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Conquering Anger
James 1:19-27
October 18th, 2015, Jeff Germo
[2]

James 1:19–27 (ESV)

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

[3]

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

[4]

²⁶ If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

[5]

Last week we focused on the first two imperatives in the trilogy in verse 19, “***be quick to hear, slow to speak.***” Today we are going to focus on the third, be “***slow to anger.***” This is a hard one for many people. It was very difficult for me for much of my life. I had no idea that my anger was a problem. I grew up in a family that expressed our anger in very unhealthy ways. Whatever we felt on the inside we expressed on the outside - loudly. The type of conflict resolution that was modelled for us was, the loudest person wins. Consequently, I grew up without any idea that the way I expressed my anger was wrong. And it took me years of walking with Jesus before he finally got through to me. **It is not okay to express my anger in ways that are hurtful.**

What happens when I let my anger control me? My heart gets hard. It becomes impenetrable and impervious to the work the Holy Spirit wants to do in me. I close my ears and I can't listen to logic or reason. And somebody always gets hurt. Trust is broken every time anger is expressed in an unhealthy way.

There is a time to be angry of course. We should get angry when we see injustice done. Jesus was angry when religious people were taking advantage of the poor in the Temple. When we listen to the news and see what is happening in Syria we should be angry at that injustice. And that anger that wells up inside us should move us to do something good about it.

Most of the time though, we get angry because our egos have been bruised. Somebody said something that we took offence at, so we want to get even by hurting them back, either in an aggressive way, or in a passive aggressive way where we might give them the cold shoulder.

When that happens authentic dialogue ceases. We posture ourselves so we cannot hear the other person, or God, which is a very serious matter. We dig in our heels, and we want to be heard more than we want to listen.

We tend to justify our anger by saying the other person deserves our wrath because of how *they* treated us. *They* overstepped *my* boundaries and infringed on *my* rights. So, I have every right to hurt them with my anger and my loud voice and caustic words.

[6]

No wonder James says to be ***“slow to anger”***²⁰ ***for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.***

Remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount?

[7]

Matthew 5:21–22 (ESV)

21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 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.

What’s the big deal with anger? Why do James and his brother, Jesus, have such strong words to about it? If I am angry on the inside, shouldn’t I express it? Perhaps, but there is a right way and a wrong way to express your anger.

What happens when we let our anger go unchecked? If we let anger take its natural course, course without reining it in, what will happen? Somebody is going to get hurt, and sometimes seriously.

[8]

The logical conclusion of unchecked anger is murder. We see it all the time in the news.

They call it a crime of passion. Someone gets cheated, or their ego gets bruised, or whatever, and they lose control, and if that anger doesn’t get reined in, the logical conclusion is murder.

Ruthie and I went to Bible college with a couple who seemed like the picture perfect couple. They were both tall and good looking and extremely talented, and way ahead of the class in intelligence. But, behind closed doors, where nobody could see, things were not as they seemed out in the public eye. A few years after college we found out that he had strangled his wife to death in a fit of rage. That’s why Jesus said ***“everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.”***

In Dallas Willard’s book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, he speaks of the danger of unchecked anger quite extensively. Here are a few quotes in which he elaborates on Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount.

[9]

“When we trace wrongdoing back to its roots in the human heart, we find that in the overwhelming number of cases it involves some form of anger. Close beside anger you will find its twin brother, contempt. Jesus’ understanding of them and their role in life becomes the basis of his strategy for establishing kingdom goodness. It is the elimination of anger and contempt that he presents as the first step toward the rightness of the kingdom heart....

[10]

...And when we look carefully at anger we can see why such a strong statement is justified. In its simplest form, anger is a spontaneous response that has a vital function in life. As such, it is not wrong. It is a feeling that seizes us in our body and immediately

impels us toward interfering with, and possibly even harming, those who have thwarted our will and interfered with our life.

[11]

...The primary function of anger in life is to alert me to an obstruction to my will, and immediately raise alarm and resistance, before I even have time to think about it. And if that were all there was to anger, all would be well. Anger in this sense is no sin, even though it is still better avoided whenever possible....

