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**Dealing with Anger**  
**Matthew 5:21-26**  
**February 23rd, 2014, Jeff Germs**

[2 – Video Clip]<sup>1</sup>

I want to describe for you a couple of scenarios this morning. As I am describing them try to put yourself emotionally in those situations. Try to feel what you would feel if you were actually experiencing them right now.

**Scenario Number One:**

You have planned to meet someone at a certain place at a certain time – let’s say 10:00 am on Saturday morning. You are a very punctual person and you actually arrive ten minutes early. You feel good about that because you hate making people wait.

[3]

At 9:58 you look at your watch and you graciously think to yourself, “Well, not everyone is as punctual as me. We agreed upon 10:00 not 9:58. One minute later you look at your watch again – 9:59. The countdown begins. What’s happening to your emotions?

The ticking of the clock gets louder. Five minutes pass. What’s going inside you? What are you feeling? Now your heart beats in time with the ticking clock. Half an hour passes. It flows swiftly by. You cannot retrieve it. It’s gone forever. Thirty minutes of your life lost in the sea of irretrievable seconds. And actually you’ve lost even more than thirty minutes because you had to travel to get to the meeting place.

What’s going on inside you now? What thoughts are running through your head? What do you do with those thoughts?

**Scenario Number Two:**

You’ve had a long hard day. You fall into bed at 10:00 pm exhausted.

[4]

You have to get up early to go to work, so it’s very important to you that you get a good night’s sleep. The bed feels so good. In no time at all you are snoring contentedly away until you are rudely awakened by laughing, loud talking, and raucous music. Your neighbours have thrown a party – again. You have talked to them in the past, on several occasions, about their loud carousing that goes until the wee hours of the morning; and now they did it again. What goes through your mind? How do you feel? What are your thoughts towards them?

How many of you have been angry about something this week? How about in the last three days? What about today?

[5]

**What kinds of things do you get angry at?** When I was working on this sermon and thinking about how to phrase that question I first, wrote, “What kinds of things make you angry?” And then I realized that nobody can actually **make** us angry. We choose to be angry? Have you ever said these words; “You make me so mad!” I have, in the past, in my unsanctified state.

[6]

**The truth is that when we get angry we make a choice to let our emotions rule us** and then some pretty ugly behavior follows the ugliness that was first seeded in our hearts and minds.

That’s what Jesus said in Matthew 15.

[7]

**Matthew 15:19–20 (NLT)**

**<sup>19</sup> For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. <sup>20</sup> These are what defile you.”**

It starts in the heart and flows outward from there and moves to action. That’s where the problem lies. We are a broken people who, when left to our own devices, outside the kingdom, are capable of doing unimaginable things.

[8]

Before we go any further let me just say that **not all anger is wrong**. There is a kind of anger that is good. Remember when Jesus got angry in the Temple? The religious leaders were taking advantage of the poor and selling livestock meant for temple sacrifices for exorbitant prices. They made “God’s house a den of iniquity,” Jesus said. And he got very angry and over turned the tables of the merchants.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://movieclips.com/9WQo-anger-management-movie-rage-on-a-plane/>

Many times in the Old Testament God got angry. The things that God got angry at were sin and injustice. God gets angry when we hurt each other. Those are the kinds of things we should get angry at too. When we hear about the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad ordering the massacre of civilians we should get angry. A sense of justice should well up inside that says, "That is wrong. Something needs to be done to stop this evil tyrant." When we see people being abused we should get angry.

[9]

**The problem is that as broken human beings we are not very good at righteous anger.** When we get angry we tend to say things that are hurtful, or worse. What happens if we let our anger go unrestrained? What is the logical conclusion if don't reign it in? Where will it lead?

You've heard of the term "crime-of-passion." It's when someone gets so angry and loses control and lets anger run its course. The end result is murder. Lawyers use the crime-of-passion excuse to get their client off the hook for murder. They say it was done in the heat of the moment so it doesn't count as murder. It's manslaughter.

Ruth and I went to bible college with a couple that seemed like they had the perfect marriage. They were both very good looking. They got straight A's in all their courses. They seemed to have a great relationship. Everyone at the college looked up to them. Several years after we graduated we found out that the husband strangled his wife in a fit of jealous rage. He got four-and-a-half years for manslaughter. Susan was his second wife. It came out in the trial that he would regularly beat his first wife and many times tried to strangle her.

