

### How to Get Angry Without Sinning

I have been doing a series that I have called The Facts About Your Feelings to try to address the different emotions that we all experience from a biblical perspective. So last week I talked about depression and what the Bible teaches about depression. We talked about anxiety and next week Danny is going to talk about romantic love—a talk, which I am sure, is going to get a PG rating. We try to tackle these kinds of subjects here at the Vineyard because this is where we live. And I want to help provide you with biblical guidance for your life.

In addition, I do want to help you to be able to discern and evaluate the counsel that you are receiving from friends, family members, professional therapists and even from Christian counselors. When you have a problem, everyone you talk to has an opinion. Just because someone has a degree on their wall or is a Christian counselor doesn't mean that their counsel is necessarily reflective of God's thoughts. So as much as possible in this series we have tried to stay close to the text of scripture, remembering as Isaiah the Prophet said, "God's thoughts are not our thoughts. And God's ways are not our ways. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are God's ways higher than our ways and God's thoughts higher than our thoughts."

There is a great amount of material that is out there in the market place, supposedly from a Christian point of view, that really is just a thin veneer of spiritual language covering the particle board of American secular thinking in the 90's. I want to help you to distinguish between veneer Christianity and the real deal. The real oak that contains God's thoughts all the way through.

I don't know if there is a topic we could cover that is more confusing not only personally, but also biblically, than the topic of anger. The personal side of anger is confusing because anger wears a mask that we don't recognize. See, it comes to us in a disguised form where we have to be told, "That's anger." So many folks have a stereotype that says that if I am not screaming or yelling or openly complaining then I am not angry. But you don't have to punch the wall, kick doors, or scream and yell, or throw a tantrum. You don't have to have an explosive volcanic temper in order to be angry. You might just be irritated because a person was insensitive or incompetent. You aren't angry when they ruin your shirt at the cleaners. You are irritated. Or maybe you are frustrated because something that you want has been denied you.

Husbands, you want to become romantic with your wife in the evening and she doesn't want to, you aren't angry, are you?

Your boss doesn't listen to your good ideas, but listens to the ideas of others that are stupid, you aren't angry, are you? It is just frustrating.

You're late for an appointment and you are caught in traffic. Anger? Not, me...never.

It is frustrating to sit in traffic. Anger has so many disguises – critical comments and critical thoughts mask anger. Complaining about a person behind their back. Avoiding people or unpleasant circumstances because we are upset with them. Speaking in really harsh tones. Withdrawing from someone. Procrastinating on jobs you don't like.

Sure, it is the case that screaming at someone is one way that anger is displayed. But lots of people display anger simply by being icy. Is something wrong, honey? NO. Why do you think something is wrong? Well, I don't know, call me intuitive – your tone of voice sounds a little hard. And when you were chopping vegetables in the kitchen a few minutes ago with that cleaver, you seemed to be really getting into that chopping. And then there was that incident this morning where you backed your car over my clothes while I was still in them. I don't know, maybe I have read you wrong.

Certainly, part of the confusion of anger is that it is the rarest family that models anger in a healthy biblical way. If you think back on the home you grew up in and how anger was shown, the vast majority of us will see that the way anger was handled in our homes was thoroughly unbiblical. In the home that I grew up in, anger was openly displayed by shouting and fistfights, screaming and yelling. No one ever said they were sorry. There was never any closure brought or an attempt to bring healing. I hated the fighting. And growing up in a home like that I learned how to withdraw, to pull away for the purpose of self-protection.

Some families go to the opposite extreme and anger is always suppressed even though there is a high level of upset in the home. Every one has to learn to stuff it

because no one ever crosses Dad. Mom never crosses Dad and the kids, if they have a contrary thought, they are treated as rebels and renegades. You are sent to your room for a week. The demands for parental respect are so extreme that it is never balanced with the complimentary scripture in Ephesians 6:4, which says, "Father, do not exasperate your children." Yes, Dads and Moms, you need to teach your children to respect you, to not sass you, to not always have a snotty comeback to everything you say. Yes, raise the bar of respect in your home. But make sure that when you do that you don't choke off all legitimate discussion or disagreements. There must be an outlet for your children to express strong emotion, because otherwise you might be sinning against your children by exasperating them.

