A close-up, low-angle shot of a marble bust of a man with a thick, curly beard and hair. The bust is set against a blurred background of another similar bust and a warm, reddish-brown wall. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the marble.

*CONFLICT*  
A STUDY IN RESOLUTION





# CONFLICT

A STUDY IN RESOLUTION



# CONFLICT

## A STUDY IN RESOLUTION

*Romans 12:14-21*

### STUDY THEME

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As Christians, the Holy Spirit empowers us to be in life-giving conflict with others. Conflict does not always guarantee resolution, reconciliation, or restoration. However, it does provide opportunity for the Holy Spirit to exhort and encourage each person involved. Conflicts are occasions for us to trust the Holy Spirit.

### CONTENTS

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Series Preface	5
Study One: <i>Confrontation</i>	8
Study Two: <i>Indignation</i>	14
Study Three: <i>Expectations</i>	20
Study Four: <i>Reconciliation</i>	26
Final Journal Thoughts	32

# SERIES PREFACE

You know those negative attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, or habits that are seemingly impossible to overcome? Or, how about those relationships and circumstances where you feel completely trapped, powerless, or out-of-control?

For me, this was a deep-rooted bitterness toward my dad, an inability to share my feelings, and a 20-year addiction to pornography. My wife, Lacey, struggled with fear that fed an explosive anger producing a need to control people and circumstances.

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**If our heart and mind are poisoned with feelings of  
being unloved or unsafe, we hurt.**

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We are all created in the image of God. This identity is intrinsic. However, our perception of this identity can be distorted and devalued. When we feel loved and safe in our relationships, our heart and mind feel at peace. If our heart and mind are poisoned with feelings of being unloved or unsafe, we hurt. This pain affects how we see ourselves and others. As a result, we hurt others while continuing to hurt ourselves. This devalued and distorted perception of our identity is what led Lacey and I into our negative attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and habits. It wasn't until we were set free from our perceived identities that we were able to truly live a joy-filled life.

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**We are all created in the image of God. This  
identity is intrinsic.**

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We truly believe that every person has the potential to live a life of freedom and overflowing joy like Jesus. That is why our vision is to see Christians live free, joy-filled lives. The power of one person's story of freedom and victory is life-changing. It is the best evangelistic tool a Christian has. Our mission is to encourage and equip Christians to live free of those negative attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and habits and empower them to live joy-filled in every relationship and circumstance. Our hope is that Christians — through their story of Jesus' redemption in

their lives — would be the best testimony the world has of God’s transforming love, grace, mercy, and truth. This is the prayer behind the *Christian Living Study Series*.

On behalf of my wife, Lacey, and me, it is an honor to be able to share these studies with you. They are the result of our combined heartache, healing, education, and transformation. To get the most out of this series, we recommend that you participate in each study in the following two ways:


**First, choose a partner.** Due to the nature of the questions, we recommend, if married, your partner be your spouse. If you’re not married, choose a partner of the same gender. You and your partner will independently begin each study with prayer. Then, work through the study — reading the main Scriptures (*indicated by* ) and text. Finally, together prayerfully discuss the *Response Questions* (*indicated by* ) and implement the *Next Steps*.

**Second, journal.** Personal journaling through the lessons will help solidify what the Holy Spirit is doing in your heart and mind. Write out a summary of your answers and discussions to the *Response Questions*; your experience with the *Next Steps*; and your own thoughts, objections, and struggles with the studies. This journal will be a record of God’s grace and transformation in your life, mind, and heart.

While each study booklet may stand-alone, the *Christian Living Study Series* is a process — a linear progression of theology and application. With this in mind, we recommend going through the booklets in order. A full list of studies is available in the back of each booklet.

Our prayer is that you would be vulnerable — challenging yourself to openly discuss and answer the questions with your partner. Also, that you would allow the Holy Spirit to convict, comfort, and encourage you — empowering you to accomplish Jesus’ mission for God’s glory, other’s good, and for your joy.



*Your friend,*  
  
NATHANAEL P. STEEL



# CONFRONTATION

*But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called  
“today,” than none of you may be hardened by the  
deceitfulness of sin.*

~Hebrews 3:13~

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## INTRODUCTION

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Matthew 18:15-21

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Holy Spirit-led confrontation desires good for the one being confronted. It is done out of a concern for their best interest rather than ours. The heart of our Heavenly Father in confrontation is always to bring life to both people involved. Often, our negative views of confrontation (something to either avoid or always seek after) come from our experiences growing up. We either mimic or reject what our parents or caregivers demonstrated. The process of confrontation — in either being confronted or confronting someone else — should always begin by examining our own heart and forgiving any offenses that may be there. Finally, confrontation will always be imperfect no matter who is involved. Successful, Spirit-led confrontation begins and ends with humility. It is best done and received when both people involved assume the best about each other. Having gracious assumptions will guard against further offense.

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What attitude or feelings does the thought of confronting someone or being confronted by someone bring to mind? Why do you believe you have these feelings?

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## NEGATIVE VIEWS OF CONFRONTATION

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There are two negative views of confrontation: avoid it or seek it out. Both of these views individually are incomplete. Both views are self-focused and self-gratifying. They do not bring life to either person involved. Neither view is founded upon a desire for life-giving relationship.

