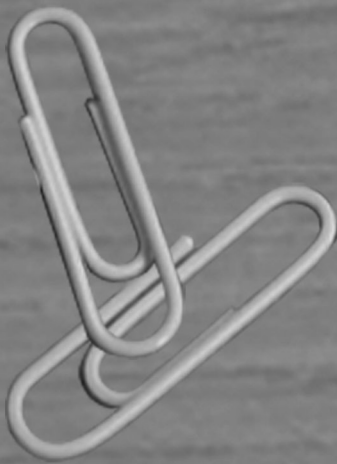


I NEED to CHANGE



Study Guides

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I Need to Change: Less Angry, More Gentle

Genesis 4:1-12

Anger is inside each of us because of our sinful nature. Cain allowed anger to get the best of him, and he murdered his own brother. God calls us to recognize our anger, repent of it, and claim the forgiveness we have in Christ. We can overcome our anger with God's help and instead live lives of gentleness.

God's Word

1. Read Genesis 4:6,7. "Sin is crouching at your door" is an incredibly apt phrase. In these verses God warns Cain of the dangers of letting anger grow in his heart. How does the visual of sin waiting to pounce help you with controlling your anger?

2. Read Genesis 4:9. God holds Cain accountable for his actions. We too are responsible for the anger we harbor and act upon. Do you have actions born from anger that you need to repent of?

Your life

1. How do you usually respond when you're angry? Do you keep it inside or talk about it?

2. Think back over the past week. How often has anger gotten the best of you? How did you handle a particularly maddening situation?

3. Now think about that situation again. Could you have handled it in a better way? How?

Reflection

1. What are some consequences of not controlling your anger?

2. When God came to Cain the first time he was angry, what opportunity was he giving Cain? Is that same opportunity offered to you?

3. God forgives us for our anger. As his children, though, what is our response to that forgiveness?

What else does God say?

Proverbs 29:11: "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control."

James 1:19: "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."

Journal applications

Are you harboring anger toward someone right now? Write about what's bothering you. What is the source of your anger? How can you let go of it? Brainstorm about it. Pray about it. Follow through.

Write about a recent event in which you were able to control your anger. Thank God for giving you patience and gentleness.

Prayer

Dear Lord, so often I find myself giving in to feelings of resentment and anger toward someone. Help me to realize that that person needs your forgiveness as much as I do. Help me also to overcome my anger and foster an attitude of gentleness and forgiveness toward others. Amen.

God's encouragement for you

Philippians 4:5: "Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near."

I Need to Change: Less Bitter, More Content

Romans 8:28-37

When we look at our lives and judge our successes and failures, we often have our own dreams and expectations in mind, which can cause bitterness when we fall short. But God tells us that he works good in all things—even the bad times. We can be optimistic because we know God is engaged in our lives and our salvation is already complete. We fight against the bitterness and accept ourselves because God has accepted us.

God's Word

1. Read Romans 8:28. That verse packs quite a punch! What does it tell you about the times when you think God isn't paying attention or, taking it even further, when you blame God for the bad situation you are in?

2. What word in verse 28 tells us that we don't just *hope* that God will watch out for us or think that he *might* be watching out for us?

3. Read Romans 8:30. Notice the past tense verbs in this verse. God lives in our future. Our salvation is complete, so much so that Paul can say that we are glorified already!

4. Read Romans 8:35-37. Does God's working in our lives depend upon how much we love him? Who goes first in that love, us or God? And what does this verse say about his love, unlike the fickle love of humans?

Your life

1. Why is it so much easier to have a negative attitude than a positive one?

2. The devil loves to push those bitter thoughts to the point where you start to blame others, yourself, or even God. But why can you always be optimistic no matter the situation because of the gospel message?

3. Maybe you don't think you display a bitter attitude. Consider asking your family members to tell you what they think. And depending upon what they say, consider making some changes.

4. What is your definition of contentment? What things or life situations do you think you need to be content? Make a list, and then compare it to what God says contentment is.

I Need to Change: Less Critical, More Encouraging

I Thessalonians 5:1-11

God tells us that because we are children of light—created, forgiven, given purpose and value in Christ—we have the ability to build others up. We put away our criticalness of others and of ourselves when we realize that we are loved and forgiven. We then share that same love by encouraging others.

God's Word

1. Read I Thessalonians 5:4. What does it mean to be children of light as opposed to children of darkness? What do children of light have that others don't have?

2. In verse 8 Paul talks about wearing a breastplate and a helmet. How are these good visuals for us as we fight against the constant temptations that the devil puts in our minds and hearts?

3. Since we know our salvation is complete, that God loves us—even as unlovable and imperfect as we are—how are we changed? How does that affect how we treat others?

Your life

1. Before you can encourage others, you need to believe what God has done for you personally. Do you struggle with self-hatred? How does God's assurance of his love and your value and worth to him help you?

2. Why is it that we often see the flaws in other people so clearly but are blind to our own issues? Have you ever considered asking a close friend or family member to offer constructive criticism of you? Will you bristle at their advice or try to put it into practice?

3. What is the difference between helping someone improve and having a critical spirit? Which do you do for others?

4. How often do you find yourself in conversations in which someone is being critical of someone else? Brainstorm some tactful ways to turn those conversations from critical to encouraging.

Food for thought

We are all worthy only of God's judgment. Yet God sent his Son for all of us. If we know this about ourselves and what God did for us, doesn't it follow that we are less inclined to be critical of others?

I Need to Change: Less Selfish, More Giving

Romans 11:33-36; 12:1-5

God created each and every one of us for a purpose. He sent his Son to die for us and through the Holy Spirit and Baptism created and sustains our faith. Knowing this about ourselves, our thankfulness and worship is shown as we offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God. We offer our lives to serve him and his will as we serve others around us who need us.

God's Word

1. Read Romans 11:36. Try to wrap your mind around that! Everything, all things are created and organized and kept in motion by God. We all have a place in God's agenda. What a blessing it is to truly know that!

2. Read Romans 12:1. This passage sums up the motivation behind our worship. What is it? Why do we live the way we do?

3. How can you "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" as it says in Romans 12:2?

4. What does Romans 12:3 tell you about your status before God's eyes compared to others? How are we to act toward others?

Your life

1. The main takeaway from this lesson is this: God has shown his abundant mercy to us by sending Jesus. *Therefore*—but not because we have to or because we are earning points—our natural reaction is to worship him with our lives.

2. Does serving others seem daunting to you? Do you perceive that you have nothing to offer others? God tells us in Romans 12:6 that he has given each of us unique gifts. If you don't know what yours are, ask a close friend or family member to help. They will be able to tell you exactly what you're good at.

3. Have you ever thought about praying as a way to serve others? God tells us we can take anything to him at any time. Who needs your prayers today?

4. Has God already given you ways to serve? Take some time to thank him for showing his love through you.