And in some families, especially those where anger cannot be openly displayed, people quickly learn how to become what psychologists call "passively aggressive." The term passive aggression simply means that you are angry with someone, you want to get even with them – that's the aggressive part of it; but you don't display your anger openly, straight-forwardly. You don't speak to them about your frustration. You don't become vulnerable in your expressions. That is where the word passive comes in.

So how would someone who has learned to mask their anger with passive aggressive behavior act? Really sweet and nice to your face and then kill you behind your back. Making agreements with you about how work is to be done to your face and then going and doing whatever they want to do, chalking it up to "I have to keep the boss happy, but I am still going to do whatever I want to do." Procrastinating. Yeah, I will work on the project...later...in my own sweet time. Or I will do it poorly.

I will do it, but I will give you half effort. I will do it, but I will leave out five or ten of the key details.

Anger wears so many masks and disguises. And some of them have such a lack of integrity. There is such a lack of truthfulness. We become deceived in both interpreting our own anger and interpreting the anger of others because anger could be the smile on the face and the knife in the back; or it could be in myself even manifested in depression.

And not only is anger confusing because it wears too many masks, but it is confusing biblically. As we are going to see, sometimes we are commanded to get angry. In the passage that we are going to look at today, the apostle Paul says, “Be angry.” There are times we are going to find in the Bible when if you don’t get angry, you are sinning against God. Anger is both commanded and commended. Think about this with me. Who is the angriest person in the Bible? Of all the personalities in the Bible, who is the angriest? God. When we studied the emotions of God just a few weeks ago, one of the emotions that I covered was anger. The Bible speaks a great deal about God’s wrath, God’s white-hot anger. If you want to get some feel for the anger of God, just begin reading the book of Revelations. You will read about seven bowls of God’s wrath poured out on the earth in ch. 16 of the book of Revelation. You read about the winepress of God’s wrath in ch. 14 of Revelation. The person in the Bible who gets the angriest is God.

As one biblical scholar put it, Christian faith isn’t a conviction that God’s anger doesn’t exist, that there is no eternal judgment. Christian faith is not choosing to believe that God doesn’t get angry. Christian faith is the conviction that we can be

rescued from the anger of God through faith in the blood of Christ. Christian faith is not that God's anger doesn't exist, it is that you can be delivered from the anger of God. You can be saved and not come under the anger of God by trusting in Christ and receiving him into your life.

Sometimes in the Bible anger is commanded and commended. It is a myth that to become more Christ-like would mean that you would never get angry. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, drove merchants out of the Temple screaming, "Zeal for my Father's house consumes me." He kicked over the tables of the moneychangers and bodily picked people up and threw them out.

God and Jesus get angry at what hurts people. They get angry when people are abused. They are angry when we have no heart for the weak.

But sometimes anger is not only not commanded, it is condemned. Anger shows up along with lust and witchcraft as a work of the flesh. In fact, if you look at the various listings of sin in the New Testament almost always you see anger on the list of sins. Sometimes God says I want you to get angry. You need to be angry. And sometimes God says that you are sinning by being angry. Sometimes God commends a person in the Bible for getting angry, like Moses, and sometimes the same person is condemned. And because Moses got angry, he doesn't enter the Promised Land.

Anger is so confusing to us not only because it wears so many masks, but because the Bible has very mixed reviews regarding anger. Commanding it sometimes, condemning it at other times; calling it righteous on some occasions, and sinful on others. And even then, regarding righteous anger, calling it sinful when it

is expressed sinfully. It is no wonder that our heads spin. Today, I want to help you navigate through the white waters of the scriptures and the white waters of your emotions in a talk that I have titled, "How to Get Angry Without Sinning." Let's Pray.

I am looking at Ephesians 4:26-27 where Paul writes, "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."

Now, this translation is weak in that first phrase, "In your anger do not sin." It is better translated, "Be angry." It is God's divine approval, indeed, God's command that on certain occasions you are to be angry.