### Avoid Confrontation

Our desire to avoid confrontation is often based in fear of what others may think or do or a minimization for the need for justice or truth to be known. Avoiding confrontation frequently leads to bitterness and being passive aggressive — ignoring or withdrawing from a situation (to numb out or escape) or relationship (to punish the person or avoid them). On the surface, this view may appear to be peaceful and gracious. However, it can be incredibly divisive and may lead to grudge-holding, sarcasm, depression, anxiety, manipulation, isolation, jealousy, envy, gossip, or slander.<sup>1</sup>



When is it most difficult or uncomfortable for you to confront? Who is it the most difficult for you to confront, those you love or strangers? Why?

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### Seek Confrontation

Our desire to seek confrontation is often based in a need to be right or justified as well as being overly focused on truth rather than grace and love. Seeking confrontation frequently leads to anger and being aggressive — physically or verbally dominating a situation (to control or manipulate) or relationship (to fault-find or vindicate oneself). While this may bring attention to a real issue, it can also be incredibly divisive and may lead to blaming others, discouragement, criticizing, nagging, lecturing, perfectionism, threatening, hostility, rage, or retaliation.<sup>2</sup>



When is it easiest or most comfortable for you to confront? Who is it the easiest for you to confront, those you love or strangers? Why? What do you generally lean toward, avoiding or seeking confrontation? What helps you feel cared for when being confronted with your failures, mistakes, and sin?

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 29:25; Matthew 10:28; 2 Corinthians 12:20; 1 Timothy 5:13

<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 14:29; 17:27; 29:22; 1 Timothy 5:13; James 1:19-20

## THE PROCESS OF CONFRONTATION

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For a relationship to be fully reconciled, confrontation may need to take place and may involve both repentance and forgiveness. The following is the process of Spirit-filled confrontation.

### 1. Examine Your Heart

The first step in confronting someone is allowing the Holy Spirit to examine our own heart. This enables Him to reveal any unrighteous or self-righteous motives. If convicted of selfish motives we should repent to God and reexamine our desire to confront or not confront. Additionally, He may reveal our own faults in the conflict. If this is the case and we are convicted, we may need to ask for forgiveness from the person before we consider confronting them.<sup>3</sup>

### 2. Forgive the Offender

To ensure the confrontation is for the benefit of the person we're confronting (and not for ourselves), we must forgive the person of any offense they may have caused us or anyone we love. This means that we are choosing to require nothing from them. Releasing the person through forgiveness also empowers us to live free of any negative responses they may have if we believe that confrontation is still necessary.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Assume and Desire the Best

A desire for the other person's good — physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual — is the foundation for confrontation. Desiring good for others empowers us to confront when we do not want to. It proves our love for that individual above our own insecurities. Spirit-led confrontation assumes that God desires relationship with every person. Therefore, God desires transformation of the person's heart and mind. It is life-giving and hope-filled.<sup>5</sup>

### 4. Confront Privately

Once we've followed the previous steps and we still believe confrontation is necessary, we should precede with a heart of humility and grace. Therefore, confronting publicly is rarely beneficial or necessary. Unless personal safety is an issue, confronting in front of others may bring shame,

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 7:1-5

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 4:31-32

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 2:3-4

embarrassment, and an atmosphere of defensiveness. Beginning with private confrontation shows that we have their best interest in mind. This may include beginning with an apology and asking for forgiveness. Next, we clearly state our desires and concerns for them (not a list of offenses) — sharing our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of what happened. At this point, asking clarifying questions will further affirm our desire for understanding and provide opportunity for them to clarify their perspective. We need to hold loosely to our perceptions and hold firmly to our commitment for reconciliation. In cases where we witness or hear about something happening between two people, it is important that we hear both sides before confronting.<sup>6</sup>

**5. Allow the Holy Spirit to Convict**

Throughout the process of confrontation, we must keep in mind our motives, emotions, and responses. We should strive to benefit the person, putting their needs above our own. The attitude of our heart and mind must be one of continual humility and grace — submitted to the will of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the process of confronting, we may need to mentally revisit forgiveness, especially in light of any negative responses. This will ensure that we are free from any undesired reactions they may have. It will also keep in check our own responses toward them. If we begin to attack or become defensive in our confrontation, we reveal that our motivation for confrontation is self-gratifying rather than for the other person's good.<sup>7</sup>

**6. Agreement is Never the Goal**

Amidst confronting, the other person may never fully agree with your concerns or satisfactorily repent of what they did. To prevent us from either becoming aggressive and belligerent or complaisant and passive in the midst of our confrontation, we should continually be in prayer in our minds — entrusting the relationship, their responses, along with our words and actions to the Holy Spirit. Trusting God for the other person and remembering that we can't control their response will keep us free from bitterness or anger. Our prayer amidst confrontation should be for truth, grace, forgiveness, and love to prevail in them and us.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Proverbs 18:2, 13, 15, 17

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 4:29-32

<sup>8</sup> Proverbs 18:8; 2:1-11

## 7. Reconciliation May Not Be Possible

We need to keep in mind that reconciliation — and full restoration — of the relationship takes both forgiveness and repentance. This mindset will guard our hearts from invalid expectations of the relationship. Both people need to trust Jesus and live empowered by the Holy Spirit for full restoration to take place. Often this may take time for trust to be rebuilt and character to be re-established. While a relationship may be reconciled, full restoration of access (or proximity) and trust may not always be possible. Healthy boundaries and caution for a season (or the unforeseeable future) may be required for safety and security.<sup>9</sup>

