

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

November 7, 2021

A Gentle Answer
“Anger Management”
Ephesians 4:26-27
Rev. Mike Fordham

Do you remember those roof turbine vents (also called, whirlybird roof vents) that used to be on many homes' roofs? They would spin with the wind and would serve to remove humid air from the attic. Sometimes they can be noisy when they spin making them very annoying to the neighbors when they spin in the wind. Evidently, one was making a lot of noise and was driving the neighbors crazy, and the homeowners never got around to repairing it. One day, the homeowner went up to see why their turbine had gone quiet to find an arrow stuck in it. Clearly, this was a message from angry neighbors who took matters into their own hands. When we get angry enough and don't manage our anger well, anger can get out of control and lead us to do things that we might not do in our right minds. Anger is a something with which we all wrestle. The question is not whether we get angry, but how do we handle our anger? An even more important question is how does God want us to handle anger? God speaks to us through *Ephesians 4* where the Apostle Paul is writing to the church in Ephesus, and us today, calling on all of God's people to put off the old sinful destructive life and to put on the new life of Christ. This then affects how we live our lives out in the real world and that includes managing anger the way Jesus did when He walked in this world. As Pastor Mike said last week in his sermon, in this world of us against them, a broken, angry strife-filled world, we are going to live our lives as Jesus did.

Ephesians 4:26-27

²⁶ And “don't sin by letting anger control you.” Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

UNHEALTHY ANGER

In *Ephesians 4:31* Paul says, “*Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.*” Notice that bitterness, rage, harsh words, slander are all related to anger and aptly describe our world today. Our world is suffering under a pandemic of anger. These elements of unhealthy anger are signs of the old, destructive sinful life. God then calls on us Christians to not allow anger to control us as it will get a hook upon which the devil, Satan himself can get a hold of our lives and bring destruction. We are not to fall into sin by letting anger be in control. There are 2 basic ways that anger can be destructive when it is handled in an unhealthy manner. The first unhealthy, dysfunctional way to handle anger is to **1) Suppress Anger**. Some people when they get angry, they stuff it deep down inside of themselves. They ignore it or deny that they are angry. They pretend everything is ok, all the while

inside they are hurting and filled with anger. They keep the anger within themselves all bottled up hoping it will go away by itself. Those of us who do that do not realize that anger does not just go away. Anger has to be addressed. Anger stuffed deep down inside us will eventually do great harm to ourselves. It has been said that some depression, not all depressions, is anger turned inward. Scott Sauls, in his book, *A Gentle Answer: Our 'Secret Weapon' In an Age of Us Against Them* very wisely states, "Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything onto which it is poured." If we do not address anger within ourselves, it will eat away at us and can become an underlying cause of anxiety, depression, and eventually will affect our behavior patterns, cause a variety of physical problems, affect our thinking, and significantly disrupt our relationships.

In a 1994 article, *Associated Press* reporter Christopher Burns writes: "The bombs of World War II are still killing in Europe. They turn up--and sometimes blow up--at construction sites, in fishing nets, or on beaches fifty years after the guns fell silent. Hundreds of tons of explosives are recovered every year in France alone. 13 old bombs exploded in France last year, killing twelve people and wounding eleven, the Interior Ministry said. 'I've lost two of my colleagues,' said Yvon Bouvet, who heads a government team in the Champagne-Ardennes region that defuses explosives from both World War I and II. ... 'Unexploded bombs become more dangerous with time,' Bouvet said. 'With the corrosion inside, the weapon becomes more unstable, the detonator can be exposed.'" What is true of lingering bombs is also true of lingering anger. Buried anger will explode when we least expect it. Anger unaddressed in ourselves turns to a grudge, bitterness, and continues to slide downhill to tear us up from the inside out. As Anne Lamott said, "Anne Nursing a grudge against someone is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die."

Another more obvious way that we handle our anger in an inappropriate, dysfunctional, unhealthy manner is to **2) Express Anger Uncontrollably**. When anger builds up to a point of being toxic in us and then we let it out in an uncontrolled manner it can leave a very destructive trail behind us. It can lead to badly damaged relationships, shooting sprees and murder, violent riots, emotional and physical abuse, wars, the assassination of people's character through gossip and slander as we often see in political campaigns, and social media feeds, and so much more.

The *Arizona Republic* (4/25/95) reported that when Steve Tran of Westminster, California, closed the door on 25 activated bug bombs, he thought he had seen the last of the cockroaches that shared his apartment. When the spray reached the pilot light of the stove, it ignited, blasting his screen door across the street, breaking all his windows, and setting his furniture ablaze. "I really wanted to kill all of them," he said. "I thought if I used a lot more, it would last longer." According to the label, just two canisters of the fumigant would have solved Tran's roach problem. The blast caused over \$10,000 damage to his apartment building. And the cockroaches? Tran reported, "By Sunday, I saw them walking around." When we allow anger to control us, we are out of control and dangerous to ourselves and the world around us. No wonder God says that He does not want anger to take control of our lives.