We see anger in God. We see anger in Jesus. The apostle commands us that there are times to be angry. It is entirely appropriate and right for us to feel anger at certain times over certain things. It is part of God's image in us.

You say, "Well, what is the purpose in anger? Why should I ever get angry?"

Let's spin this in a couple of different directions. Anger is the emotional response God gives after we make moral decisions. Some things are wrong. Anger is God's reaction to sin. It is always God's reaction to every sin. To be a moral person means that you oppose what is wrong. That you never find yourself on the side of justifying sin or minimizing sin, rationalizing sin away. You never find yourself on the side of saying that this particular sin is OK for this and that reason. Being a moral person involves the ability to make moral distinctions like, "This is wrong." It is the ability to draw lines.

But God wants more than an intellectual decision about morals. Oh yes, intellectually I say that this is wrong and this is right. God calls us to be emotionally

involved in morals, not just intellectually involved, not just to check a box. He wants you to be passionately moral, emotionally moral. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Psalm 97:10, "You that love the Lord hate evil." Here are the two strongest emotions that come together that make a moral person love and hate. Love the Lord means hating evil. The person who says that they love God by definition must say I am a person who hates what God hates. Because I love God, I hate what offends God. Because I love God, I hate what grieves God. I hate what disappoints God. I hate what is opposed to God. I hate rebellion against God. There is a passion in the moral person. Let me ask you a personal question. Those of you who say you love God, do you hate evil? Do you hate the sin you find in yourself? Do you hate the sin that you find in your kids' lives? The sin that has invaded your marriage or your dating relationship?

And to spin it slightly differently, I would say that love and righteous anger are two sides of the same coin. Because you love someone you really desire their best and you hate, you become angered, at what robs them of being their best. You could be so much more than that, you feel. Because I love you I get angered by everything that makes you function at less than an optimal level. I hate your self-destruction. I hate your drinking or drug use. A person who loves says I hate the fact that you are hanging with a person who is dragging you down. I hate your disobedience to God. I hate the fact that you are not giving God access.

One way to think about anger is that it is wounded love. God never stops being loving when he is angry. Indeed, God's anger is often the way that he loves. In his loving anger he sometimes disciplines people to remove from their life all the stuff



that he knows kills them. In his loving anger he sometimes puts us through a process of pain; the pain of broken relationships, the pain of losing jobs, the pain of illness, so that he might have the opportunity to gain more of us and love us back to health, love us back to wholeness.

Here is the problem in America today. Very few people are able to display righteous anger anymore because very few people love intensely anymore. There is a dullness, a blunting, and an inability to get angry over sin. I believe it is in large measure a blunting, a dullness, and an inability on the part of many Americans to passionately love. A few verses earlier, in v. 19 of ch. 4, the apostle Paul has this little phrase regarding the Gentiles. He says, "Having lost all sensitivity..." literally because they are past feeling – that's how I would describe the US in the 1990's. We are a culture past feeling. There is a callousness over our hearts, an inability to react, to say, "This is just wrong. One and a half million abortions, 1 out of 2 kids raised in single parent families, 50% of marriages ending in divorce. This particular thing really makes me angry." As a culture, we are so steeped in sin, unfortunately, that sometimes we are not even aware, we are past feeling, past being conscious of the fact that what we are saying and doing is morally offensive.

Someone sent me a series of real letters that had been sent to Dear Abby. One of the letters read this way, "Dear Abby, I am really confused. I have been on the pill for 3 years. I consider myself to be a knowledgeable, liberated woman. My problem is this, how do I bring up the issue of splitting the cost of the pill with my boyfriend, since I don't know him well enough to talk with him about money?"

In Jeremiah 8 the prophet Jeremiah talks about the horrible condition that Israelite society had fallen into in his day. Jeremiah says with great sadness and anger, "You the people of God have forgotten how to blush. You are able to sin openly without blushing." He is saying the same thing Paul says. You are past feeling. You are incapable of being ashamed. You are not shocked. You have that been there, done that kind of cynical attitude. You look at yourself and say, "Sin is to be expected."

