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**Who is God? In His Own Words**

**Slow to Anger—Exodus 34:6-7**

In the last 12 months, there have been many things that have happened in my own family that have caused me to slow down and to assess the situation and to think about how to best proceed next. And here is one of the biggest ones. I became the parent of a teenager. Yes, I said it—a teenage girl. Now, that is serious stuff and I know you say, “But, Shane, you don't look old enough to have a teenager!” Alas, it's true. I am headed into personally uncharted territory. Parenting a teenager is just another thing that I don't know how to do.

It seems that list just keeps getting longer. One of the ways I've tried to get a gauge on how to do this is by thinking about the way I was parented when I was a teenager. As a dad, I often think about the way that my dad parented me. My parents had two teenage boys on their hands at the same time. And my sister was just a few years younger than us. So my mom, she would mostly deal with the daily dramas of the teenage boys. We wanted perms. Yes, I know—perms. We wanted to grow a mullet. We wanted to get earrings and we skipped school and we did all that stuff. Mom dealt with that ... but Dad would get called in when stuff with his teenage boys got a little more challenging, I suppose.

And in my world, thankfully, that wasn't too often. Here is a photo of my dad and me many moons ago. As you can tell, he was a formidable figure to say it best. In my recollection, he didn't get angry with me too often, thankfully. I'm not saying I was perfect, but I had perfected the art of flying under the radar and the radar was my older brother. I just hid in his shadow because I think he took on more of the heavy stuff. So thanks, brother, if you're watching. I do remember once when I was 15 years old, when a

pack of cigarettes—yes, it's true—flew out of the waistband of my sweatpants when I was sitting at the dinner table. Of course, I was holding them for a friend. That's what we all said in that moment. I saw a glimpse of Dad's anger, albeit just a glimpse. And that was all I needed to see. Thankfully, in my experience, my dad, as he parented me through my teenage years, was slow to anger. And I hope to be that kind of parent to my teenagers as well. There is a phrase you maybe heard in the last several months that became a part of popular culture during the last American presidency. The phrase is: *When someone tells you who they are, you should believe them.* You've probably heard that a few times over the last few years.

Here at North Park Fanshawe, the teaching team has been in this series called *Who is God? In his own words*. Paul and Trish have been unpacking this amazing passage of scripture over the last couple of weeks. In this scripture, God is telling us in his own words who He is. And when God tells you who He is, you can definitely, certainly, absolutely believe him. So in the passage of scripture that we're going to look at today in the Book of Exodus, God has been hanging out with Moses on a mountain in the midst of a whole scene where God is trying to give the people the Ten Commandments (something we'll go back and unpack in a few moments). God says this to Moses about Himself.

***Exodus 34:6-7***

*The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness and rebellion and sin.*

Today, I want to chat with you about one of the most interesting, mysterious, nuanced aspects of the character of God. God says about himself that He is slow to anger. Before we really get into this today, it's important to know that one of the top ten reasons people reject God is because they believe He is an angry God, full of wrath and punishment, and they don't want more anger in their life than they currently have.

So if you're watching this today and you're not really into the whole God thing—maybe somebody shared this content with you today and you're just checking us out—I want to tell you to stay tuned,

because you may have thought that God is like an angry person, but there's a lot more to this story that I think that you'll want to know. And we're super-glad that you're here right now. This particular story in the Bible is actually, ironically, full of anger. There are angry leaders, angry followers and even a glimpse of an angry God. This revelation of God's character being slow to anger all happens in the bigger story of God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses.

Moses is up on top of the mountain and the people are on the bottom of the mountain and they're waiting for him. And they have been waiting for what they thought was way too long. And when they didn't understand what the leader is doing, they got angry and told Aaron, "Come make us gods who will go before us. Because as for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what's happened to him." And, of course, Aaron gives into this anger and he makes a golden calf for the people to worship angry followers.

Then God becomes aware of what the people are doing. And what do we see in the story? I'm glad you asked. Listen to this. The Lord tells Moses:

***Exodus 32:9-10***

*I have seen these people and they are a stiff necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I might destroy them.*

Angry God.

What I'm going to say next may sound odd, so bear with me. This glimpse of God actually makes me feel close to God because this is how I express my anger. How many times have I said when I was angry...? *Just leave me alone. Just let me be angry. I just want to go somewhere and be angry.* I don't often lash out and freak out and tear into people. When I'm angry, I just want to go somewhere by myself and let my anger burn a little bit. It sits on me for a few hours or a few days if I'm really mad. Only the people closest to me, my family (unfortunately), know how I'm feeling, but it makes me feel kind of good. In this story, God just wanted to go off by Himself and stew in His anger. But God in this story is mad and rightfully so, because these Israelite kids of his just keep blowing it and throwing it in God's face over and over.

