisdom from below. It keeps score. It remembers who got the bigger room and the extra help with college. Wisdom from above would rather make peace than win.

> *“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”* **James 3:16–17**

So I deal with today, and I am specific. Who drives on Tuesdays? Who helps with the bills? What did we actually agree to? Clear expectations leave less room for assumptions. They can’t replace generosity or repentance, but they help.



Today's problem doesn't need yesterday's file.

I refuse to recruit the rest of the family. Phone calls that start with “Can you believe what she did?” build a party, not a peace. When inheritance, property or caregiving gets tangled, honest records and wise outside help serve fairness. They are tools for clarity, not weapons.

If I’m raising young children, I hear both sides before I rule. The louder child is not automatically guilty. I teach each one to tell the truth about his own part and make it right. A forced “sorry” doesn’t change a heart.

Then there is envy, the quiet fuel under so much family anger. My brother's promotion. My sister's easy marriage. The grandkids who visit her more. Another person's blessing is not a verdict against my worth. If I look at their good news and see only myself, I am seeing it wrong.

Who is God? He is sovereign over my family story too, even the parts I would have written differently. Joseph's brothers sold him out of envy. Years later he could say this:

> *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."* **Genesis 50:20**

Joseph didn't pretend the wrong was small. He trusted that God was bigger. That trust set him free to forgive without measure, and to feed the very brothers who had hurt him.

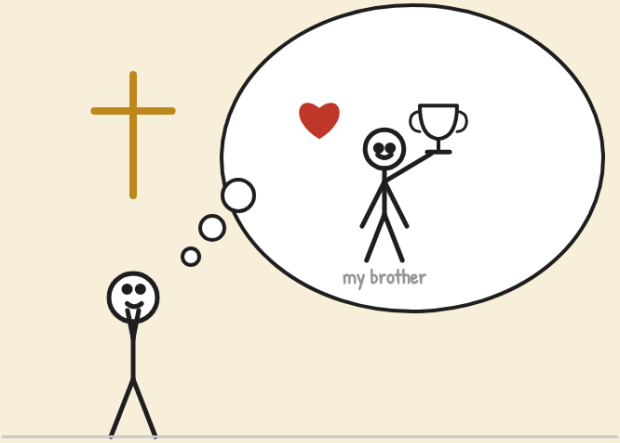
Paul gives the daily cure among the marks of a true Christian: share their joy, share their tears.

> *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."* **Romans 12:15**

It is hard to stay jealous of someone I honestly pray for. When I ask God to bless my sister, and mean it, my eyes come off me and onto Christ.

Maybe I really did carry more of the load. Being right about the wrong does not make my response right. So I ask the better question: God, what do You want me to learn from this? Then I choose wisdom from above.

Your turn



Hard to stay jealous of someone I pray for.

Today's issue or the old file? Sort what someone might say.

	Today's issue	Old file
You missed Mom's appointment Tuesday.		
You've always been the favorite.		
Can we set a schedule for next month?		
This is just like when we were kids.		
I need help with the pharmacy runs.		
You never cared about anybody but yourself.		

Old feelings I still choose to reopen with family: (check all that apply)

- ☐ being compared
- ☐ feeling less favored
- ☐ feeling left with the work
- ☐ feeling left out
- ☐ feeling looked down on
- ☐ envy over their blessings
- ☐ other:

When family conflict comes up, how often do I call someone else to get them on my side? (circle one)

Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Almost always

Say it better. Deal with today's problem without putting a whole life on trial.

"Of course you couldn't make it. You never show up when it matters."

Better:

Rejoice and weep

A brother, sister or relative whose good news I find hard to celebrate:

One honest way I will rejoice with them this week:

One burden of theirs I will share or pray about:

Think it through: Like Joseph, where has God worked in my family story for good, even in a part I would have written differently?

Hide it in your heart

> *"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere."* **James 3:17**

Let's pray

Lord, You know the old files I keep in my heart: the comparisons, the favorites, the times I felt left out or left with the work. I confess that I keep choosing to open them. Forgive me for retrying yesterday when You have called me to deal with today. You are sovereign over my family story, and You mean even the hard parts for good. Pull up the roots of jealousy and selfish ambition in me. Teach me to rejoice when my family rejoices and weep when they weep. Make me a peacemaker at my own table. In Jesus' name, amen.