As you grow in Christ's likeness, the reaction that God wants you to have toward sin, sin in someone else and sin in yourself, is loving anger. God wants to share his heart with you and his heart toward sin is always the same – loving anger. When you are walking in the Spirit, your natural reaction to sin will be loving anger.

Let's make this personal. When would God say to you, "Be angry. Shake off your moral dullness. Stop being a get-along, play-along kind of person. Let's draw a line here. Let's say enough is enough." When would God say to you, you need to be angry, friend?

How about when your spouse is battling with one of your children and you hear one of your children being blatantly disrespectful to your spouse, just sassing her? You know that snotty tone, "I am just not going to do it. I don't need to listen to you." Whether it comes out that overtly or it is just a tone of voice, instead of shrugging your shoulders and saying, "Well, that is not my fight. Keep me out of it. I don't want to get in the middle of this. I am just reading the paper. I am Mr. Nice Guy. I don't fight with the kids." God would say, "Parent, be angry."

If you are a single parent and you are worn out by a child who is stronger willed than you and who is pushing you around, who is just disrespectful, who you know is doing things that are wrong, God says, "Parent, be angry. Draw the line. Enough is enough."

You have a friend who claims to be a Christian and who is contemplating divorce although they have no biblical grounds. They are just unhappy with their marriage. It is unsatisfying. You read in the Bible from the book of Malachi where it says, "'I hate divorce,' says God" and the anger of the Lord fills your heart because of a sin that would absolutely separate that person from God. Toward a sin that makes that person so much less than they could have been in God. Toward a sin that denies the reconciling power of Christ. Toward a sin that injures the reputation of Christ. Instead of shrugging and saying, "I will support you whatever the case," God says, "Christian friend, be angry."

Your husband has an addiction which is destroying his relationship with God or is hurting his relationship with you or is destroying his relationship with the kids, he is addicted to being on the computer every night for hours on end. He wanders up to bed at 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. You know he has a secret addiction to pornography. A secret addiction to alcohol or drug use. Instead of "Well, I am going to just settle for less," God says, "Christian wife, be angry."

In v. 15 the apostle Paul says, "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ." There are some people who are really good with truths, but lose love along the way. There are some people who seem to be really good with love, but who lose truth along the way. Being angry

about what wounds people, what robs them of their potential, what robs you of your potential is a way that truth and love come together. Righteous anger is always both loving and truthful.

Now the Bible immediately goes on after telling us to be angry by adding this word of caution, “Do not sin.” Be angry and then immediately, do not sin. There is obviously this fine line that we are called to walk. There is this distinction that the Bible draws between righteous and unrighteous, legitimate and sinful anger, and the Proverbs says to us that one of the major differences between the wise person and the foolish person is that the wise person has learned how to distinguish between righteous anger and unrighteous anger. A mark of wisdom in the Bible has a great deal to do with how you handle anger. You are a wise person if you get angry about the right things and you don’t get angry about the wrong things. You are a wise person if you process your anger in the right way. You are a fool if you get angry about what is not sin and if you don’t process your anger in a Holy Spirit controlled way. The line of demarcation between the wise person and a fool in the Bible is: how do you deal with anger? There is such a thing as sinful anger. Sinful anger is getting angry about what is not sin. Getting angry because you have been lied to, getting angry because there is abuse, getting angry because there is infidelity, getting angry because of injustice or corruption in the government or support for a partial birth abortion – all of that is righteous anger. Because you are getting angry about sin.

But you know what unrighteous anger is? Unrighteous anger is getting angry about what is not sin. Unrighteous anger is always characterized by frustrated

wants and unbelief toward God. Most people get angry most of the time because their wants are frustrated and they don't believe that God will meet their needs. Frustrated wants and unbelief are at the bottom of most unrighteous anger.

Why did the Israelites in the desert continually grumble, which is just a mask for anger, why did they constantly complain? Well, the Bible doesn't leave us any doubt about it. The Israelites didn't get what they wanted. And they didn't believe that God was good enough or loving enough, wise enough or kind enough to give them what they needed. See, the people of God in the books of Exodus and Numbers are continually getting angry because of frustrated wants and unbelief. They wanted meat, cucumbers, melons, and garlic that they used to eat in Egypt. They complained because of the food – frustrated wants. Miriam and Aaron were angry because Moses was chosen to be God's spokesman and Moses got the status and Moses had the spotlight. So they complained – frustrated wants. I want the status of that guy. And they displayed unrighteous anger.

