

Bible Class: Extinguishing the Flames of Strife (60-Minute Study)

Introduction (5 minutes)

This study explores Jesus's radical teaching on anger, reconciliation, and peacemaking from Matthew 5:21-26. In a world consumed by rage, division, and conflict, Jesus calls His disciples to a fundamentally different way—a way that prioritizes reconciliation and makes peace even when the world is on fire.

Central Thesis: Our homes must be embassies of God's kingdom where we actively extinguish the flames of strife rather than fan them.

Opening Question: When was the last time you felt genuinely angry—at a person, a situation, or an injustice? What did you do with that anger?

I. A World on Fire (10 minutes)

A. The Fire Metaphor

Anger spreads like fire:

1. **Spark** → Something offends or wounds you
2. **Flame** → You nurture the anger, replay the offense
3. **Fire** → Anger turns to rage and outrage
4. **Tongue catches fire** → You say things you regret
5. **Spreads** → Your words spark someone else's heart
6. **Cycle repeats** → The fire rages all around us

Examples of sparks: News stories, traffic incidents, neighbor disputes, family conflicts, workplace tensions, social media posts

B. This Is Nothing New

Genesis 4:1-8 - Cain and Abel:

- A spark of jealousy in Cain's heart
- God's warning: "Sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it"
- Cain didn't conquer it
- The anger consumed him until he killed his brother

The Pattern: From humanity's beginning, anger has grown into rage, and rage into violence. The fire has been burning for generations.

C. Jesus's Context

First-century Israel was on fire:

- Jews vs. Samaritans vs. Romans vs. Greeks
- Pharisees vs. Sadducees vs. Essenes vs. Scribes
- Zealots vs. Tax Collectors
- Those who loved Rome vs. those who wanted to kill Rome's friends

The dinner tables:

- Simon the Zealot's family: hatred toward "traitors" like Matthew
- Matthew the Tax Collector's family: contempt for "fanatics" like Simon

Jesus knew: Within their lifetimes, Jerusalem would burn (70 AD). They were tearing themselves apart, and the fire would consume them.

Discussion Question: How is our world similar to first-century Israel?

II. Jesus's Call: Be Different (10 minutes)

A. What Jesus Doesn't Do

Jesus doesn't:

- Call people to defend Jerusalem
- Call people to hasten Jerusalem's fall
- Take sides (Zealots vs. Tax Collectors)
- Ignore the tensions

B. What Jesus Does

He calls His disciples to be different:

- Be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9)
- Extinguish flames, don't fan them
- Make our homes "embassies of God's kingdom"
- Do God's will on earth as it is in heaven—even if only in our households

C. The Reality Check

What we wish: "I wish I could fix all the world's problems, stop all the strife, end all the anger and destruction."

What we can do: "I don't have control over every household. But I do have control over mine. As for me and my household, we will serve Jesus."

The commitment: My home will be an embassy of God's kingdom—an embassy of peace where we:

- Speak out against evil
 - But answer evil not with more evil
 - Answer anger not with more anger
 - Answer fire not with more fire
 - Overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21)
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III. Jesus's Teaching: When Peace Is Broken (15 minutes)

A. The Text (Matthew 5:21-22)

Read together: "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."

B. When Peace Breaks

Common understanding: Peace breaks when someone dies—when violence occurs.

Jesus's teaching: Peace breaks **long before** that:

- When anger builds in your heart
- When insults fly
- When you call someone "You fool!"
- When contempt enters your heart

The progression to violence: Anger → Insults → Contempt → Hatred → Violence → Murder

Jesus's point: Stop the fire at the spark, not after the forest is burning.

C. Who Is Liable?

The repeated word: "Liable, liable, liable" = guilty, answerable, responsible

Who is liable?

- The murderer? Yes.
- The one who is angry? Also yes.
- The one who insults? Also yes.
- The one who says "You fool"? Also yes.

Our tendency: "It's them! The other side! Those people are causing the problems!"

The uncomfortable truth: Which of us is innocent?

- Who has never been angry with a brother?
- Who has never said things in anger?

- Who has never engaged in name-calling?
- Who has never harbored bitterness?

The answer: We're all guilty. We've all fanned the flames.