Today's problem doesn't need yesterday's verdict.

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LESSON 18

Husbands, Wives and Daily Frustrations

Read Colossians 3:12–19

Marriage gives me a thousand small chances a week to choose myself. The towel on the floor. The thermostat. The tone of a one-word answer. Familiarity quietly turns into permission. I would never talk to a coworker the way I sometimes talk to the person I promised to love.

My spouse cannot make me mad. I choose.

As we saw in Lesson 1, no one can make me angry. That includes the person across the breakfast table. So here is the honest question: have I made my spouse responsible for keeping me calm? If my peace depends on everyone at home doing what I want, that is not the peace of the Spirit. It is having things my way.

Paul starts with what we put on: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. Then forgiveness, as the Lord has forgiven me. Then he gets specific about the home.

> *"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."* **Colossians 3:12–13**

> *"Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them."* **Colossians 3:19**

Love, and don’t be harsh. That leaves no room for using closeness as a license to wound, for the husband or the wife. And “as the Lord has forgiven you” sets the measure. He forgave me ten thousand talents. I can forgive the towel on the floor. Again.

Picture this. He comes home to a job that didn’t get done and assumes she’s been careless. She hears his short reply and assumes he doesn’t care. Neither one has asked about the other’s day. A question might have uncovered what an accusation buried: a sick child, a hard phone call, a headache that wouldn’t quit.

A question can uncover what an accusation buries.

Glorifying God at home starts before I say a word. The assumption is a thought. The accusation is a word. The slammed cabinet is an action. God wants all three.



Ask first. You may not need to accuse at all.

We can agree on some protections while we're both calm. One issue at a time. No insults, no threats, and no using private things the other shared in trust. If either of us needs a pause, we say so and name when we'll come back. A pause is not a slammed door, and it is not a way to wear the other person down.

I listen for the concern under the complaint. "You never do anything around here" is unfair. But "you feel left with all the work" may be true and worth hearing. I can understand the hurt without accepting the unfair words, and I can own my part either way.

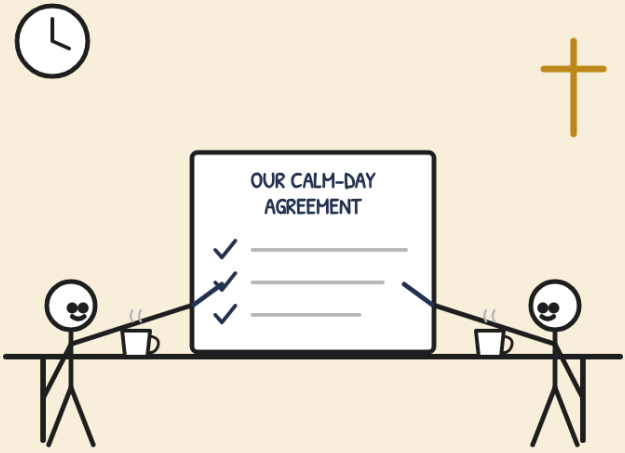
And even here I ask the better question: God, what do You want me to learn from this? A marriage is one of God's best personal trainers. It adds weight every day.

Repair shows up in ordinary life. Keeping the agreement. Carrying part of the load. Coming back to the hard conversation. Receiving correction without punishing the one who gave it. Love becomes visible in what happens after "I'm sorry."

If you're not married, put a roommate, a parent or a close friend in this picture. The same truths hold wherever people share a kitchen and a schedule.

One more thing, said plainly. Nothing in Christian teaching on marriage permits coercion, intimidation or violence. Forgiveness never means staying silent about ongoing harm. If you are afraid in your own home, get to a safe place and reach out for help: a trusted pastor, a qualified counselor and, when needed, the authorities. That is not a failure of faith. It is wisdom, and God is in it.

Your turn



Make the agreement while the water is calm.

What do I most often choose to get angry about at home? (check all that apply)

- ☐ being interrupted
- ☐ clutter or mess
- ☐ money decisions
- ☐ feeling unheard
- ☐ feeling unappreciated
- ☐ schedules and lateness
- ☐ other:

How often do I assume the worst before I ask a question? (circle one)

Rarely Sometimes Often Almost always

Ask first or accuse first? Sort these homecoming lines.