So you can't blame him for wanting to go off and stew for a bit. Then Moses talks God down from His anger and a disaster is averted. Maybe you're the one who talks down a friend or a spouse or a co-worker when they're angry. Takes some real de-escalation skills sometimes. Can you imagine being the one in this story to help God process His anger? Moses was a very special man indeed.

After Moses convinces the God of the universe to work through his anger towards these people, the story shows us that Moses becomes the next one who shows symptoms of this most volatile emotion. Moses comes down from the mountain, sees his people worshipping this golden calf and you guessed it, here it comes—angry Moses! It says his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. Angry leader.

And then to help Moses settle down, Aaron steps in to de-escalate. Thank goodness for the people who know how to do this.

***Exodus 32:22***

*Don't be angry," Aaron said. "You know how prone these people are to evil."*

So there's lots of anger and lots of de-escalation here. And right after all of this, God says "I am the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger."

Seems like there's some sorting out we need to do in this story. For the record, we know that the Bible never says that God doesn't get angry, but it does say that it takes Him a really long time to get there. He's slow to anger. And if you think about some of the moments when you see flares of God's anger in the Bible and you consider what He was putting up with before it happened, things make more sense.

As for me, I'm very aware of the way that my anger works and in the last 12 months I'm more aware than ever; my anger kind of sits like God's anger did early in our story today. Everyone around me just leaves me alone. I just go off by myself to be angry. I never have the public blow up those hot, temper-filled, yelling, screaming-mad moments in front of other people. Never. My anger just comes out slowly and leaks out through a thing called frustration ... and I admit that I sense more

frustration lately than I have in quite a long time. And I need to pay deep personal attention to that.

But in 23 years of marriage—and I know I don't look like that's possible, I get it, but in 23 years of marriage (in May)—my wife, Yvonne, has never ever seen me blow up in hot, yelling, freaking-out, kind of anger. It has happened but it's really rare. The last time it happened was in 1996 when I was in Bible College in Peterborough, Ontario. I had only months before become a Christian and I kind of bought into this fallacy that if I became a Christian, then everything in my life was just going to sort itself out and be rosy after that. That's a sermon for another time. But I got a telephone call and it was my mother on the other end calling me from Newfoundland, telling me that my 49-year-old father, after going to the doctor because he was just a little off balance, was given five years to live with a terminal illness. I remember hanging up that phone. And not just yelling, but I was screaming and crying and freaking out and swinging with my fists. I remember hitting the towel rack on the wall and slicing my finger and my knuckle open on a piece of metal. That scar is still there today. It's a reminder. My Ethiopian roommate, Ermeas, was sitting on his bed and he watched the whole thing. When I'd finished my rage-filled temper tantrum of the ages, he looked at me and said in a very serene tone. "Okay, Shane. Now we pray."

So anger and hot anger happens to the best of us, and God gets angry, too, but he's slow to get there—really slow. Can you put it in the chat today? Really slow. Put it in the chat right now. Really, really slow. It's part of his character, part of who He told us He is—He promised us he would be this way with us. So the promise is good. But think for a second, if you had to deal with the human race, I'm sure that you would have a hot moment every once in a while too.

God's people, the Israelites, were throwing God's goodness and his generosity and his kindness back in his face almost every chance they got. They complained and they worshiped other gods. And they were carnal and they cursed God's leaders. And at times they slandered God himself. And God could have lashed out with good reason, probably every day. But He didn't. There were times in Scripture where God had enough ... and his anger? Yes, it happened. And he let people drift towards the

consequences of their own actions. But it was not a sign of God that appeared very much. And even though the people probably deserved to see it, most days it really didn't happen. God is slow to anger. Thankfully.

So if you're sitting here today, watching this and thinking this is just like a theological discussion that has no real ramifications to your day-to-day living ... well, that wouldn't be completely accurate. Because as much as God is slow to anger and as much as we need to thank God for being that way towards us, there's something about this that makes us accountable. There's something about this statement in Exodus that now rests on us. On you. On me. Are you ready for it? Here it comes and this is going to be heavy and it comes to you courtesy of a man named James. So here we go. He says:

**James 1:19**

*My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak*

and here it comes

*and slow to become angry because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.*

Ouch! Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Yes, God deals with all of our junk day in, day out, and his anger is rarely seen, it's slow, and we thank Him for that because we deserve that anger probably in more ways than we're ever going to understand. But there's also an expectation on you, on me, on us to be like the God we serve in this regard—to be slow to become angry. Why, you might ask? Because your anger does not produce any of the character of Jesus in you.

That is a heavy one. Now, it's no longer a discussion simply about the character of God. Now it's a discussion of the daily actions of you and me. It's Christianity 101: class in session right now. Because we benefit every day from God not expressing his anger towards us.

Question: how do people in your world benefit from you not constantly expressing yours?