D. The Need for Forgiveness

Personal confession: "I'm guilty. I've participated in the anger. I've fanned the flames. I need forgiveness."

Jesus's call: Stop. Stop fanning the flames of anger, outrage, and loathing. Stop allowing those words to come from your mouth.

Why?: Because every time we speak in anger and outrage, it spreads the fire. Every. Single. Time.

Discussion Question: Where have you been guilty of fanning flames rather than extinguishing them?

IV. The Practical Path: Extinguishing Flames (15 minutes)

A. Take Initiative (Matthew 5:23-24)

Read together: "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."

Notice the shift: Jesus addresses both sides:

- Before: "You're angry at others"
- Now: "Someone has something against you"

Both directions need reconciliation:

1. When someone is angry at you
2. When you're angry at someone else

The instruction: In either case, **take the initiative.**

B. The Priority of Reconciliation

"Leave your gift... and go":

- Stop worship
- Leave immediately
- Go to the person

"First be reconciled":

- Before anything else
- Before completing worship

- Reconciliation comes first

The shocking prioritization: What could be more important than worship? Jesus says: **Reconciliation.**

The principle: God is not interested in our rituals if we're not interested in our relationships.

Hosea 6:6: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice"

Application: In our homes, these must take priority over religious activities:

- Relationships
- Reconciliation
- Peacemaking
- Unity

C. Have Conversations

The desperate need: Talk to each other. Listen to each other.

If someone has accused you:

- Go to them
- Talk it out
- Listen to their perspective, frustrations, fears, anger
- Seek to understand

If you're angry at someone:

- Go directly to them
- Share your feelings
- Explain your hurt
- Listen to their side
- Seek reconciliation

The goal: Not to prove you're right, but to make peace.

D. Come to Terms Quickly (Matthew 5:25-26)

Read together: "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison."

The principle: Conflict escalates. That's the nature of conflict.

How it escalates:

1. Someone says something
2. Other person's anger rises
3. They respond

4. First person's anger rises
5. Back and forth, up and up
6. Until it's out of control and irreparably broken

The timeline:

- Small spark → Manageable
- Small flame → Still containable
- Growing fire → Getting difficult
- Raging inferno → Out of control

Jesus's urgency: Come to terms **quickly**. Before it escalates. Before it's too late.

The Hatfield-McCoy example: 13 people died in a feud that started over a lawsuit about a stolen hog. What if they had come to terms quickly?

Application question: What small conflicts in your life need to be addressed quickly before they escalate?

V. Application: Our Homes as Embassies of Peace (10 minutes)

A. The Question for Every Family

What does your family do with strife?

When conflict arises, anger flares, tension builds—what happens?

Two possibilities:

1. **Fan the flames** - Nurture anger, speak harshly, escalate conflict
2. **Extinguish the flames** - Address quickly, seek reconciliation, make peace

Which pattern characterizes your home?

B. Natural vs. Supernatural

The truth: Nothing is more natural than getting angry when someone hurts us.

Jesus's call: He doesn't call us to be natural people; He calls us to be spiritual people.

Galatians 5:16: "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

The choice: When sparks fly (and they will), what will we do?

- Fan the flames (natural response)
- Extinguish the flames (spiritual response)

C. Where This Applies

In marriage: Address conflicts quickly; don't let anger fester

With children: Model reconciliation; teach them to extinguish flames

With extended family: Take initiative even in long-standing conflicts

With neighbors: Address issues face-to-face before they escalate

In the church: Our unity testifies to Jesus's deity (John 17:20-21)

In society: We can make peace on a personal level, and that ripples outward

D. Practical Commitments

This week:

1. **Confess to God** - Your participation in anger and division
2. **Identify one relationship** - Where conflict needs reconciliation
3. **Take initiative** - Call, text, visit—make the first move
4. **Have the conversation** - Share honestly, listen deeply
5. **Make peace** - Forgive, reconcile, commit to unity
6. **Stop fanning flames** - Commit to not spreading anger and division

Family commitments:

- **24-Hour Rule:** Address conflicts within 24 hours
- **Listening Commitment:** When someone wants to talk, stop and listen
- **Apology Practice:** Model sincere, quick apologies
- **Forgiveness Habit:** Make forgiveness quick and complete
- **No-Gossip Policy:** Go directly to people, not about them
- **Peacemaker Priority:** Celebrate those who make peace

VI. Hope and Encouragement (5 minutes)

A. Jesus Pardons All

The beautiful truth: Jesus pardoned everyone who would come to Him:

- Both Zealots and Tax Collectors
- Both those on opposite sides of every divide
- Everyone who would become His disciple

What He made them: One family with one new identity

Ephesians 2:14: "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility."