	A question	An accusation
How was your day?		
Why didn't you…?		
Is something wrong?		
You never think about me.		
Can I help with anything?		
I guess I have to do everything myself.		

Say it better. Name the concern under the complaint.

"You never do anything around here!"

Better:

Our calm-day agreement

The issue I tend to pile on top of other issues:

Words I will not use, even when I'm tempted to choose anger:

When I need a pause, I will say:

And I will come back to it by:

This week I will glorify God at home by showing love after the apology through _____.

Hide it in your heart

> *"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."* **Colossians 3:12–13**

Let's pray

Lord, You put me in a home with people I love, and I confess I don't always love them well. No one there makes me angry; I choose it. Forgive me for using closeness as permission to be harsh, and for assuming the worst before I ask. Clothe me with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. You have forgiven me so much; help me forgive as You forgave. Don't let me make anyone else responsible for my peace. Protect every home where someone is afraid. Let my love show in what I do after I say I'm sorry. In Jesus' name, amen.

Love becomes visible in what happens after "I'm sorry."

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LESSON 19

Other Christians and Church Disagreements

Read Galatians 6:1–5; Romans 14; Matthew 18:15–35; 2 Timothy 2:24–26

Church should be the safest place to disagree. Sometimes it's the hardest. We care deeply, we've given years, and it's easy to feel that God's honor and my preference are the same thing.

Picture a volunteer who changes the order of the Wednesday night supper. Now the prayer comes after the announcements. Someone says he is disrespecting God. But the real complaint is that something familiar changed. Anger at church is still a choice, and often I choose it because my way got moved.

Am I defending Scripture, or my place in the group?

Go back to Jesus' question: "Who do you say that I am?" If Jesus is Lord, the church is His, not mine. He bought it. He leads it. I am a follower here too. Before I attach God's name to my opinion, I need to ask which biblical truth is actually at stake.

Romans 14 teaches believers to handle disputable matters without contempt and without passing judgment. Not every disagreement belongs there. Some touch the gospel or a clear command. But many church fights are about music, schedules, paint colors and who was asked first.

> *"So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding."* **Romans 14:19**

When a brother or sister really is caught in sin, Paul tells me how to go: gently, keeping watch on myself.

> *“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”* **Galatians 6:1**

Seeing the problem does not make me immune to pride. If I go to restore someone while secretly enjoying being right, I’m already in trouble. I am a sinner too, saved by the same mercy. Who am I to pass judgment on someone else’s servant? He belongs to the Lord, and so do I.



Don’t glue God’s name on my preference.

Jesus gives a path in Matthew 18:15–17. Go to the person first, privately. If that fails, bring one or two others. Then, if needed, the church. Notice what’s missing: gossip. The prayer chain, the parking lot and the group text are not on His list.

Going privately does not mean I must confront a dangerous person alone, and it never means hiding abuse or a crime from the proper authorities. Protection comes first.

When a real doctrinal or moral issue is at stake, I speak plainly and show it from Scripture. The Lord's servant does it this way:

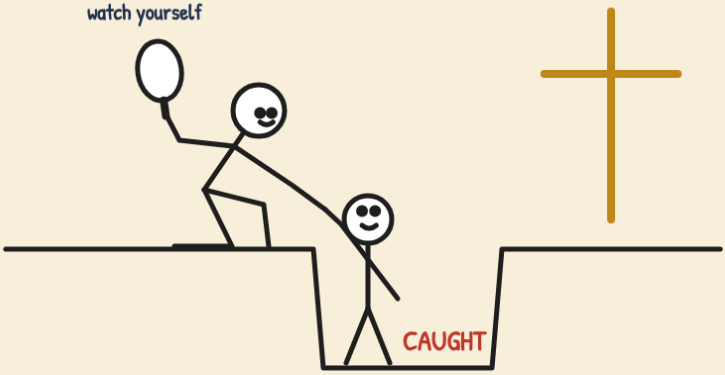
> *"And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,"* **2 Timothy 2:24–25**

Firmness and gentleness can sit in the same pew. And I trust God with the outcome. Paul says God grants repentance, not my winning argument. My job is to obey and to glorify Him in how I speak. The heart is His job.