That's why the Bible has some very strong words to say about anger, and it's why we must allow the Holy Spirit help to gain control of that very dangerous emotion.

[10]

**If left completely unbridled anger will lead to murder.** It's a dangerous emotion that we must surrender to the Holy Spirit. The good news is that it is possible.

Let's read what Jesus says about anger in the Sermon on the Mount and then look at some more Scripture texts about anger.

[11]

**Matthew 5:21-26 (NLT)**

<sup>21</sup> ***"You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.'***

<sup>22</sup> ***But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.***

[12]

<sup>23</sup> ***"So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. <sup>25</sup> 'When you are on the way to court with your adversary, settle your differences quickly. Otherwise, your accuser may hand you over to the judge, who will hand you over to an officer, and you will be thrown into prison. <sup>26</sup> And if that happens, you surely won't be free again until you have paid the last penny.***

As we said last week, each of these sections from verses 21 - 48 represents Jesus raising the bar from what was the norm in regards to the law. Jesus begins each section with, "**You have heard that our ancestors were told...**" in this case, "**You must not murder.**" And five more times in regards to other laws. Each of these laws have to do with relationship. Jesus brings the law past the written code to the heart of the matter.

One of the things that people like using lawyers for is finding loopholes in laws. If our goal is to simply obey the letter of the law like the Pharisees did we will continually try to find loopholes in order to justify ourselves. When we do that we miss the heart of the gospel.

Is the point in relationships to simply not kill each other? I've seen some marriages where the spouses seem to have that as their goal. "If we can just keep from killing each other until the kids are grown up." Relationships are deeper than that. The goal is to learn how to love each other better. The goal of relationships is to learn how to help the other be the best they can be so that each one is mutually growing. And Jesus shows us here that it's not just murder that gets in the way of good relationship. Anger is a deadly disease and it is the root of murder.

This passage could be divided into two parts.

[13]

The first part, from verses 21 and 22 is about the **seriousness** of unbridled anger. Jesus actually equates anger with murder. The reason is that God doesn't just look at outward behaviour. He sees deep down into our hearts.

Here's what James Bryan Smith says in his book, *The Good and Beautiful Life*.

[14]

***“Jesus understands the human heart—and the primary concern, not merely outward actions. The heart full of anger, the heart that hates, is not far from the heart that would murder. In fact, it is essentially the same inner condition. All that is missing is the actual act. Jesus understands that an angry person would actually harm someone if he or she could get away with it.”***<sup>2</sup>

Do you think that’s far fetched? James, the half brother of Jesus said the same thing in the letter he wrote in the New Testament.

[15]

**James 4:1–3 (NLT)**

***<sup>1</sup> What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don’t they come from the evil desires at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You want what you don’t have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can’t get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don’t have what you want because you don’t ask God for it. <sup>3</sup> And even when you ask, you don’t get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.***

Why do we get angry? James says that **we get angry simply because we don’t get what we want.**

[16]

When we get angry we are like little kids throwing a temper tantrum. It’s really quite pathetic. The more mature you are the more control of your anger you will have. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit that the Lord wants to develop in us.

Anger is a serious problem with some people. And I know that some of you here today are feeling very convicted in your hearts right now because you have an anger problem. And it is hurting your relationships. How do I know that? Because you are human like me. I have, in the past, had difficulty controlling my anger. And I still have to be very aware of my emotions and surrender them to the Lord. If I let my guard down I could easily lose control – and sometimes I still do. But, God has done an amazing work in my heart over the years as I’ve allowed him to take control.

[17]

The second part of Jesus’ teaching on anger in Matthew 5 is about **what to do with your anger.** Jesus said, simply, that we need to own our problem. **If you have been wronged, he said, you need to go to that person and reconcile.** Make it right. Don’t let your anger win.

[18]

**It is healthy to express anger.** We need to. **But, we need to do it in a way that honours and respects the other person.** It’s ok to say, “I’m angry. What you did or said to me hurt me.”

[19]

**Ephesians 4:26–27 (NLT)**

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

Did you know that when you let anger take over you are holding yourself captive to Satan and giving him an invitation to use you? That’s what Paul says here. Do not let anger control you. There is a way to express anger that is healthy and a way to express it that is wrong. And it is always wrong to get out of control and let the anger take over. So, express your anger, but do it calmly and respectfully. How the other person responds then is up to them. You can’t **make** them respond positively. You can only do your part and leave the rest to them and to God.