B. You Can Make a Difference

What we know for sure: We can't fix the whole world, but we can change our corner of it.

The ripple effect:

- One family becomes an embassy of peace
- Impacts the neighborhood
- Neighborhoods change communities
- Communities can change nations

It starts here: With you. With your family. With your decision to extinguish flames.

C. Living in Hope

The tension: We live between Jesus's first and second coming

- Already: The kingdom has come; reconciliation is possible
- Not Yet: Perfect peace awaits Christ's return

Until then: We work, pray, make peace, extinguish flames, and testify to the kingdom

Revelation 21:4: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore."

Closing (5 minutes)**A. The Challenge**

Our world is on fire: Anger, division, hatred, violence threaten to consume us all.

We're all guilty: We've all fanned the flames and participated in the anger.

But Jesus offers:

- Forgiveness for our guilt
- A way out of the cycle
- A different path forward

The call: Stop fanning flames. Start extinguishing them. Be different.

B. This Week's Action Step

Identify: One relationship that needs reconciliation

Take initiative: Make the first move this week

Have the conversation: Share, listen, seek understanding

Make peace: Come to terms, forgive, reconcile

Your home: Will it be an embassy of peace?

C. Closing Prayer

Father, forgive us for fanning the flames of anger and division. Thank You for Jesus, who calls us to a different way—the way of peace and reconciliation. Give us courage to take initiative,

humility to admit when we're wrong, and grace to forgive those who've wronged us. Help our homes to be embassies of Your kingdom—places of peace in a world of conflict. Make us peacemakers. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Discussion Questions (Choose 3-4 for your context)

1. When you take an honest inventory, where are you guilty of fanning flames rather than extinguishing them?
 2. Why does Jesus say that anger and insults make us liable to judgment—not just murder? What does this teach us about how God views our hearts?
 3. What does it mean practically for reconciliation to take priority over worship?
 4. Why does Jesus put the responsibility on us to "go first" regardless of whether we're the offender or the offended?
 5. Can you share an example of a conflict that escalated because it wasn't addressed quickly? What could have been different?
 6. What is the current pattern in your household when conflict arises—do you fan flames or extinguish them?
 7. What one specific action will you take this week to extinguish a flame or initiate reconciliation?
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Key Scriptures for Reference

- **Matthew 5:9** - "Blessed are the peacemakers"
 - **Matthew 5:21-26** - Jesus's teaching on anger and reconciliation
 - **Romans 12:18** - "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all"
 - **Romans 12:21** - "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"
 - **Ephesians 4:26** - "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger"
 - **Hosea 6:6** - "I desire mercy, not sacrifice"
 - **John 17:20-21** - Jesus's prayer for unity
 - **2 Corinthians 5:18-19** - The ministry of reconciliation
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Summary: Core Truths to Remember

1. Our world is on fire with anger and division—we're all guilty of participating
2. Peace breaks long before violence—it breaks with anger, insults, and contempt
3. Jesus calls us to be different—to extinguish flames, not fan them

4. Reconciliation must be the priority—even above worship
5. We must take initiative—whether we're the offender or the offended
6. Quick action prevents escalation—come to terms before conflict grows
7. Our homes must be embassies of peace—outposts of God's kingdom
8. This starts with you—in your relationships, this week

The Bottom Line: Stop fanning the flames. Start extinguishing them. Take the initiative. Make peace. Be different.