When someone repents, I rejoice. If I'm disappointed because I wanted a reason to keep condemning, my aim drifted from restoration long ago. Notice that the same chapter that tells me to go privately goes on to tell me to forgive seventy-seven times. In the church, forgiveness without measure gets very practical.

It is almost never about me, not my reputation and not my seat at the table. The goal was always a brother or sister restored, not an argument won.

Your turn



Restore gently, and keep one eye on me.

Clear command or disputable matter? Sort these church issues. (Some may spark good discussion.)

	Clear biblical command	Disputable matter or preference
Worship style and song choices		
Telling the truth about another member		
What time the service starts		
Caring for widows and the poor		
Whether to buy new hymnals		
Sexual faithfulness		
Who is asked to serve on a committee		

When I choose anger toward someone at church, I'm most tempted to... (check all that apply)

- ☐ talk to others before I talk to them
- ☐ go silent and pull away
- ☐ quote Scripture to win
- ☐ threaten to leave
- ☐ go to them directly and gently
- ☐ other:

Before I go

What I need to say, in one sentence:

The truth from Scripture actually at stake (if any):

How I could be tempted too:

What “restored” would look like:

Say it better. Rewrite this so it seeks restoration and glorifies God, not a win.

“Some of us actually care about doing things God’s way around here.”

Better:

When someone I’ve disagreed with at church changes or repents, how glad am I? (circle one)

Not very | Somewhat | Mostly | Truly glad

The church matter I need to hand back to the Lord of the church is _____.

Hide it in your heart

> *“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”* **Galatians 6:1**

Let's pray

Lord Jesus, the church is Yours, not mine, and You love it more than I do. Forgive me for the times I put Your name on my preferences and called it faithfulness. Forgive me for talking about people instead of to them. When a brother or sister needs correction, make me gentle, and keep me watching my own heart. Help me speak Your truth plainly and kindly, and trust You with the outcome. Teach me to forgive without measure. And when someone repents, let me rejoice with all my heart. In Jesus' name, amen.

The goal is a brother restored, not an argument won.

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LESSON 20

Neighbors, Strangers and Public Encounters

Read Titus 3:1–7; 1 Peter 3:15–16; Matthew 5:43–48

Some of my angriest moments happen with people I'll never see again. The driver who cuts me off. The clerk who doesn't seem to care. The stranger online who mocks everything I believe. There's no relationship to protect, so anger feels free. It isn't. Someone is always watching how a Christian handles being provoked, and the Lord sees it all.

Remember the pharmacy line from Question 1. If God is sovereign, the stranger in my lane is not an accident and not an obstacle. He is someone God loves, in a moment God is using. So the question is not, "Who does he think he is?" It is, "God, what do You want me to learn from this?"

Paul tells Titus to remind believers to be gentle and courteous toward everyone. Then he tells us why.

> *"For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,"* **Titus 3:3–5**

Remembering my own rescue cools my contempt.

That is Question 2 again. I am a sinner. I was foolish and disobedient too, until God's kindness came looking for me. When I feel superior to people who don't share my faith, I've forgotten where I came from. And when I make a public encounter about my rights, my time or my pride, I've traded a chance to show Christ for a chance to be right.

Picture a stranger online who mocks Christians. I can answer an honest question. I can correct a false claim. Or I can decline an argument that will go nowhere. What I don't have to do is return every insult. Peter joins my answer for the hope I have with gentleness and respect.

> *"but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."* **1 Peter 3:15–16**

No one should have to put up with my anger as the price of hearing about my Savior. Before I ask whether my words are forceful, I ask whether they are true, useful and God-honoring.



I don't have to return every insult.

Picture the car that swerves into my lane on the way to church. I don't know whether he's rushing to a hospital or just rude. Either way, my response belongs to me. Being right about the wrong does not make my response right.

Picture a neighbor with a flat tire. Help with the tire. If a conversation about faith opens up, speak honestly and listen well. Kindness doesn't mean agreeing with everything in someone's life, and help should never become leverage to force a conversation.

I shouldn't expect someone without Christian commitments to start from my assumptions. I can explain rather than just condemn. Real wrongdoing may still call for a boundary, protection or a truthful report to the proper authority. Gentle is not the same as passive.