[20]

**Romans 12:17–21 (NLT)**

***<sup>17</sup> Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. <sup>18</sup> Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the LORD. <sup>20</sup> Instead, “If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.” <sup>21</sup> Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.***

[21]

The real issue is one of trust. **When we get angry and take revenge by trying to hurt someone with our words or our actions we are telling God that we don’t trust him to do his job.** It’s God’s job to judge not ours. It is God’s job pay them back, not ours. How does Paul say we should respond to someone who hurts us? Serve them.

[22]

***<sup>20</sup>...“If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.” <sup>21</sup> Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.***

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<sup>2</sup> James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Life*, p. 75

Now, I know this is not natural. It takes a lot of practice. And if you have an anger problem you are going to have to be patient with yourself and ask those who love you to be patient with you because this kind of change doesn't happen over night. But, the first thing you need to do is recognize that you have a problem. Your wife, your husband, your kids, your friends, and colleagues don't deserve to be treated harshly because of your anger.

Learn to slow down your reaction time.

[23]

Stephen Covey said, "**Quality of life depends on what happens in the space between stimulus and response.**" In other words, if someone says something to you that you take offense at there is a small space of time after they say it to when you respond to it. How you respond in that space will determine how the next part goes. If you react without thinking you will likely say or do something you regret. So, what's the solution?

[24]

**Learn to increase the space.** Remember, your mother used to tell you to count to ten. That's good advice. Increase the space and then do the right thing motivated by love.

[25]

**James 1:19–25 (NLT)**

***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. 21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. 22 But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.***

[26]

***23 For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. 24 You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. 25 But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.***

Humble yourself. Look in the mirror of God's Word and let the Holy Spirit speak to your heart. Let the Holy Spirit show you what your motives really are. That means you will need to take some daily quiet time to spend with Jesus and allow him to train you to live the kingdom-kind-of-life.

[27]

James Bryan Smith, in his book *The Good and Beautiful Life*, prescribes a spiritual training exercise to deal with anger.

[28]

***"Keeping the Sabbath is a spiritual exercise that can help us better deal with our anger. This may seem strange because anger and Sabbath keeping do not seem to have much in common. But there is a strong connection. Anger is about unmet expectations and fear.***

[29]

***Sabbath is about trusting God and his ways. As Norman Wirzba notes,***

***Sabbath rest is thus a call to Sabbath trust, a call to visibly demonstrate in our daily living that we know ourselves to be upheld and maintained by the grace of God rather than the strength and craftiness of our own hands. To enjoy a Sabbath day, we must give up our desire for total control. We must learn to live by the generosity of manna falling around us.***

[30]

***Anger is a result of our need to control (unmet expectations) and fear, and the Sabbath teaches us to trust God's strength. Sabbath keeping, therefore, is the perfect exercise to help us deal with anger."***

If you are someone who struggles with anger you need to deal with it. The first thing you need to do is confess it to God. You need to recognize that you have a problem. In a previous ministry there was a woman who, in anger, said something defamatory to another woman in the congregation. I talked with her later and she knew that it was wrong, but what she said next caught me off guard. She said, "I'm sorry. It was out of character."

I said, "No, actually it was in character. You would not have done it if it was out of character. You said those things because that is what was on the inside. You let it come out when you lost control." If I pour a bottle of water out on the stage, water will come out, not Coca-Cola because water is on the inside. We always act from our character when we let our guard down. The rest of the time we are controlling what is there.

[31]

**Matthew 12:33–37 (NLT)**

***33 "A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad. 34 You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say. 35 A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the***

***treasury of an evil heart. <sup>36</sup> And I tell you this, you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. <sup>37</sup> The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you.”***

Those are pretty harsh words, aren't they. The stuff that comes out of us shows us what we are on the inside. And, we will give account on judgement day for every stray word we speak. We need to be very careful with our anger and let the Spirit of Jesus control our thoughts, words and our actions.

The mature person will express their anger, but in a way that is not defamatory. It won't be to hurt the other person. It will always be redemptive, because that is what the Gospel of Jesus does.

If you struggle with anger, the first thing you need to do is surrender control to God. Then you need to go to anyone you have offended with your anger and ask forgiveness. And then learn to become very aware of your thought life and take those thoughts that don't honour God or people captive. Be honest with yourself and with others and let the Spirit of Jesus change you so that the words you use build others up and not tear them down.