## 8. Witness & Church Leadership

If a private confrontation does not lead to repentance, go back to step one. If the Holy Spirit does not have you leave the person and issue alone, seek the Holy Spirit's leading in seeking a witness. A witness should be someone who is either neutral or has walked through the previous steps as well. Finally, if private confrontation then taking a witness does not work, church leadership may need to get involved. This may include some form of church discipline. At this point, we need to release the issue, person, and outcome to God along with any expectations we may still have.<sup>10</sup>



When was the last time you confronted someone? What was the outcome of the confrontation? When is it the most difficult for you to confront someone? Why? Is there anyone currently that you may need to confront? Who? For what reason? Is there someone you need to repent to for the way you confronted him or her in the past? Who? For what reason would you need to repent?

## RECEIVING CONFRONTATION

The Holy Spirit will use imperfect people who may have wrong motives or means to convict us.<sup>11</sup> Agreeing with the Father for our identity enables us to receive this imperfect conviction. If we receive imperfect criticism, conviction, and confrontation,

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<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 6:1-5

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

God will honor our humility.<sup>12</sup> Regardless of how we are confronted, there may be consequences to our sin that we need to accept. Being forgiven does not always mean that we are free from negative results to our sin.<sup>13</sup> These negative consequences may include broken relationships, health issues, or civil or legal penalties. Along with these, we may have also broken our trust with someone. Scripture is clear that we should not trust people, but rather we are to trust God.<sup>14</sup> In light of this, trust may be lost quickly and earned slowly. Our sin may require us to earn back trust with others through a season of testing.

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When was the last time someone confronted you? When is it most difficult for you to be confronted or receive correction? What makes you feel most cared for when you are confronted?

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## CONCLUSION


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Confrontation, when avoided or rejected, denies the Holy Spirit's work of conviction, repentance, and reconciliation. Confrontation is to be done for the benefit of the person being confronted. It is never to be done out of selfish motivation or vengeance. Spirit-led confrontation reveals our love and desire for others to live a free, joy-filled life.

## STUDY RESPONSE

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### DISCUSSION

Pray through and discuss the above  questions with your partner. Journal your response and answers to this study. Include any questions or differing opinions and thoughts that were shared in your discussions.

### NEXT STEP

Who do you need to confront this week that you have not done so yet? Who have you confronted out of selfish motivation and need to repent to?

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<sup>12</sup> James 4:1-10; Philippians 2:1-11

<sup>13</sup> Numbers 5:5-8

<sup>14</sup> Jeremiah 17:5-8

# INDIGNATION

*Be angry and do not sin;  
do not let the sun go down on your anger...*

~Ephesians 4:26~

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## INTRODUCTION

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Ephesians 4:26-27

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Trusting the Heavenly Father's plan for your life will enable you to live free of unrighteous or self-righteous anger. Righteous anger is always motivated by love and a desire to reconcile a relationship — either between two people or God and others. Therefore, righteous anger will always be good and beneficial for others rather than ourselves. Unrighteous or self-righteous anger is self-serving, self-gratifying, and self-protecting. There are two forms of anger, smoldering anger and explosive anger. These forms of anger are usually simply referred to as bitterness or anger. Bitterness and anger are willful internal (bitterness) or external (anger) responses to a specific offense, hurt, or loss. While we may genuinely “feel” bitter or angry, these are our protective responses to something or someone that has triggered a negative emotion in us. These negative and harmful responses only perpetuate our pain, discomfort, or insecurity.

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What usually is the motivating factor in your anger?  
What is the usual outcome of your anger for other people? What is the usual outcome of your anger for yourself?

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## UNRIGHTEOUS & SELF-RIGHTEOUS ANGER

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Our emotional responses to conflict are generally hard-wired into us in our early development and growing up years. However, our negative reactions to these emotions develop over time. Because we've habitually inclined ourselves toward selfish reactions, unrighteous and self-righteous anger (the "anger of man") becomes an automatic negative response.<sup>1</sup> Anger becomes a self-gratifying way to fulfill a genuine need or fleshly desire. It does not produce life-giving relationships. There are two types of unrighteous anger.

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Genesis 4:3-8

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### Smoldering Anger

This type of anger burns slowly in our heart; it's internal. It is rooted in a slow and steady vindictive mind-set. This internal anger often goes unnoticed and can be considered bitterness.<sup>2</sup> However, it negatively affects our perception of circumstances and relationships. From this, responses to circumstances and people are passive, guarded, and defensive.

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Exodus 2:11-12

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### Explosive Anger

This type of anger damages the hearts of others; it's external. It is rooted in an impatient and unstable mind-set.<sup>3</sup> This external anger is obvious and immediately self-gratifying. However, it negatively affects our relationships and exacerbates our negative circumstances. From this, responses to circumstances and people are aggressive, personal, and offensive.

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See the Identity Booklet, Emotional Influences (pg. 9). Amidst the circumstance, what possible emotions did Cain's anger reveal? Amidst the circumstance, what possible emotions did Moses' anger reveal? What type of anger do you generally demonstrate, Smoldering or Explosive? Give one example. What emotions might be behind this anger?