This is a difficult teaching and it's easy to receive the promises of God of slowness in becoming angry with us, but it's a little more challenging for us to live out the expectation of being slow to anger with others, especially in our world. Especially right now, especially in a global pandemic. There's just a whole lot that gets us angry these days, and it's not that the coronavirus has caused our anger. It's more accurate that coronavirus has revealed an anger in us that was always there. But now it comes out faster and fiercer. Let me ask you this question, have you been *pangry* in the last year or so? No, it's not *hangry*; I didn't say that, which is a combination of being hungry and angry. And I've felt that emotion—certainly the hunger one a lot more than normal these days—but *pangry*. It's a word that's being used in our culture right now to describe being pandemic angry, being *pangry*. It's a thing and it's happening more and more often the longer this thing drags on.

People can get *pangry* fast—in a moment. And over things that on their own are relatively meaningless:

- A person is walking the wrong way down the aisle at Walmart. The arrow on the floor says **this** way. They're walking **that** way.
- Someone walks into your favorite Dollarama and they're not wearing a mask. You just want to walk up to them and say, “Where have you been for the last year!” without knowing their back story at all.
- When we see too many people on our neighbor's front lawn, that can make us really *pangry*.
- Someone in a lineup behind you just won't keep that six feet; they just won't do it. It's like the person doesn't have a sense of spatial awareness.
- It's easy to get *pangry* when some churches are open and others are not.
- It's easy to feel this way when you're following the rules and other people are not.

And on and on and on. Or maybe you just think this whole thing is quite crazy and we should just get back to doing life like we did it before, and maybe you're *pangry* about that. Welcome, everyone, to what's become a fairly angry world. And in this pandemic—hear this please—God is still slow to anger. Thankfully, this whole pandemic doesn't change His anger threshold.

And even though much of the research tells us that it's okay for us these days to vent our anger because we are justified in doing so, because our pandemic context permits it, you need to be very careful with that. Consider what God is asking of you, because I do believe—and James backs us up here—that God is asking us to not just be slow to be angry, but to be slow ... really slow ... to be *pangry*. I've had some *pangry* moments in the last 12 months. And I've been on the other end of some *pangry* moments in the last 12 months, and I'm sure that's probably true for you, too. It's rough out there.

But God's posture towards us in this area didn't change—and our short and oftentimes hot reactions towards others? They've not become acceptable because a pandemic took place. God wants us to be so thankful for his slow-to-anger approach to us that we show a similar posture to others. When we're at Walmart. While we are walking our dogs. While we consider and think about and should I add, pray, for our government. And our leaders. While we process what our churches are doing, while we process what our schools are doing, while we process what our neighbors up the street are doing.

God is slow to anger.

And so are we to be. This is not a one-way street of God is slow to anger with us, but we can let our anger go unchecked online on social media through emails, or face to face. That's not what this thing is about. The statement of the character of God and how to best follow him is a challenge, a big one, especially right now; to be slow to anger with those in our world. The apostle Paul encouraged us to be longsuffering with one another, didn't he, bearing with one another in love and forgiving one another. Because people often get on our nerves, don't they? Sometimes they irritate us, exasperate us, slight us, provoke us, gossip about us, wrong us, misinterpret us, offend us. Sometimes they break COVID protocol right in front of our face and our patience wears thin and sometimes we just want to strike back in anger.

God wants us to be slow to anger like Him. And to bear those injuries patiently. And to forgive. So because of my earthly father ... Dad, the fact that you were slow to anger with me—even when the cigarettes went flying across the kitchen floor when I was way too young—I trust I'm becoming what I think a good parent is. So thanks, Dad.

Because of my heavenly Father and the way that he is slow to anger with me ... God, when you don't punish me every time that I mess up or use the wrong words or when I don't live my best life in front of you, I can still live as Your child in confidence, knowing You've got my back and You're slow to anger. So thanks, God.

And now it's on me. I'm called to live in a way that's slow to anger too. Hopefully one day, someone in my home, my work, my street, my world, will be able to say to me that I made a difference in their life because I kept my anger in check. Because when we're slow to anger, we're a whole lot more like God. And that's what our world needs right now.

**Points to Ponder**  
**Sunday, May 2, 2021**  
*Who is God? In His Own Words*  
*Slow to Anger: Exodus 34:6-7*

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. The Bible doesn't say God never gets angry but rather that he is "slow to anger." When you think about that, why do you think so many people reject God because they see him as being *perpetually angry*? As Christians, why do we often believe that the moments our lives are in turmoil, it's because God is mad at us?
2. Maybe there is someone in your world, who exhibits a bit of a *quick anger*. How does that make you feel? Do you jump in to help soothe their anger? How do you do that?
3. God's anger doesn't increase or *lash out* because we are in the middle of a pandemic. But ours often does. In what ways have you seen your *panger* (pandemic anger) come to the forefront in the last year? How have you dealt with that?
4. James 1:19 says that we are to be "slow to anger." What are some tangible steps you can take to leave your *panger* behind in this season, and move into the next season in a better, healthier way?