God has us here on this earth for relationship, and one hundred percent of our time, energy and resources should be used to make our relationships better between ourselves and others and ourselves and God.



**Dealing with Anger**  
**Matthew 5:21-26**  
**Week of February 23rd, 2014**

**Object of this study:** To allow the Spirit of Jesus to penetrate our hearts so we are aware of how our anger affects all our relationships.

**Worship (5 – 10 minutes)**

1. Spend five minutes in silent prayer asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
2. After the five minutes of silence have someone interrupt the silence and read Psalm 46 meditatively to the group.
3. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

**Welcome (5 – 10 minutes)**

How is anger depicted in movies? (eg. laughable, macho, etc.) Give examples.

**Word (20 – 30 minutes)**

1. What stood out from the sermon for you?
2. Could you relate to the scenarios given at the beginning of the sermon? (waiting for someone who is late, noisy neighbours waking you up at night)  
What feelings rose up in you as these situations were described?  
What's your scenario? ie what kinds of things do you get angry at?

Remember that "not all anger is wrong...The things God gets angry at are injustice and when we hurt each other." When we see these things we should also be moved to do something about it. "The problem is that as broken human beings we are not very good at righteous anger."

In this study we're going to look at what God's desires and plans are for us regarding anger.

3. Read Matthew 5:21-26.

"You have heard that it was said...Do not murder...but I tell you..."

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus takes from five Old Testament laws and raises the bar, getting right to our hearts. Matt. 15:19-20 "From the heart come evil thoughts, murder..." Each of these laws have to do with relationships.

When we're angry, what do we say, think, feel, wish, about the other person?

Why does Jesus consider anger to be so serious? How are anger and murder related? What kinds of things result from unbridled anger? How are even non-murderous expressions of anger damaging? What message do we give people when we are angry with them in unhealthy ways?

In the NLT verse 22 says, "If you are even angry with someone...if you call someone an idiot..." Do you remember angry words spoken to you? What did they do to your spirit?

4. What does Jesus want instead of us giving free rein to our anger at each other?

**a)** See Matt. 5:23-24. What is Jesus saying here? Does the order seem a bit off? Why is Jesus saying reconciliation is so important? See 1 Cor. 13:1-3, John 15:9-12.

**b)** Eph. 4:26-27. What happens when we give free rein to our anger and let it control us?

What does God want for us instead? See James 1:19-20 Normally our anger does not accomplish God's righteous purposes. What would those be --- in our heart? In the other person's heart? See Eph. 4:22-24 and 4:15.

**Work (20 – 30 minutes)**

5. How does the practice of Sabbath keeping "combat" anger?
6. How can we cooperate with God in this kind of transformation?

See James 1:19-20, Rom. 12:17-21. Imagine, what would it look like to not be reactive when offended, to slow down the response time and choose how you're going to respond? What fruit of the Spirit would be involved? (See Gal. 5:22-23.) What kind of power would that give you? How could you use this to overcome evil with good, rather than being overcome by evil?

**"The best revenge is to take the high road and invite the other person to join you there."**

7. How can we express anger in a healthy, mature way?

Sermon quote: **"When we get angry we are like little kids throwing a temper tantrum. The more mature you are the more control of your anger you will have. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit that the Lord wants to develop in us."**

Can you relate? What does immature expression of anger look like?

Another quote: **"It's healthy to express anger. We need to. But we need to do it in a way that honours and respects the other person. It's ok to say 'I'm angry. What you did or said hurt me.' The mature person will express their anger, but in a way that is not defamatory. It won't be to hurt the other person. It will always be redemptive, because that is what the Gospel of Jesus does."**

8. See Leviticus 19:16-18.

Considering all of the above, what would a healthy expression of anger look like?

What would the goal be? What would the message to the other person be? What would the desired outcome be?

Perhaps make a list of adjectives that apply,

eg. Respond:

\*calmly

\*respectfully

\*peacefully

\*kindly

\*with a servant heart

Not:

\*vengefully

etc

9. This week practice identifying the moment between the stimulus you feel angry about and your response.

Identify your feelings. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you. Choose to respond with trust in God and love and respect for the other person.

This will take practice! Be patient with yourself and others!