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<sup>1</sup> James 1:19-20

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 12:15

<sup>3</sup> James 4:7-8

## AN ISSUE OF SUBMISSION

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Anger (either internal or external) is a reaction that we can and should have control over through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> However, we use anger to either protect ourselves from emotional, physical, or mental pain. We choose to submit ourselves to the negative emotion (thereby producing anger) rather than submitting our emotions to God.<sup>5</sup> God is good and in control of all circumstances. Romans 8:26-29 tells us that His desire is to make all things work out for His glory and our good. Regardless of the circumstance or relationship, we must submit our desired outcomes to Him along with what we believe good may mean in a particular circumstance.



When you feel unsafe, uncared for, out of control, or unloved, how do you generally respond?

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## RIGHTEOUS ANGER

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Any motivation or response not rooted in God's character, His design and plan, and led by His spirit will produce unrighteous or self-righteous anger. On several occasions throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus demonstrating righteous anger out of a desire to obey His Heavenly Father.<sup>6</sup> It is by looking at these examples that we can begin to understand the characteristics of righteous anger and the circumstances that necessitate it.

### 1. Jesus' Anger Toward Temple Workers<sup>7</sup>

The temple was a place where any person from all over the world could come, offer sacrifice, and be reconciled to their Heavenly Father. Money changers had inflated the exchange rates to a level that prevented people from purchasing sacrifices. This made it impossible for people to atone for their sin and, therefore, unable to be reconciled with God. The motivation for Jesus' anger was the Father's desire to have relationship with all people. Jesus' outward expression of anger was not for selfish gain. Rather, it was a physical demonstration of God's hatred for those who hinder people from being reconciled to Him.

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 4:6-7

<sup>5</sup> James 1:1-4

<sup>6</sup> John 5:19

<sup>7</sup> See Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-47; John 2:13-22



What could a modern-day equivalent be for what was happening at the temple?

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## 2. Jesus' Anger Toward His Disciples<sup>8</sup>

Parents, along with their children, were coming to Jesus to be taught, for prayer, and in need of healing. While Jesus was teaching, children began coming up to Him. His disciples, believing teaching to be more important, denied children access to Jesus. Jesus becomes verbally angry toward His disciples. This verbal reprimand has the same intensity as His physical rebuke in the temple.<sup>9</sup> Jesus is once again motivated by relationship and reconciliation.

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What could a modern-day equivalent be of what the disciples did to the children?

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We see from Jesus' example of anger that righteous anger does not claim any personal agenda. Even when something lines up with the Word of God and we know that we are right, our anger may still not be righteous if our motivation is self-serving, self-gratifying, and self-protecting. This is why anger can't simply be defined as an emotion. There is always a deeper reason or motivation for our anger. Therefore, our motivation and follow-through may disqualify what would have been righteous anger. The following questions are a means to evaluate if our anger is righteous, unrighteous, or self-righteous.

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What is the goal (desired outcome) of your anger? What standards have you set for others that you find difficult or are unwilling/incapable of living out yourself? How does your anger benefit you? How does your anger benefit others? Has God called you to take up a cause (be angry) on someone else's behalf? How has this calling been confirmed? What is your goal (desired outcome) of taking up this cause? How will you accomplish this goal?

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<sup>8</sup> See also Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17 (Matthew 18:1-14)

<sup>9</sup> The Greek word for "indignant" in Mark 10:14 is "aganakteo". "Aganakteo" is the same word used for the anger of some of Jesus' disciples in Matthew 20:24; 26:8; Mark 10:41; 14:4 along with Jesus' enemies toward Him in Matthew 21:15; Luke 13:14. It is also the same word used in 2 Corinthians 7:11 for the "indignation" we are to have toward sin and its effects.

## OVERCOMING NEGATIVE ANGER

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Our frustrations have the same roots as anger, rage, and murder.<sup>10</sup> It is an attitude that demands “my way” goals and outcomes. Additionally, it includes any “my way” means by which we achieve these goals and outcomes. These frustrations lead to self-serving, self-gratifying, and self-protecting means by which we fulfill our frustration and anger. The following actions will free us of unrighteous and self-righteous anger.

### 1. Forgive & Release<sup>11</sup>

Our ability to forgive offenses and release any goals, outcomes, or expectations to God will empower us to be free of unrighteous or self-righteous anger. In addition to forgiving and releasing offenses and offenders, our ability to release our desired outcomes of negative or uncomfortable circumstances will help us live free of frustration and anger.

### 2. Identify & Resolve<sup>12</sup>

If left unidentified and unresolved — through not forgiving, repenting, and releasing — issues in our heart will lead to frustration and unrighteous or self-righteous anger. Therefore, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to search our heart to reveal unresolved foundational offenses or negative circumstances. We resolve these issues through forgiveness, repentance, and release.

### 3. Trust & Submit<sup>13</sup>

**Trusting** the Holy Spirit is living with the realization that we are dependant upon Him. Often, we depend upon ourselves to fix or get through our circumstances or get over past offenses. However, this self-reliance perpetuates our frustration and unrighteous or self-righteous anger. Our willingness to submit past offenses, offenders, and past or current negative circumstances to the Holy Spirit will enable us to be empowered by Him.



Who have you yet to forgive and release to God?  
What desired outcomes of negative or uncomfortable circumstances have you yet to release to God?