When the Israelites were threatened by their enemies, they complained. They didn't believe that God would provide. That God would protect. That God would defend them. Unbelief. Unrighteous anger.

When the Israelites were hemmed in by the Red Sea and they couldn't figure out a way across or through, it seemed like an obstacle that was too great for them. They complained. Unbelief. Unrighteous anger.

Now let's apply this to you and to me. How often is it that our irritations, frustrations, complaints, all the thousand and one ways that we mask our anger with passive aggressive behavior, sulking depression, withdrawal, coldness – how often

is it that at the bottom of our anger is one of two things: frustrated wants or unbelief? You want to become a wise person. When you find yourself irritated or frustrated or complaining or gossiping or hurt or upset or procrastinating about a task or getting resentful or fantasizing about getting revenge, why not stop and ask yourself this question: why am I so angry? We want to be wise. We want to become Christ-like. Stop. In the middle of your anger, stop and say, "Why am I so angry?" So many Christians live with so little self-reflection. We drift with our emotions, irritations, and frustrations – call it what you will, it is anger, unrighteous anger. That walk into sin unless we stop and say, "Why am I so angry?"

The bottom line as to why we are so angry very often is frustrated wants and unbelief. We wanted a job promotion and it didn't come. It was given to someone else. We wanted to get home and the highway was clogged. We wanted to have a good night sleep and the baby cried all night. We want a spouse that is successful and thin and romantic and our spouse is none of those or just one of those. We want ourselves to be successful, popular and good-looking, and we are none of the above or just one of the above and so we are angry. You desire a ministry opportunity and the door is closed to you. Frustrated wants.

And unbelief. You look at the way life is turning out for you and it seems that the deck is stacked against you. Your marriage is not satisfying. Your husband or wife is not the spiritual person you want them to be. You are still single and you want to be married. Where does unbelief come into unrighteous anger? You stop believing that God is willing to be good to you whether your situation changes or not. You stop believing that your life is going to be a blessed life, if you just trust God and

obey him and don't sin. You stop believing that God will provide and you think that you have to make your own way. I have to fend for myself even if it involves disobeying God.

Paul says, "Be angry. But don't sin." When you see yourself getting irritated or angry, putting up walls between you and another person, putting up walls between you and God, you stop. You say to yourself, "Why am I so angry?" And then with openness before God, you honestly acknowledge to him, "God, I am angry because of a frustrated want. I wanted the home cleaned up before I came home and it wasn't. I am angry because life hasn't turned out the way I hoped it would. By this point, I thought I would have this much money or this status or this job. I am angry because I really haven't trusted you to be good to me. Because I don't believe your word when it says that the plans you have for me are good. They are plans to bless me and not to hurt me. They are plans to give me a future and a hope."

Unrighteous anger is also shown in the loss of self-control. When Paul says to be angry, but don't sin, I think he is particularly talking about the sinful response of losing control, losing our tempers, or displaying righteous anger about sin in an unrighteous way. I don't know how many of you have a problem with your temper. You may want to talk with the person who lives with you and say, "Honey, roommate, do I have a problem with my temper?"

Now if you have a problem with losing your temper, you might want to read through the book of Proverbs. Very often as I said before, the book of Proverbs notes that a person who loses their temper is called a fool. I have found that often because I don't let some of my other emotions get expressed – that because I don't

express sadness or hurt, the only emotion that gets expressed is anger. I think this is true for many men. We have so narrowed the range of what we allow ourselves to express emotionally that it gets channeled into a short fuse called anger. And if we find ourselves with short fuses the Bible calls us fools. Scripturally we are called as Christians to manifest in our lives the fruit of the Holy Spirit, namely self-control. And scripturally the book of Titus tells us that God's grace will be shown in our lives as we exercise self-control. The more that you are able to direct and manage your anger, the wiser you are. The more like God you are. God is self-restrained. The Bible says over and over again that God is a God who is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. He is not at all quick tempered. He is the opposite of a person with a short fuse. God has a very, very, very long fuse. He is incredibly patient with people. Aren't you glad for that, that God's fuse is very long? I certainly am. The Bible always describes God not only as being loving, but being slow to anger and having tremendous self-control.