[12]

...Anger indulged, instead of simply waved off, always has in it an element of self-righteousness and vanity. Find a person who has embraced anger, and you find a person with a wounded ego.

...To cut the root of anger is to wither the tree of human evil. That is why Paul says simply, “Lay aside anger” (Col. 3:8).

[13]

Anger is dangerous because it shuts the door of our heart so that we cannot hear reason from other people. Worse yet, we can no longer hear God’s voice and receive the seed of his Word in the soil of our heart. Growth is stunted when we embrace anger. Hence, it does not, as James says, ***produce righteousness.***”

The first murder recorded in the Bible is a case in point. Cain killed Abel. Why? He allowed his anger to overtake his reason. He killed his brother in a fit of jealous rage. Let me fill in the context for you. Genesis 4 tells us that both Cain and Abel brought offerings to God. Abel’s was accepted by God and Cain’s was rejected. We aren’t exactly sure why. The Bible doesn’t tell us. The only thing we can surmise is that there was something wrong with Cain’s heart in giving his offering. Did he give it trying to impress God, or one-up his brother? We don’t know. What we do know is that God rejected it and Cain got mad and pouted. So, God asked him about his attitude.

[14]

Genesis 4:6–7 (NLT)

⁶ “Why are you so angry?” the Lord asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? ⁷ You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”

This is very interesting. God warned Cain. He told him exactly what he had to do with his anger. “I see you are angry,” God said. “Now you have a choice as to how you are going to respond to your anger. ***Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.***”

Every time we are faced with what we think is an infringement on our rights we have a choice to make. God says, at that point, ***“Sin is crouching at the door eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”***

When we embrace our anger as if we are somehow justified in it, it will take over and destroy us and those in our way. That is why unbridled anger is so dangerous.

[15]

“[Be} slow to anger”²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Unchecked anger does not produce the kind of righteousness God wants to produce in us. The kind of life God wants to produce in us is not possible if we cannot master our anger.

[16]

Just think about the fruits of the Spirit: **Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.** That is what the Spirit of God wants to produce in us. If we give in to anger, the door of our heart slams shut so growth is not possible.

Or, what about the way Paul describes unconditional love.

[17]

1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (ESV)

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Are any of those possible if we embrace our anger? Absolutely not! We need to get to the place where we realize that **it is not okay to allow our emotions to control us and express our anger in ways that are hurtful.** And then once we do that we need to **marinate in the vision God has for us**, that our character would be exemplified by the fruit of the Spirit and the love of God.

[18]

Imagine that **your life is continually being videoed**, but the recording stops each time you act in such a way that does not exemplify any one of the nine fruits of the Spirit. So, when you act out in anger and get impatient and use unkind words the video stops and won't continue until you make it right. And every time you lose control in any way the video stops. When you act in any way that does not exemplify love your video stops. Any time you have an unkind thought, the video stops.

[19]

Now imagine that this video was played at your funeral.

How long would it be? Would it be a mini-series, or a feature length film? Or would it be just a short clip? This is a very good thing to think about because Jesus said this in Matthew.

[20]

Matthew 12:36–37 (NLT)

³⁶ ...you must give an account on judgment day for every idle word you speak. ³⁷ The words you say will either acquit you or condemn you."

Your words show what is in your heart, whether you say them out loud, or keep them hidden in your secret thoughts. How many of you have said things in the past that you regret? I think we all have. When we let our anger get the best of us we always lose. And actually, nobody wins. The harsh words that fly out of our mouths in an outburst of anger can be etched in the other person's memory, sometimes leaving deep scars.

[21]

No wonder, James said, ***"[Be} slow to anger"²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.***

So, what's the remedy? Well, firstly, as we already alluded to, you need to come to the place where you realize that the way you express your anger is not okay. And then secondly you need confess to the ones who have been hurt by your anger and ask them to forgive you. And

then ask them to help you. In other words, you need to humble yourself before God and others.