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<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 4:31-32; Colossians 3:8; James 4:1-3

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 6:14-15

<sup>12</sup> Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 12:33-35

<sup>13</sup> Romans 8:28-29; James 1:2-4

## CONCLUSION

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**Righteousness** is defined as good and beneficial actions and words that are inline with God's desire and plan for others and ourselves. In short, righteousness is right-living. **Godliness** is defined as acknowledging, trusting, submitting to, and thanking God — or God-focused motivations. These are thoughts and intentions based on the character and mission of God. In light of this, we can categorize anger into four different types:

**Godly & Righteous** - Both our motivation and actions are based in the character and mission of our Heavenly Father. This is the ultimate demonstration of righteous anger.

**Godly & Unrighteous** - While our motivation or cause is based in the Heavenly Father's character and mission, our actions or follow-through are either intentionally or unintentionally not Spirit-led. For Christians, this form of anger is often the most tempting to choose. Therefore, this form of anger can be the most dangerous in that it can devalue or distort God's character and mission to others.

**Ungodly & Unrighteous** - Both our motivation and actions are self-serving, self-gratifying, and self-protecting. This is the most obvious form of unrighteous or self-righteous anger.

**Ungodly & Righteous** - Our motivation is self-reliant and self-gratifying while our actions are in line with the Gospel and character of our Heavenly Father. This is perhaps the most deceptive form of anger in that while it appears righteous and moral, it does not acknowledge or trust God.

## STUDY RESPONSE

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### DISCUSSION

Pray through and discuss the above 🗣️ questions with your partner. Journal your response and answers to this study. Include any questions or differing opinions and thoughts that were shared in your discussions.

### NEXT STEP

Who do you know that struggles with explosive or smoldering anger but genuinely pursuing freedom? How can you forgive and purposefully demonstrate patience toward him or her? How can you encourage specific improvements that they've made?

# EXPECTATIONS

*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

~Exodus 20:16~

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## INTRODUCTION

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Proverbs 24:28<sup>1</sup>

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Jesus, in Matthew 12:33-37 and 15:18, tells us that our actions proceed from our thoughts and heart. Therefore, it is our attitudes, thoughts, and beliefs along with our actions and words that make us unrighteous or self-righteous. Bearing false witness against our neighbor goes beyond lying about others to assuming the worst about their intentions and motives. Our mind becomes the courtroom and our thoughts become the judge, jury, and star witness in the court of our assumptions. These assumptions develop into judgments about them. Once we've made judgments about someone's intentions and motives, our interactions with them will be motivated by this verdict. If we do not test our assumptions (judgments), we deny the person the right to defend their position (actions and words).

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Has anyone ever lied, gossiped, or spread a rumor about you? How did this make you feel? Have you ever lied, gossiped, or spread rumors about someone else? What was the outcome of this?

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<sup>1</sup> See also Proverbs 19:5, 9; 21:28; 25:18; Deuteronomy 19:16-20

## RULES ABOUT ASSUMPTIONS

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Our thoughts, beliefs, and assumptions toward others should always build them up, be encouraging, and filled with grace.<sup>2</sup> We are able to have this mindset and attitude because we know that the Heavenly Father desires and pursues relationship with all people. Therefore, we have hope that if they submit to the Holy Spirit, He will transform their heart, mind, and life. Our assumptions — whether encouraging or discouraging — will affect how we live in relationship with others. Gracious assumption build up and encourage others. With this in mind, there are three rules that we must be aware of with regard to assumptions:

### 1. Be Aware of Assumptions

Our brains are wired to make assumptions about the world around us. We develop and rightly prove most of these assumptions in our early developmental years. Therefore, our brain is constantly making unconscious assumptions. This system in our brain functions as an energy saver — enabling our brains to focus on tasks that are more important. We must also be aware that we make assumptions about people's intentions and motives.



What other assumptions do you think people have? How might these assumptions affect how people live their lives?

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### 2. Be Gracious with Assumptions

We all make assumptions about people. However, most of us make judgmental assumptions — we assume the worst about people based on our history with them or our own past negative experience. Our assumptions can either bring hope and life to our relationships or condemnation and death. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind whether or not our assumptions are encouraging or discouraging.



In what recent interaction have you had discouraging thoughts or beliefs about the other person? What possible encouraging thoughts or beliefs could you have?

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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 4:29-32

### 3. Be Willing to Test Your Assumptions

Our willingness to confront the person about our assumptions will give them the opportunity to clarify their actions, intentions, or motives. This confrontation will bring clarity to both them and us. Untested assumptions will lead to invalid expectations. Therefore, confrontation is the means by which we test our assumptions.

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From the previous question, is it possible to test your discouraging thoughts or beliefs? If so, how will you go about confronting this person?

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## INVALID EXPECTATIONS

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Invalid expectations of a person or circumstance lead to unhealthy assumptions. Therefore, we need to be sure that we have valid expectations. The following are four possible ways our expectations of people or circumstances may be invalid:

### 1. Unconscious Expectations

Our frustration or disappointment at someone (or a situation) is often the only signal we have of an unconscious expectation. Discovering unmet desires begins with acknowledge our frustration and disappointment. Thinking through our desired outcomes will reveal our unconscious expectations. Releasing and trusting our desired outcomes to God will enable us to be free of our frustration and disappointment. While forgiveness may not be necessary, we will have to release our unconscious expectations to God. A conscious expectation — one that we are aware of — is the first step in developing valid expectations.

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When was the last time you felt frustration or disappointment but didn't understand why? What did you do with your frustration or disappointment?