Additional Resources for Further Study

Related Scripture Passages

On Anger:

- Proverbs 14:29 - "Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly"
- Proverbs 15:1 - "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger"
- Proverbs 15:18 - "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention"
- Proverbs 16:32 - "Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city"
- Proverbs 19:11 - "Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense"
- Proverbs 29:11 - "A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back"
- Ecclesiastes 7:9 - "Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools"
- Ephesians 4:26-27 - "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil"
- Ephesians 4:31-32 - "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"
- Colossians 3:8 - "But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth"
- James 1:19-20 - "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"

On Reconciliation:

- Matthew 18:15-20 - The process of going to a brother who has sinned

- Romans 12:14-21 - "Bless those who persecute you... If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"
- 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 - "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"
- Ephesians 2:14-18 - Christ as our peace who broke down the dividing wall of hostility
- Colossians 1:19-22 - God reconciling all things to himself through Christ's blood

On Peacemaking:

- Psalm 34:14 - "Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it"
- Matthew 5:9 - "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God"
- Romans 14:19 - "So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding"
- Hebrews 12:14 - "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord"
- James 3:17-18 - "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace"
- 1 Peter 3:11 - "Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it"

On Unity in the Church:

- Psalm 133:1 - "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!"
- John 17:20-23 - Jesus's prayer that His disciples would be one
- 1 Corinthians 1:10 - "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment"
- Ephesians 4:1-6 - "Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace... one body and one Spirit... one Lord, one faith, one baptism"
- Philippians 2:1-4 - "Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind"

On the Power of Words:

- Proverbs 12:18 - "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing"
- Proverbs 18:21 - "Death and life are in the power of the tongue"
- James 3:5-6 - "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!"
- James 3:9-10 - "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so"

On Forgiveness:

- Matthew 6:14-15 - "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"
- Matthew 18:21-35 - The parable of the unforgiving servant
- Luke 17:3-4 - "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him"
- Ephesians 4:32 - "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you"
- Colossians 3:13 - "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"

Books for Further Reading

On Reconciliation and Conflict Resolution:

- *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* by Ken Sande
- *Peacemaking for Families* by Ken Sande
- *Caring Enough to Confront* by David Augsburger
- *When People Are Big and God Is Small* by Edward T. Welch

On Unity and Division:

- *Unoffendable: How Just One Change Can Make All of Life Better* by Brant Hansen
- *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (especially on Matthew 5)
- *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- *Compassion* by Henri Nouwen, Donald McNeill, and Douglas Morrison

On Anger and Emotions:

- *Good and Angry: Redeeming Anger, Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness* by David Powlison
- *Uprooting Anger: Biblical Help for a Common Problem* by Robert D. Jones
- *The Dance of Anger* by Harriet Lerner

On Justice and Peacemaking:

- *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* by Martin Luther King Jr.
- *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson
- *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* by James Cone

Practical Resources

For Personal Growth:

- Study the "one another" passages in Scripture (love one another, bear with one another, forgive one another, etc.)
- Keep a journal tracking when you feel anger arising and how you respond
- Memorize key verses on peacemaking and reconciliation
- Practice the "soft answer" principle from Proverbs 15:1

For Families:

- Establish family ground rules for conflict resolution
- Create a "reconciliation ritual" that young children can understand
- Hold weekly family meetings to address conflicts before they escalate
- Model sincere apologies and forgiveness in front of children
- Teach children the difference between tattling and seeking help for genuine problems

For Churches:

- Implement Matthew 18:15-20 processes for conflict resolution
- Provide mediation training for church leaders
- Create small accountability groups focused on relationships
- Offer classes on communication and conflict resolution
- Establish a culture where reconciliation is celebrated

Questions for Ongoing Reflection

1. How has reading these scriptures on anger changed your perspective on "small" expressions of anger?
2. Which of the Proverbs on anger resonates most with you? Why?
3. How does the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-20) shape your understanding of what it means to follow Jesus?
4. What specific practices could you implement in your home to become better at extinguishing flames?
5. Who in your life models peacemaking well? What can you learn from them?
6. How does understanding that "God hates discord among brothers" (Proverbs 6:19) motivate you toward reconciliation?
7. What is one book from the list above that you will commit to reading in the next month?

Memory Verses to Learn

Consider memorizing these key passages:

- **Matthew 5:9** - "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God"

- **Matthew 5:23-24** - "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"
- **Ephesians 4:26-27** - "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil"
- **Romans 12:18** - "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all"
- **Proverbs 15:1** - "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger"
- **James 1:19-20** - "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"