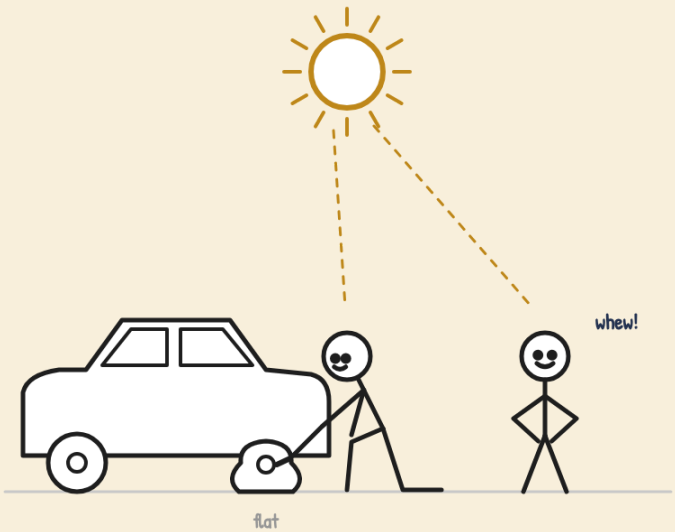
Then Jesus goes further than any of us would like.

> *“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”* **Matthew 5:44–45**

Loving an enemy means seeking his good and praying for him. It does not mean calling evil good. That is how my Father treats the world: sun and rain on the just and the unjust. It is Romans 12 lived out on the street: bless and do not curse; overcome evil with good.

Whatever comes at me in public, a horn, a comment, a cold shoulder, I have the same choice I always have. I can look in the mirror, or I can look to the cross.

Your turn



Kindness opens doors that arguments close.

Where do I most often choose anger with strangers? (check all that apply)

- ☐ driving and parking
- ☐ checkout lines and customer service
- ☐ online comments
- ☐ news and politics
- ☐ noisy or careless neighbors
- ☐ other:

When a stranger provokes me, how often do I remember that God put this moment in my day? (circle one)

Rarely Sometimes Often Almost always

Fact, assumption or demand? Sort these thoughts from a hard day in public.

	Fact	Assumption	Demand
The car pulled in front of me.			
He did that on purpose.			
People should always let me merge.			
The clerk didn't say hello.			
She thinks she's better than me.			
I must be treated with respect everywhere I go.			

Say it better. Someone mocked your faith online. Rewrite this reply with gentleness and respect.

“Typical. People like you have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Better:

My enemy prayer list

One person (or kind of person) I find hard to love:

One good thing I will ask God to do for them:

One small kindness I could offer if the door opens:

Remembering that God saved me by His mercy, not my goodness, helps me see _____ differently.

Hide it in your heart

> *“but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,”* **1 Peter 3:15**

Let’s pray

Father, You rule over every line, every lane and every screen, and nothing in my day is an accident. I was once lost, and You came looking for me in kindness. Forgive me for the contempt I have felt toward people who don’t know You yet, and for the times I made a stranger pay for my bad day. Give me gentleness and respect when my faith is mocked. Teach me to love my enemies and pray for them by name. Let the people I meet in traffic, in line and online see Your kindness in me. In Jesus’ name, amen.

No one should have to endure my anger to hear about my Savior.

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Next: Lesson 21 →

LESSON 21

A Week of Honest Practice

Read Psalm 139:23–24

We've come a long way together. Look back at the road.

We started with four big questions, because everything about anger rests on them. Who is God? He is sovereign and good, and I can trust Him in the circumstances I don't like. Especially those. Who am I? A sinner, either born again or separated from God by my sin. Am I born again? Everything turns on my answer to Jesus: "Who do you say that I am?" What does Jesus require of me? I am a follower. I trust and obey, I forgive without measure, and more than anything I glorify God in my thoughts, words and actions.

Then we faced anger itself. Anger is a choice (Lesson 1). It grows from my demand to have my way (2) and starts in the heart before a word is spoken (3). God is slow to anger, and I should be too (4). Even right anger is a choice to be grieved by what grieves God (5), and when I'm angry at God, I bring it to Him (6).

We named the excuses I make (7), the quiet anger I store up (8), the words that wound (9) and what my anger teaches others (10). We learned from people in Scripture (11), what to do when anger rises (12), repentance, forgiveness and trust (13), building walls before the storm (14) and how God can bring good (15). Then we took it home: parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, the church, and the strangers we meet (16–20).