God's long fuse will eventually burn down with this planet. There is coming a day of judgment when this earth will have so provoked God and our sins have risen to the point when judgment will come. But it takes a huge amount of provocation. And we, friends, are to have long fuses. If you have a short fuse and are given to outbursts of anger and rapid rises in temper, you need to ask God for the trait of self-control. You need to read through the book of Proverbs and underline all the verses that are about being quick tempered. You need to control yourself even when you display anger. Proverbs 17:14 says, "The beginning of strife is like letting out water, stop contention before it starts." You get into it with another person and



pretty soon the dam breaks and you are saying things that you later regret. The words you use can deeply wound a person you love.

How many of you can still remember the sting of words spoken to you by angry parents? How many of us have been wounded by thoughtless words or insensitive words spoken by a wife or husband or brother or sister?

I am so glad that God gives the quick-tempered person hope for change. God can strengthen your will. Those of you whose wills have been continually eroded by constantly giving in to your temper, I want to give you a word of hope that God can transform you. You do not need to walk around seething with rage. I am not talking about stuffing your emotions. I am talking about transforming your emotions. As you continually choose to confess frustrated wants to God, and disavow your right to one of your wants, as you continually choose to repent against unbelief toward God, as you continually ask God to control what comes out of your mouth, to control by the power of the Holy Spirit your temper, as you ask God to lengthen your fuse, to make you more like him and slow to anger – he will do that.

Let me underline this point for you. In giving you hope, those of you who are quick-tempered, those of you who find yourselves losing self-control often, those of you who say things that you shouldn't say or react in ways that you are ashamed of later, let me give you hope by telling you that anger is something that you are choosing.

You say, "How does that give me hope?"

I believe that one of the great lies regarding our emotions that the enemy uses is that they are not something that we choose. Our emotions just come over us like a

power or a wave and we are helpless to do anything about it. Now I know it is what it feels like with anger. That it feels like this power overwhelms you; that it is not you choosing to do something, but something in you that needs to leap out. But the Bible never addresses you that way. The Bible says that you can choose. That anger is something that you do. That you can either give ground or not. The Bible never says that you just have to get it out and vent, take a pillow, draw your mom's face on it and then beat it with a baseball bat. Get it out and you will feel better. The Bible always says, "No, friend, choose to subdue. Choose to be under the Spirit's control. Choose to have this erosion of your will healed by God so that you can direct anger where you want it to go toward the appropriate issues and in the appropriate way."

Now Paul adds another limit on anger. He not only tells us not to sin with our anger, but he says, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." Make sure that even if you have righteous anger, that it stays with you for a limited duration. It is interesting that with God he is slow to get angry. He has a very long fuse. But he is very quick to get over it. That's what Psalm 30:5 says, "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime. Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." God is very, very slow to anger and very quick to get over his anger. He doesn't nurse a grudge. His heart longs to show favor. Paul says there needs to be a time limit on your anger. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.

Here's the deal, friends. Unlike God, many of us are quick to get angry and very slow to get over it. We love to lick our wounds. We nurse hurts and grudges for years and years and years. Why do we do that? Why do we nurse grudges? Why do we repeat to ourselves offenses and rehearse conversations that we are going to

have or that we did have month after month and year after year? Why don't we listen to Jesus when he says, "Quickly settle matters."? Or to Paul who says, "Don't let the sun go down, a day's duration is enough."?