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### 2. Unrealistic Expectations

Our disappointment in someone coupled with his or her frustration may reveal an unrealistic expectation. This is often the result of untested assumptions and miscommunication. Developing realistic expectations begins with releasing our disappointments. Once we've been able to release our disappointments, we can begin the

process of clarifying our expectations. This clarification comes through the person's feedback and agreeing on what is practical and reasonable. A realistic expectation — one that is practical, reasonable, and agreed-upon — is the second step in developing a valid expectation.

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When was the last time you were disappointed at someone? What was it for? How did you resolve this disappointment with the person?

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### 3. Unspoken Expectations

Mutual frustration and disappointment between us and another person reveal unspoken expectations. This is often a result of believing “they should just know” or “it’s obvious”. To resolve our frustration we need to identify and, if necessary, repent for our unspoken expectations. Discussing, revisiting, and clarifying our expectations allows any unclear or unrealistic desires to be resolved. Defining, clarifying, and communicating our desires to the person validates the expectation. In some cases writing out the agreed upon expectation may be necessary. A spoken expectation — one that is clearly communicated — is the third step in developing a valid expectation.

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When was the last time you said or thought, “they should just know,” or “it’s obvious”? How did this work out for you or them?

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### 4. Unaccepted Expectations

When someone does not agree to a conscious, realistic, and spoken expectation it becomes invalid. Unaccepted expectations often come from the belief that someone “has to” or “needs to” do or say something (or not do or say something). Holding someone to an expectation they do not accept only leads to our disappointment, frustration, and eventually unrighteous or self-righteous anger. Re-evaluating, negotiating, and discussing expectations allow us to come to an agreement. An accepted expectation — one where both people agree to the desires — is the final step in developing a valid expectation.

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When was the last time you said or thought, “they have to,” or “they need to”? How did this work out for you or them?

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## RESOLVING UNMET VALID EXPECTATIONS

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There are several steps in resolving and being free of our frustration and disappointment with regard to our unmet valid expectations:

### 1. Forgive & Repent for Invalid Expectations

We need to forgive others for not meeting our expectations. With this, we may need to repent for having invalid expectations of others.



Who do you need to forgive for not fulfilling a valid expectation? Who do you need to repent to for having invalid expectations?

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### 2. Clarify Expectations

Our misunderstandings of expectations with others should be clarified graciously — assuming the best. This will help unify your relationship and mark out clear expectations.



With whom do you have an unresolved misunderstanding?

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### 3. Revisit Expectations

Often times, our expectations are either forgotten or unconsciously ignored. Graciously revisiting and reminding others of our expectations will prevent frustration.



With whom do you have an unmet expectation? When was the last time you reminded them of the expectation?

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### 4. Negotiate Expectations

If expectations continue to go unmet, we may need to graciously negotiate our expectations. Perhaps it's simply an issue of reasonableness. We may simply have too high an expectation, requirement, or desire.



What are you willing to release to make your expectations agreeable? How could you make current invalid expectations valid?

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## 5. Forgive Expectations

Sometimes, after several attempts at being gracious with our expectations, we need to simply forgive the person of that expectation. This may mean releasing an employee from a job, releasing a desire or outcome for a relationship, or simply doing a job ourselves. Regarding expectations of circumstances, forgiveness isn't an option. However, they can be released to the Lord. Sometimes the outcomes of certain events are not how we expected or desired. Prayerfully submitting specific outcomes and unmet desires to the Lord empowers His Spirit to give us peace. We must not choose to pick up an offense from people who either refuse to accept or repeatedly disregard conscious, realistic, and spoken expectations.



With who or in what circumstance do you need to release your expectations or desires to God?

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## CONCLUSION


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Unhealthy assumptions of others or our circumstances come from invalid expectations. Ensuring that our expectations of others are conscious, realistic, spoken, and accepted will prevent us from being frustrated, disappointed, and ultimately, free of unrighteous or self-righteous anger. However, circumstances won't always agree with our desires. Therefore, to prevent unnecessary frustration or disappointment any expectations we may have still need to be at least conscious (acknowledged and recognized), realistic (agree with God's plan and design, nature, and is achievable), and spoken (perhaps only to ourselves and God). We must submit and trust our desires to God.

## STUDY RESPONSE

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### DISCUSSION

Pray through and discuss the above  questions with your partner. Journal your response and answers to this study. Include any questions or differing opinions and thoughts that were shared in your discussions.

### NEXT STEP

What unmet expectations do others have of you? Why haven't you met those expectations? How will you pursue clarifying, revisiting, negotiating, or fulfilling this person's unmet desire?

# RECONCILIATION

*All of this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.*

~2 Corinthians 5:18~

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## INTRODUCTION

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Matthew 5:21-26

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As Christians, we have been reconciled to God. Therefore, we have the responsibility, as far as it depends upon us, to pursue reconciliation (peace) with others.<sup>1</sup> Using the example of how we are reconciled to God, both forgiveness and repentance must be extended and received. However, reconciliation may not always be possible. Therefore, the extent to which we are able to live a free, joy-filled life in all relationships is dependant upon our ability to release and trust God amidst a relationship rather than the ability for a relationship to be reconciled. Too often, we sacrifice God's peace for a false definition of reconciliation.

