

In Christ . . . And With You . . . I Can . . .

I CAN USE MY ANGER WELL

Session 10 (3.15.20): In Christ, and with you, I can use my anger well.

Get angry. Just don't sin. Anger is such a powerful emotion that it seems to always be accompanied by a cloud of suspicion and warning. Anger has been judged as guilty by its association with a long list of misapplications. Because it often travels with evil companions, anger has often been taught as evil in itself. Often children are taught not to express anger, rather than being tutored in how to manage anger effectively. In your childhood, how did your parents and family respond to your anger? Were you ever taught a positive way to express your anger or were you reprimanded *when* you got angry? Often the focus with anger is on how it is expressed, and there are so many ways to express it badly. Thus the symptom (expression) of anger gets disciplined but the anger itself usually does not get *nurtured*. Why would any parent want to nurture anger? Because it is so important, so powerful, and so essential to righteousness. The problem is that the application of anger demands such precision.

Anybody can become angry - that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way - that is not within everybody's power and is not easy. Aristotle

God gets angry and he does not sin. God's anger is rooted in his righteousness and his justice. In modern culture, folks do not get angry *enough* about the killing of unborn children or the attempted eradication of gender. An anything-goes culture is proud of its acceptance. Those who oppose are called haters. Close. We are not hating, we are angry. But we are not angry at the folks involved, we are angry at the violation of God's will. Sometimes we do not express that well to non-believers. When Jesus cleansed the Temple, he expressed anger. He even crafted an instrument of punishment, a whip. It is an instrument of justice, of wrath, and of judgement. He wielded it but he did not use it. They deserved it but he did not administer it to them. That is consistent with his whole ministry:

47 "As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. 48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.
John 12:47-49

When we lose our ability to get angry at what Satan has done and is doing to our neighbors and loved ones, we lose our sense of justice and righteousness on their behalf. Then we become complacent and "accepting" just like the culture. The culture rewards us for being accepting and inclusive while we watch our culture head straight to God's justice and eternal damnation. We can't do that. For them! We fight Satan, not them. We fight him *for* them.

Anger and jealousy can no more bear to lose sight of their objects than love. - George Eliot.

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Anger is an emotion that is designed to get us to move (*e-motion*), to do something. Anger is an alarm that something needs to be corrected. When we don't immediately answer the alarm, we begin to harbor anger, and that leads to a plethora of problems and sins. When we answer anger's call to do something to correct what is wrong (unjust, unrighteous), then anger has accomplished its God-given role and it must be abandoned. If we bring anger to the solution, we will shipwreck the opportunity for positive change. Rather than focusing on the problem, folks will focus on our anger. So will we. As soon as we answer anger's call to action (justice), we must cast anger aside, for from that point forward we begin to *harbor* anger. We are not designed to harbor anger, therefore we do not do it well: Ephesians 4:, 27: "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

Notice the progression: anger + time = foothold for Satan. God even gives us a definitive deadline for anger: the rest of the day. Action takes place during the day, but things fester at night. At sundown the daylight fades and "work" (action) ceases. Anger kept over from the time allocated for action becomes harbored. That festering can then lead to a desire for vengeance or returning hurt for hurt. God withholds vengeance for himself. Our job, like that of Jesus on this earth, is to use the anger in the face of injustice (the money changers in the Temple) to warn people of the danger of what they are doing. Vengeance is left to God after his patience (of not wanting anyone to perish) has come to an end and punishment (justice) is dispensed. At the cleansing of the Temple, even Jesus deferred vengeance for the mistreatment of God's house to God by brandishing the whip (a warning of vengeance) but not applying it.

Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured. Mark Twain

We must be very, very careful when our anger is triggered by an injustice done to us personally. "Righteous indignation" is righteous when it stands for the right, not the self. Certainly there are times when the right is associated with a wrong that is perpetrated on us, but it is difficult to main a "right" view of things when we are involved, because justice is blind and in such a situation we are not blind (impartial). When we stand against injustice to others, we do so without concern for their race, gender, or even religion. We do so because it is right to defend the opposed and persecuted, not because *they* are right. It is not personal. When we are injured by others it cannot not be personal to us. In such cases, David begged God to defend him against his enemies and Jesus begged God to forgive his. David's response is certainly understandable, but was he seeking philosophical justice or payback by God? Either way, he deferred that to God. Jesus' response demonstrates the highest calling . . . to seek the forgiveness and salvation of anyone who harms us rather than to see them judged to hell. Vengeance will always involve punishment and ultimately punishment will involve outer darkness. Do we desire folks to be saved only if they are not our personal persecutors?

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1. When you were young, were you taught (directly or implicitly) that anger is wrong or unacceptable? If yes, how and by whom?
2. Should children be taught to not express anger to their parents or should they be taught to express their anger to parents only in an acceptable way? Why do you answer that way?
3. What is the relationship between anger and sin? Do anger and sin always accompany one another? If you answer no, describe some scenarios in which they do not necessarily go together.
4. What are some positive, acceptable ways to express anger? When would a “cleansing of the Temple” kind of demonstration of anger be appropriate?
5. Discuss Aristotle’s astute description of acceptable anger. How many ways does he describe unacceptable anger.
6. What is the basis of God’s anger? What can we learn from his anger when considering our own?
7. Describe the use of a whip by Jesus when he cleansed the Temple. Why does his use of a whip surprise so many people? Why does it seem uncharacteristic of Jesus to some? How is it a powerful demonstration of anger rather than of “losing his temper?”
8. When *should* we get angry? About what is it *righteous* to become indignant? Concerning whom or what should we be angry?
9. What happens to us if we lose Godly anger? What happens to the world if we lose it?
10. Why did God even give us the emotion of anger if it gets us in trouble so much?
11. What is the difference between getting angry and harboring anger?
12. What problems arise when we harbor anger? What does harbored anger ultimately become?
13. What is the God-given time limit on anger? Why does he only allow such a short amount of time?
14. Complete the equation: anger + time = _____. Explain how that works.
15. What is the relationship between harbored anger and the desire for vengeance? Why does God restrict the administration of vengeance to himself alone? Why is God patient with vengeance? Why are we not so?
16. When we get angry due to a wrong done to us personally, how should we respond? Why? What dangers are present when we are personally involved in the justice we seek?
17. Discuss the difference between how David and Jesus prayed concerning their enemies.

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Scripture References

Eph 4:26-27

26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

Ps 4:4

4 In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.

Eccl 5:6-7

6 Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the [temple] messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? 7 Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.

Eph 4:31-32

31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

1 Tim 2:8

8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

James 1:19-21

19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Ps 37:8

8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret — it leads only to evil.

Prov 29:8

8 Mockers stir up a city, but wise men turn away anger.

Prov 29:11

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

Eccl 7:9

9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.

Eccl 10:4

4 If a ruler's anger rises against you, do not leave your post; calmness can lay great errors to rest.