

# Study Guide

**Monday June 20- Read Genesis 4:1-10.** This is a primal story of tragedy. Cain is angry with his brother Abel and with God. God warns Cain that the anger he holds in his heart has lethal risks. But Cain ignores God's message, plots to act out his anger against his brother, and kills him. Sadly God says, "Your brother's blood cries to me from the ground." The story gives few details. We don't know how much time passed from the offerings to the murder, or just why God did not view Cain's gift favorably. The focus is internal. What was the spiritual danger against which God warned Cain? How does the image of sin "crouching" in wait (v. 7) fit with your experience? When God asked Cain where his brother was, what was Cain's callous answer? Do Cain's words in this ancient story ever echo the way that you are tempted to deal with the results of your anger? What does the story tell you about God's attention to actions and situations we'd like to gloss over?

**Tuesday, June 21– Read Ephesians 4:22-32.** Today's text says Christians can be angry without sinning (v. 26). At the same time, it calls us to rid our lives of destructive bitterness, rage and anger (v. 31). We need to think clearly about anger. Jesus showed that there are evils that should make us angry (Mark 3:1-6, John 2:14-17). But directed wrongly, anger is toxic to us and to others. John Wesley once wrote that if he could gather 100 people who "hate nothing but sin," he could shake the world. List some of the kinds of evil in the world that you believe make God angry. What do you believe are some of the main characteristics of "righteous anger"? James 1:19, 20 says we should be "slow to become angry, because OUR anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires." In what ways do you think harmful human anger differs from the kind of "good anger" Jesus showed? How can we keep the one from turning into the other?

**Wednesday, June 22 – Read 1 Samuel 20:30-34, 2 Samuel 9:1-8.** These stories vividly show the difference between anger and mercy. In the first, Saul feared David's military skill and rising status. In a rage, he even tried to kill his son Jonathan for being David's friend. In the second, when David became king, he sought out Saul's descendant, not to take revenge, but to show him compassion. Romans 12:19 says, "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." How likely are you to buy and wear a T-shirt that says, "I don't get mad—I get even," and mean it? Do you find David's mercy to his enemy's grandson admirable or weak? When Saul's grandson arrived, King David's first words were, "Don't be afraid." Do you think those were just polite words, or do you think Mephibosheth needed to hear them? How do they foreshadow the mercy of David's Lord and descendant, Jesus, who often greeted people by saying, "Fear not"?

*Prayer: Dear Jesus, when you lived here, you showed anger—and got it right. Evil made you angry—innocent people getting hurt, pious people who misrepresented God. I show anger, too—but I often get it wrong. Things that hurt my ego, others who get something I want, or small hassles that upset my plans make me angry. Help me be angry about the things that make you angry. But help me, also, to have your patience and mercy. Amen.*

**Thursday, June 23 – Read Luke 10:25-37.** The religious expert knew he should love his "neighbor." However, he seemed to think (or hope?) that left room for NOT loving lots of people. Jesus' story asks, "What if everyone might be a neighbor?" What if I'm willing to offer true help (avoiding codependency or reinforced helplessness) to any person I can, no matter who they are? Centuries of anger and fear divided Jews and Samaritans in Jesus' day. Are there long-standing divisions that affect you personally (business enmity, family disputes, maybe even a sports rivalry)? How easy or hard do you find it to treat the person(s) on the other side of those rifts as your neighbor? Jesus made a Samaritan the hero of his story. That was like telling an Israeli today a story in which the hero is a Palestinian. Was Jesus naïve to think that it's possible to move beyond long-standing anger and hatred between people groups? How did his approach differ from human peace-making efforts?

**Friday, June 24 – Read Luke 15:11-32.** There's anger in this story. There's rash anger when the younger son demands his legacy and leaves home. There's bitter anger as the older brother fumes outside when the father takes the younger son back. But the story hinges on the father's mercy and love. He probably had the most cause to be angry—but he wasn't. In what ways have you felt the kind of rash, impatient anger that the younger son in this story felt? In what ways have you felt the older brother's bitter, envious anger? Jesus told this story to tell us about God. How did the father show mercy to both sons? How has God been merciful to you? Have you ever had to deal with someone who has hurt you in some way, but has now "come home"? What issues and struggles did you face in deciding whether and how to show mercy? How can you show mercy to someone who has hurt you without "stuffing" your own pain, leaving it to fester in the dark?