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Is there something specific keeping you from being in relationship with someone? Who? What is keeping you from relationship, something you've done or something they've done? If it is something they have done, have you forgiven them? If it is something you have done, have you repented to them?

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 12:18

## DEFINING RECONCILIATION

**Reconciliation** is a restoration of harmony and right standing within a relationship. It requires both forgiveness and repentance to be extended; forgiveness must be received and repentance must be genuine and accepted. Reconciliation cannot exist where one of these is missing. We are to pursue reconciliation with both God and others. The Father has already extended forgiveness toward everyone through Christ.<sup>2</sup> Our ability to receive His forgiveness will affect how we repent. We respond to His forgiveness with our repentance.<sup>3</sup> The offending person may not always receive our forgiveness. It is the same with our repentance. Additionally, others may not always forgive us. Our part is to do what God has asked us to do and trust Him with the other person's response.<sup>4</sup>



How have you responded when someone didn't forgive you when you repented? How have you responded when someone didn't repent even though you forgave him or her?

## SEEKING FORGIVENESS

Sin is willfully breaking relationship with God through unrighteousness or self-righteousness. Additionally, we can sin against people when our unrighteousness or self-righteousness causes them offense or pain. **Sins of Commission** are attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, actions, words, or motivations that we should not have but willfully do. This includes our unwillingness to acknowledge, trust, submit to, or thank God.<sup>5</sup> In addition, these can be either intentional or unintentional. However, sins committed unintentionally do not bear the same judgment as sins committed intentionally.<sup>6</sup> **Sins of Omission**<sup>7</sup> are attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, actions, words, or motivations that we should have but don't. These sins include our unwillingness to believe, think, or do something God has asked us to. There are several reasons we seek forgiveness from God and others:

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:11-21

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 1:19-23

<sup>4</sup> Luke 17:3-4

<sup>5</sup> Romans 14:23;

<sup>6</sup> 1 John 5:16-17

<sup>7</sup> James 4:17; see also Luke 12:47-48;

### 1. We Agree with the Sin

We must ask for forgiveness when we agree that we have wronged someone. Either the Holy Spirit will convict us or the person we've wronged will confront us with the offense.

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What have you said or done (or failed to say or do) that you have yet to ask for their forgiveness?

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### 2. We Don't Agree with the Sin

We may also need to seek forgiveness when we don't agree that we have wronged someone. In this situation, we do not need to agree with the offended person that we were wrong. Rather, we need to acknowledge and affirm the other person's feelings. Feelings are neither right nor wrong. However, affirming their feelings shows that we value their relationship above us being right. Seeking forgiveness from them gives them an opportunity to trust God and release you. Matthew 5:23-24 does not give us an option to agree. We must pursue reconciliation regardless of whether or not we agree.

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When is it difficult for you to set aside being right for the sake of a relationship? What sin has God convicted you of that you disagree was a sin? Why do you disagree?

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### 3. When Restitution is Needed

Sometimes our sins require us to pay back something owed. In the case of stolen property, we may be required to return or make restitution.<sup>8</sup> True repentance desires restitution. Restitution can also be an attempt to make amends; that is, provide compensation or correct what was done.

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Regardless of what you did, how could you make (or at least pursue) restitution for your sin toward someone?

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### 4. When we are convicted

In some cases, we may never see the negative result of our sin and offense on someone. However, the Holy Spirit is

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 19:2-10

faithful to convict us of anything that is not life-giving. He may even convict us of a wrong done to someone even if he or she wasn't offended by us or think we did anything wrong. Additionally, we may not always agree with God when we are convicted — especially if what we did or said was correct, accurate, and right. However, our motives, thoughts, or beliefs behind what we did or said may have not been godly.

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When was the last time you were convicted but the other person wasn't offended or didn't feel like you did anything wrong? What did you do? When have you been convicted of something you don't believe to be wrong, offensive, or a sin? How did you respond?

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## WHEN NOT TO SEEK FORGIVENESS

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There are some instances when seeking forgiveness from others is not necessary. The following are circumstances in which we do not need to seek out forgiveness from people:

### 1. Heart Sins

**Heart sins** are those committed in our heart and mind. This includes but is not limited to: jealousy, unacted upon anger, sexual lust, etc. These sins are between God and us. Confession and repentance to God must still be lived out.

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What sins have you not repented to God for because you didn't "act" upon it or "say it out loud"?

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### 2. Repeat Offendees

Some people seek out being offended and have a victim mindset. They are perpetually unwilling to forgive. These people will never be content with any repentance or restitution we may extend.

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In what sins or offenses have you been living in shame or guilt because the person you've offended won't forgive you?

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### 3. Willing but Unable

We may be fully willing to seek forgiveness and pay restitution; however, we may be unable to because of distance or death. In these instances, having a desire to walk in the spirit of Matthew 5:23-24 is sufficient.



In what sins or offenses have you been living in shame or guilt because you were willing but unable to seek forgiveness? Have you confessed and repented of these sins to God?

## THE PROCESS OF SEEKING FORGIVENESS

Seeking forgiveness desires the best for the other person. We can take several steps to ensure the other person feels cared for. Whether they choose to forgive is their choice.

### 1. Forgive if Applicable

Before we seek forgiveness, be sure to forgive them of any part they may have had.

### 2. Confess & Repent to Jesus

We need to clearly define the offense in our mind to the best of our knowledge. Then we need to confess and repent (audibly if possible) to the Father for our sin. Secondly, we need to simply trust and receive His forgiveness.