HEALTHY ANGER

Instead, God's plan for dealing with anger is for us to manage our anger in a healthy manner. Notice, that God does not say anywhere in the Bible that we are never to be angry or that anger in itself is a sin. God admits here in Ephesians that we will get angry. That's just a fact of life. From the Old to the New Testament, we see that God gets angry and rightfully so. We may not like the idea of God being angry, but we need to understand that because God is just and loving, God gets angry. God gets angry at the destruction sin leaves behind. God gets angry with murder, physical and emotional abuse, lying, stealing, the pain left behind from adultery, the gripping destructive power of addictions, terrorism, racism, hatred, violence, injustice, murder, bullying, gossip, backbiting, and all the destruction that sin brings to God's creation. Love and justice are the motivation behind God's anger. Jesus showed anger when He turned over the tables of the moneychangers in the temple because of their corruption and taking advantage of the poor and doing so in a house of worship. Likewise, when we have righteous, healthy anger it tells us that something is wrong and reveals to us what we love, that is being threatened, hurt, oppressed, or abused. God created us with the ability to have the same full range of emotions that He has and that includes anger. Nancy Anne Smith is right when she said, "You're responsible for what you do with your feelings, but you can't help having feelings." God then wants us to channel anger to bring about healing, wholeness, and to be life-giving and not destructive. A healthy anger is angry and loving at the same time as well as furious while still being full of grace.

How then are we to handle our anger in a redeeming, healthy, life-giving manner? **1. Restrain It.** *Proverbs 29:11* tells us that "*Fools vent their anger, but the wise quietly hold it back.*" This is not calling for us to bury our anger or to not deal with it. Instead, we are to be in control of our emotions, of anger and how we express it. Anger has to stay within certain healthy boundaries. **2. Re-evaluate It.** *James 1:19-20* says, "¹⁹ *Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.* ²⁰ *Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.*" Don't just fly off the handle out of control with anger. God's way of dealing with anger is to be slow to anger, listen carefully, and take time to calm down and not internalize or act in the heat of the moment. Then re-evaluate the person's words or actions, ask questions to find out exactly what and why it happened, try to understand what really happened and why you feel as you do, and often you will find that the person did not intend to hurt you, or it was all a misunderstanding. **3. Release It.** As I read earlier from *Ephesians 4:31*, God calls on us to get rid of anger and all associated unhealthy, damaging actions fed by anger. When we deal with anger God's way, we feel it, talk about, vent it in a safe way (possibly complaining to a trusted, innocent third party) where no one is harmed, and then release it. One way to get rid of anger is to turn to God with our anger and **pray about it.** When we bring our feelings to God, we are beginning the process of venting our pain, to the safest, wisest, most loving counselor there is. He already knows what we are feeling and longs to walk with us through our anger and bring healing to us. Often God will give us strength to face the pain of anger and the perspective we need and the power to deal with it in an

appropriate manner. We then put the problem in God's hands and God can give us peace and the ability to forgive and be forgiven. God then gives us the ability to do what we cannot do on our own. God empowers us to do what *Ephesians 4:32* says, "*Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*"

God's way is to allow the power of the Holy Spirit to control our anger and let it led us to being tenderhearted, forgiving, kind, and gentle just as God continually treats us. As *Proverbs 15:1* says, "*A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.*" Please don't be mistaken, God's way is not the easy path of dealing with anger, but it is the most powerful, constructive, disarming way of handling anger in ourselves and in our world. In Robert Morgan's book, *Worry Less, Live More*, he relates a story from the life of John Wooden, one of the most revered coaches in the history of college basketball, who credited much of his success to his dad. He recalled a boyhood occasion when he watched his father deal with a certain situation. His rural Indiana county would pay local farmers to take teams of mules or horses into the gravel pits scattered through the county and haul out loads of gravel. Some pits were deeper than others, and sometimes it was hard for a team to pull a wagon filled with gravel out through the wet sand and up the steep incline. One steamy summer day, wrote Wooden, a young farmer was trying to get his team of horses to pull a fully loaded wagon out of the pit. He was whipping and cursing those beautiful plow horses, which were frothing at the mouth, stomping, and pulling back from him. The elder Wooden watched for a while, then went over to the young man and said, "Let me take 'em for you." Dad started talking to the horses, almost whispering to them, and stroking their noses with a soft touch. Then he walked between them, holding their bridles and bits while he continued talking-very calmly and gently-as they settled down. Gradually he stepped out in front of them and gave a little whistle to start them moving forward while he guided the reins. Within moments, those two big plow horses pulled the wagon out of the gravel pit as easy as could be. As if they were happy to do it. John Wooden said, "I've never forgotten what I saw him do and how he did it. Over the years I've seen a lot of leaders act like that angry young farmer who lost control. ... So much more can usually be accomplished by Dad's calm, confident, and steady approach." Wooden took away an indelible lesson: "It takes strength inside to be gentle on the outside."

The display of God's gentleness and kindness in the midst of anger is beyond compare God's anger was to take it and release it through forgiveness

Icebreaker I – On a scale of 1 – 10, 1 being SUPPRESSING ANGER and 10 being EXPRESSING ANGER UNCONTROLLABLY, where do you rate yourself?

Icebreaker II – What are your anger “triggers?”

1. What do you learn about how God wants you to handle your anger from *Ephesians 4:26–27*?
2. In *Ephesians 4:31*, Paul says, “*Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.*” How have your attitudes, actions, and thoughts changed since turning your life over to God?
3. *Proverbs 29:11* tells us that “*Fools vent their anger, but the wise quietly hold it back.*” How do you usually handle your anger?
4. *James 1:19-20* says, “¹⁹ *Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. ²⁰ Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.*” Do you live this out or do you struggle in this area?
5. *Ephesians 4:32* says, “*Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*” When you are wronged, how are you able to forgive the person who wronged you?
6. *Proverbs 15:1* says, “*A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.*” Are you more likely to respond with a gentle answer or harsh words when you have been wronged?
7. How can this group pray for you this week?