Now comes the part that matters most. Practice.

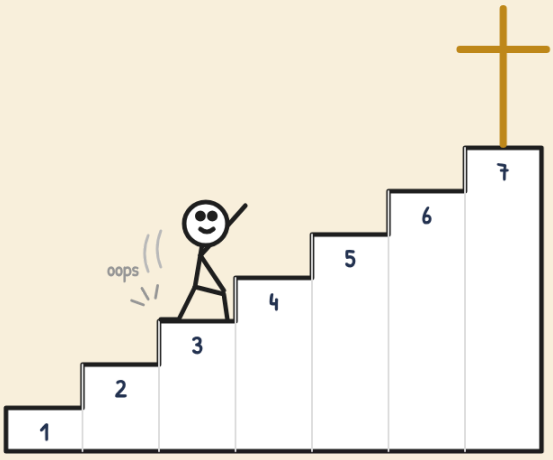
Knowing about anger and changing are two different things. I can nod at every page and still snap at the next person who cuts in line. So this last lesson is a week: seven days that walk back through the book, with one reading, one action and one honest line each day.

> *“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”* **Psalm 139:23–24**

Notice who that prayer is about. It doesn’t ask God to search my family or my neighbor. It asks Him to search me.

God, start with me.

Go in order. Be honest: write what is true, not what sounds spiritual. Pick a partner now, a trusted believer who will talk with you on Day 7. And expect pushback. Someone will cut you off on Day 2. That isn’t failure. That’s the personal trainer adding weight.



One honest step at a time.

You are not doing this alone. Self-control is fruit of the Spirit, not something I squeeze out by willpower. The goal is not a perfect week. It is a surrendered heart. When you blow it, and you will, don’t quit. Confess it quickly. Repair it quickly. Take the next day.

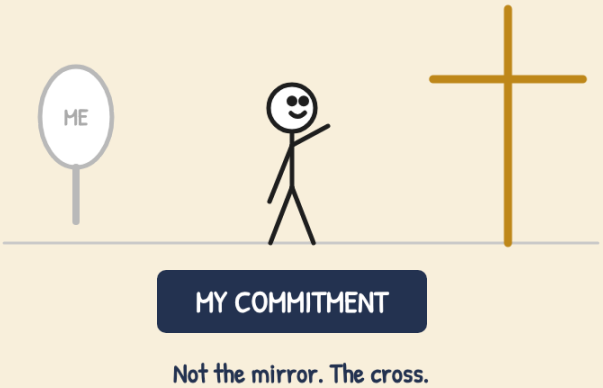
> *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* **1 John 1:9**

Here is what this whole study has been about. It is ultimately all about humility, trust in God, obedience, and a Christ-centered life as the exact opposite of a me-centered life.

Trust and obey. Forgive without measure. Glorify God.

Whatever comes at you this week, it’s almost never about you. And even if it is, don’t let it become about you in your mind. That space belongs to Christ. When the seven days are done, turn to the commitment page. Sign it. Tell your partner. Then start again, one surrendered day at a time.

Your turn



As I start this week, how ready am I to let God search my heart? (circle one)

Not yet | A little | Mostly | Ready

Looking back over the book: me-centered or Christ-centered? Sort what I might say.

	Me-centered	Christ-centered
“This should not be happening to me.”		
“God, what do You want me to learn from this?”		
“You made me so mad.”		
“I chose my response.”		
“I’ll forgive when they’ve earned it.”		
“Forgiven much. Forgive much.”		
“At least I’m not as bad as they are.”		
“I am a sinner too.”		

The truths from this study I most need to practice: (check all that apply)

- [ ] trusting God in what I don't like
- [ ] owning anger as my choice
- [ ] asking, "God, what do You want me to learn from this?"
- [ ] naming what I'm demanding
- [ ] letting go of old grievances
- [ ] going first to make peace
- [ ] forgiving without measure
- [ ] glorifying God in my words
- [ ] other:

Think it through: Which truth in this book has God used most in me, and where have I seen even small change?

My practice partner for Day 7 is _____.

Day 1 — Who is God?

Read: Romans 12:9–21

Do: When something goes the way I don't like, say, "God is sovereign. God is good. I can trust Him."

Write: The circumstance I handed back to God today: ____.

Day 2 — Who am I? Who is Jesus?