### 3. Define & Clarify the Offense

True clarity and extent of our sin may only come once we have a conversation with the offended person. We should be sure not to minimize, justify, or excuse the offense. Call the offense sin. Additionally, we shouldn't over complicate the offense in our mind.

### 4. Don't Confront

This is not the time for us to bring up unresolved offenses toward the person. It is simply our time to acknowledge and confess our wrong attitudes and behaviors.

### 5. Ask for Forgiveness

We need to be clear in what we are asking for. For example, we may ask, "I see that when I \_\_\_\_\_ it made you feel \_\_\_\_\_. Will you forgive me for \_\_\_\_\_?" Asking clarifying questions may help us identify, acknowledge, and

affirm the person's feelings. This will also help us know how to accurately ask for forgiveness. If possible, we should be sure the person replies with, "I forgive you for \_\_\_\_." This will give us confidence that they clearly understood your apology and that the conflict is resolved. We should also consider when, where, and how we seek forgiveness. The timing, location, and body language may make all the difference in their response.

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From whom do you need to seek forgiveness?

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## CONCLUSION


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Seeking forgiveness is our responsibility. Sometimes, the person may not forgive us. We must remind ourselves that reconciliation takes both people trusting Jesus and obeying Him. We should not take on an offense because the other person chose to live in sin through unforgiveness. We can be confident that when we repent, Jesus alone is the source of our freedom. We are set free when we obey God and trust Him in seeking forgiveness, offering restitution, and living in repentance. Entrusting the person and their response to Jesus will help us continue in that freedom.

## STUDY RESPONSE

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### DISCUSSION

Pray through and discuss the above  questions with your partner. Journal your response and answers to this study. Include any questions or differing opinions and thoughts that were shared in your discussions.

### NEXT STEP

How will you entrust your sin, regardless of a person's response, to the Heavenly Father?

## FINAL JOURNAL THOUGHTS

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1. In **Conflict** (*Confrontation, Indignation, Expectation, Reconciliation*), what passage of Scripture has been the most convicting or challenging for you? Explain. What passage of Scripture has been the most encouraging or empowering for you? Explain.
2. What content or discussions regarding **Conflict** (*Confrontation, Indignation, Expectation, Reconciliation*) have you disagreed with? Or, have difficulty accepting or understanding? Or, find most difficult to apply? Explain.
3. What content or discussions regarding **Conflict** (*Confrontation, Indignation, Expectation, Reconciliation*) have you agreed with? Or, find easy to accept and understand? Or, find easy to apply? Explain.
4. From study one, Confrontation, how have you approached confrontation in the past, avoid it or sought it out? Explain. From study two, Indignation, what type of unrighteous or self-righteous anger do you generally go to, smoldering or explosive? Explain. In what ways have you justified your anger as “righteous” in the past? Give one example.
5. Since beginning the study on **Conflict**, what area in your life (*actions & words*), mind (*thoughts & beliefs*), and heart (*motivations & passions*) have you noticed the most significant change — positive or negative? Explain. Or, in light of this study, what do you desire to change? Explain.
6. What was your favorite discussion with your partner? Why? What was your least favorite or most difficult discussion with your partner? Why? Who could you encourage with what you’ve learned from this unit? How will you do this?

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

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### **When Sorry Isn’t Enough: Making Things Right with Those You Love**

*Gary Chapman & Jennifer Thomas*

Northfield Publishing, ©2013

### **Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate**

*Jerry Bridges*

Navpress, ©2007

## CHRISTIAN LIVING STUDY SERIES

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The power of one person's story of freedom and victory is life-changing. It is the best evangelistic tool a Christian has. Our mission is to encourage and equip Christians to live free of those negative attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, and habits and empower them to live joy-filled in every relationship and circumstance. Our hope is that Christians — through their life and story — would be the best testimony the world has of God's transforming love, grace, mercy, and truth. This is the goal behind the *Christian Living Study Series*.

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8. STEWARDSHIP // *A Study in Managing Resources*
9. SPIRITUAL WARFARE // *A Study in Being Relentless*
10. PRAYER // *A Study in Divine Relationship*
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12. SCRIPTURE // *A Study in God's Revelation*

## INFORMATION

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**NATHAN & LACEY STEEL** were married in 2004. They met at Alaska Bible Institute, located in Homer, Alaska. Nathan graduated from ABI's Biblical Study Program in 2004 and Christian Ministry Program in 2006. Nathan was born with a genetic disease called Cystic Fibrosis. This disease led the Steels to adopting their

two girls, Lydia and Arianna. Through God's grace and provision, the Steels have shared Jesus' love, grace, mercy, and truth all over the world. Nathan and Lacey's vision is to *See Christians Live Free, Joy-Filled Lives*. They designed the *Christian Living Study Series* as a catalyst for one-on-one discipleship, a curriculum for church small groups, and a course for discipleship schools. They developed and teach the *Christian Living Course* at Alaska Bible Institute (ABI). ABI exists to *Train and Equip Christians for Life & Ministry*. You can find out more at [www.AlaskaBible.org](http://www.AlaskaBible.org). For more information about the Steels, visit their website at [www.NathanLaceySteel.com](http://www.NathanLaceySteel.com). They currently reside with their two girls in Homer, Alaska.