Our natural tendency when confronted with any sin is to do what Adam and Eve did when confronted with theirs. We deflect, blame, or make excuses. I think we've all said something like this. ***"He makes me so mad."*** And when those words come out of our mouths they squeeze through our gritted teeth. Can anyone relate? Sometimes we say things like that to justify our hurtful actions. What we are saying in essence is that she deserved my wrath for what she did to me. I can feel good about my angry words because she hurt me first. "I lost control because she made me mad."

The truth of the matter is nobody has the power to make you mad. Only you have that power. When your anger gets the better of you, you have made a conscious choice to sin. As a matter of fact, the Bible says when you let your anger control you, you make a choice to allow Satan to work through you.

Just this last week I shared something with Ruthie and she wanted to draw me out, which she is always very good at. So, she asked me some questions. The problem is that I broached the topic when I didn't really have time to deal with it. And after she asked me a couple questions I snapped at her, not in a super nasty way, but just enough that she knew by the tone of my voice, I was frustrated. After a few minutes of silence she spoke up and told me how she felt when I did that. I walked over to her and hugged her and told her she didn't deserve that and asked her to forgive me.

And then we talked about how we can better handle situations like that in the future. I could have very politely told her that those were great questions, but I don't have time to deal with them right now and then made arrangements to talk more about it when it would better suit both of us.

Every time we are stimulated to react in a given way we have a choice to make.

[22]

Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master."

I always have a choice. James has very good advice. Slow down.

[23]

Steven Covey says,

"Quality of life depends on what happens in the space between stimulus and response."

So, when I am stimulated to react to something someone has said to me or done to me, my natural inclination is to react immediately. Sometimes there is a millisecond of time between stimulus and response. James says the secret is to expand that space.

[24]

"[Be] slow to anger"²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Slow down. Your mother told you to count to ten. She was right. Increase that space and then make a conscious choice to do the right thing.

Here's what Paul said:

[25]

Ephesians 4:26–27 (ESV)

²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.

That's a pretty scary thought isn't it. When we let our anger control us and use our words to be hurtful and tear somebody down we unconsciously make a choice to work with Satan, the enemy of our souls, the accuser of the brethren, our adversary. We don't realize just how dangerous anger is when it is embraced. It will destroy us and others and when that happens we are in cahoots with Satan, the enemy of our souls.

Notice, Paul does not say anger is a sin. He simply says to deal with your anger. The implication is, of course, to deal with it in a way that is redemptive. It's okay to tell someone you are angry. Just don't hurt them with your anger. Don't harden your heart.

That leads us to the solution to the problem of how to deal with our anger.

James continues,

[26]

James 1:19–27 (ESV)

²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

James says we are to posture ourselves with “**meekness**”. Our hearts need to be soft, pliable, humble and ready to hear and obey the Word of God.

And then, as we noted last week, we need to get quiet enough so we are in a position to hear what God is saying. This means we need to get into his Word and meditate on it, in a calm undistracted way.

We cannot hear God if our lives are always busy and distracted. It's impossible. That's why Jesus frequently went away by Himself to pray. Sometimes God speaks to us through his people. And again, we need to actively listen and then evaluate whether or not what they are saying is from God. The temptation of course when we are confronted is to get defensive and angry. And if that happens our hearts will harden and God's Word will not penetrate. So, whatever you do, the most important thing is that your heart stays soft.

I don't think there is anyone here who hasn't said something they regret. We are all in the same boat. The good news is that we can all get better at this. None of us has to stay where we are at. If you struggle with anger, you can give it to God and let him heal you. I have seen this over and over. I have seen some very angry people transformed by the power of Jesus and become gentle, loving people who are a joy to be around.

If you are sitting here this morning and feeling guilt and shame because of how you have allowed your anger to hurt others, there is hope for you in Jesus.

[27]

1. The first thing you need to do is come to the place where you realize that **it is not okay to let your anger get the upper hand.**

[28]

2. Second, you need to **ask forgiveness from God and from the ones you have hurt.**

[29]

3. Third, you need to **ask for help, from God and from the ones you've hurt**. You need to know that you cannot do this alone.