Read: Ephesians 2:1–10; Matthew 16:13–17

Do: Each time I catch myself judging someone, say, “I am a sinner too, and God has been merciful to me.”

Write: Who I say Jesus is, today: ____.

Day 3 — Anger is a choice

Read: James 1:19–20; James 4:1–10

Do: When anger rises, stop and ask, “God, what do You want me to learn from this?” Then name the demand underneath.

Write: Today I was really demanding ____.

Day 4 — My thoughts

Read: Matthew 5:21–26; Ephesians 4:25–32

Do: Take down one billboard. Take one truthful step toward an old grievance: a prayer, a note, a conversation. (Never an unsafe one.)

Write: The step I took: ____.

Day 5 — My words

Read: James 3:1–12; Proverbs 15:1

Do: Listen all the way to the end of one conversation. Give one soft answer where I wanted to give a sharp one.

Write: A soft answer I gave: ____.

Day 6 — My actions: forgive and go first

Read: Matthew 18:21–35; Romans 12:17–21

Do: Confess one specific wrong, with no excuses attached. Pray by name for someone who wronged me. Refuse one chance to get even.

Write: I prayed for ___ and asked God to ___.

Day 7 — Look back, look up

Read: Galatians 5:16–25

Do: Talk over the week with my partner. Thank God for one change I saw.

Write: The fruit of the Spirit I most want to grow, and the me-centered opposite I am leaving behind: ___.

My commitment

God is sovereign and good. The circumstance I choose to trust Him with:

Jesus, I say You are:

The demand I hand over to God:

When anger rises, I will first ask, “God, what do You want me to learn from this?” Then I will:

The person I choose to forgive without measure (and, only if it is safe, go to first):

How I will glorify God this month — in my thoughts:

— in my words:

— in my actions:

The trusted believer who will ask me how it’s going:

Signed: ___ Date: ___

Hide it in your heart

> *“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”* **Psalm 139:23–24**

Let’s pray

Search me, O God, and know my heart. You are sovereign and good, and I can trust You, especially in the things I don’t like. I am a sinner, and You made me alive in Christ. Jesus, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, and I will follow You. Forgive me for every time I chose my way and called it someone else’s fault. Teach me to trust and obey, to forgive without measure, and to glorify You in my thoughts, my words and my actions. When anything comes at me, turn my eyes from the mirror to the cross. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Whatever comes at me, I can look in the mirror, or look to the cross.

↑ Contents

FOR GROUPS

How to Use This Book in a Class

Each question and lesson works as one session of about 45–60 minutes. A simple pattern:

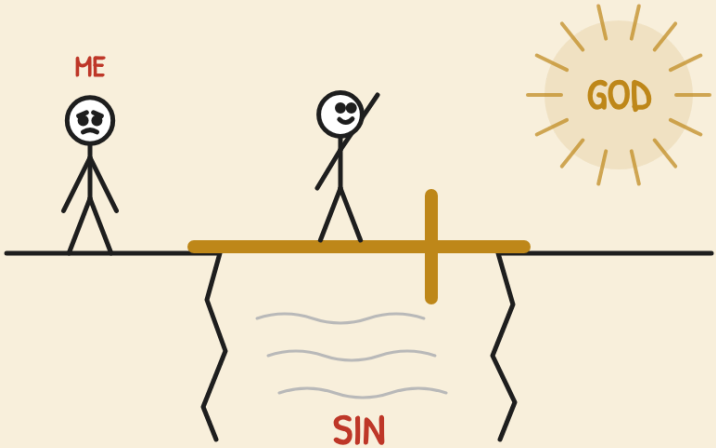
Open with a light question. **Read** the passage aloud. **Teach** the main point and show the drawing. **Talk** through two or three questions. **Practice** one “Your turn” exercise together. **Close** with the memory verse and the prayer.

A full leader guide with a goal, questions and a weekly challenge for every session is available from Aiming For Jesus.

Keep the focus where this book keeps it: on my own heart, not on the faults of people who are not in the room.

Do You Know Jesus?

If you are not sure that you have been born again, go back to Question 3, or visit **aimingforjesus.com/how-to-know-jesus**. We would love to pray with you.



The cross is the only bridge.

Hollis McGehee · Aiming For Jesus · aimingforjesus.com