You may need to get professional help from a qualified Christian counsellor, or join a program like Freedom Session. We have sixty people in Freedom Session right now. God is giving them healing and freedom from all kinds of things that destroy relationships, including anger. There is no shame in asking for help. You are worth it. And your relationships are worth it. Nobody deserves to be hurt by our anger.

In closing I would like to read a few verses from Proverbs. Listen to these and let the Word of God pierce your heart and give healing.

[30]

Proverbs 15:1 (NLT)

¹ A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.

[31]

Proverbs 15:18 (NLT)

¹⁸ A hot-tempered person starts fights; a cool-tempered person stops them.

[32]

Proverbs 14:29 (NLT)

²⁹ People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.

[33]

Proverbs 12:16 (NLT)

¹⁶ A fool is quick-tempered, but a wise person stays calm when insulted.

[34]

Proverbs 12:18 (NLT)

¹⁸ Some people make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise bring healing.

[35]

Proverbs 19:11 (NLT)

¹¹ Sensible people control their temper; they earn respect by overlooking wrongs.

[36]

Proverbs 20:3 (NLT)

³ Avoiding a fight is a mark of honor; only fools insist on quarreling.

[37]

Proverbs 29:11 (NLT)

¹¹ Fools vent their anger, but the wise quietly hold it back.

[38]

Psalms 37:8 (NLT)

⁸ Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper— it only leads to harm.

[39]

James 1:19–27 (ESV)

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.



Conquering Anger
James 1:19-27
Week of October 18th, 2015

Objective of this study: To learn how to conquer your anger.
[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
2. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read Psalm 37:1-9 **in the NLT** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.
3. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.

Welcome (5 – 10 minutes)

How did it go this past week listening to God?...listening to others in your conversations?

Word/Work (60-90 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read James 1:19-27
 1. What jumps out at you from this passage?
 2. What's the relationship between humility and anger. (v.21)
3. Why is anger so dangerous? Read Genesis 4:1-9; Psalm 37:8
4. James says man's anger does not produce the righteousness God would like to see in his people. What *DOES* God want to produce in us and how is it impossible when we embrace our anger? Refer to Ephesians 4:15-16; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; Galatians 5:22-23.

Sermon Quote: **"We need to get to the place where we realize that it is not okay to express our anger in ways that are hurtful. And then once we do that we need to marinate in the vision God has for us, that our character would be exemplified by the fruit of the Spirit and the love of God."**

Sermon Quote: **"Anger is dangerous because it shuts the door of our heart so that we cannot hear reason from other people. Worse yet, we can no longer hear God's voice and receive the seed of his Word in the soil of our heart. Hence, it does not, as James says, *produce righteousness*."**

Sermon Quote: **"What happens when I let my anger control me? My heart gets hard. It becomes impenetrable. I close my ears and I can't listen to logic or reason. And somebody always gets hurt. Trust is broken every time anger is expressed in an unhealthy way."**

5. Read the attached Proverbs. Which ones twig with you and why? If you have a large group break into smaller groups or pairs for this question and then regroup to share highlights.

Proverbs 15:1 (NLT)

¹ A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.

Proverbs 15:18 (NLT)

¹⁸ A hot-tempered person starts fights; a cool-tempered person stops them.

Proverbs 14:29 (NLT)

²⁹ People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.

Proverbs 12:16 (NLT)

¹⁶ A fool is quick-tempered, but a wise person stays calm when insulted.

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Psalms 37:8 (NLT)

⁸ Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper— it only leads to harm.

James 1:19–27 (ESV)

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

6. Brainstorm about some healthy responses you can choose when you are angry instead of reacting in ways that are hurtful. For example: Using kind words; active listening; probing for understanding; clearly stating your desires without contempt; etc.

7. Let's Practice — Again

Break up into pairs and have one person ask the other if they struggled with anger about anything in the last week and how they dealt with it.

The person asking the question will listen and then ask one or two more clarifying questions to gain understanding. Remember not to give advice, diagnose, label, or interrupt. Resist the temptation to tell how it relates to you. It is not your story. It's the other person's.

After you do this ask how you can pray for the other person and then do it. Regroup and share your experience.