Let me suggest two reasons why you and I are so slow to give up our anger. One reason is because being angry protects us from further hurt. So long as you are angry toward your ex-spouse, they can't hurt you anymore. So long as you put up a wall of anger toward your mother, father, spouse or co-worker, you have safely protected yourself from their hurt. The problem is that your wall of anger constructed against another person always walls you off from God. Think about what the Lord's Prayer calls us to pray every day. "Father, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." You have a wall of anger between you and a parent, wherever that wall is up, God can't get through to you. You have lost touch with God. You have a wall of anger up against a spouse. Wherever that wall is, God can't get through to you. See, you are safe and protected from another person by maintaining anger, that's true. But the very same anger that protects you, keeps you cut off from God. If you want God's presence fully in your life, you must forgive every person and every action that has made you angry.

Now there is a second reason why we nurse anger. Frankly, the reason why we don't give it up is because we like it. There is something enjoyable about being angry. And if you think that I am wrong about it, reflect on how often you have heard someone rehearse the details of how they lashed back at another person. Listen to people tell stories of their anger and you just see the relish, the enjoyment, the sheer thrill of being angry as they retell the story to a friend. He said this, but I

said and I just...I went after him...I had just had it. There is something real enjoyable about getting back or getting even. Listen to guys talk about fights that they have had in the past. They get better with the telling, but that anger that they felt...and then I just punched him out... Think about how many times you replay a tape of some hurt you suffered and how often you might fantasize about getting even. Instead of fantasies of revenge, how about forgiving? Give the anger over to God.

The Bible says that nursed anger is self-destructive. One writer I read said that when you nurse your anger you create arthritis of the soul. What a description. Arthritis of the soul. Surely you have met people who have harbored bitterness, who have nursed anger and resentments. Maybe it is someone in your family – an older person who never learned how to give up their anger, who never learned that anger needs to be short in duration and that at the end of the day you go before God and say, “God, paint the blood of Jesus Christ all over this.” Maybe you have met people in your family shriveled up inside, unable now because they have arthritis of the soul, unable to really love, cut off from brothers, sisters, parents, and children. Isolated and lonely and bitter.

Marlene has often quoted this verse, “Do not let the sun go down on your anger” to me especially between us. We haven’t always succeeded. There are times when I have gone to bed mad and have chosen not to talk. But there have been other times where we have said, “No, we aren’t going to do that. We want the kind of marriage in which things get resolved, where we talk things out.” We were able to move on from our hurt. We are able to hope for the future and our relationship.

Paul says that if you don't give up your anger and turn it over to God, if you don't let it go, if you don't forgive, you are giving the devil an opportunity. Do not give the devil an opportunity. Don't give the devil an opening, a foothold, an open door. Don't give him access to you by holding dark anger inside.

Why does the devil have an opportunity through anger to access us? Well, when you hold anger inside, your spirit very quickly becomes like that of the devil. It's virtually impossible to nurse a grudge without getting proud, without feeling like I am better than this other person. It is virtually impossible to stay angry with someone without lifting yourself above them and the pride and judgment and criticalness that comes from nursed anger is really the spirit of the devil. You are saying, "Satan, I want to share your spirit. I don't want to share the Spirit of Jesus, a merciful spirit, a humble spirit, a forgiving spirit, a clean spirit – no, I want to share your spirit, a proud spirit, a self-righteous spirit, a spirit which lifts me up over someone else."

Why does Satan have access to the angry person? Because a person who nurses anger by definition is not forgiving. And when we don't forgive, we grieve the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of mercy and forgiveness.

There is a story told about D.L. Moody, a great American evangelist, who was once preaching in a certain town. He said it was like he was beating the air. There was no impact from his preaching. No one was getting saved. There was no sense of God's presence. He went back to his room and prayed about the powerlessness of the meeting and he felt like God spoke to him and said, "There is someone here with great unforgiveness. And because of the unforgiveness that was present, the Spirit

of God was grieved and so he wasn't blessing the meeting." He shared that and immediately one of the leaders of the church got up and ran out of the room. There was a great commotion that started in the room and that church leader came back and said, "Mr. Moody, your words shot me through the heart. I have great unforgiveness toward another leader here in the church and I just had to go before God and repent." Moody said that the results of that repentance was a release of the presence of the Holy Spirit in that place.

Ending with a positive note, I believe that you and I have a choice regarding who has access to our spirits, to have access to our families, who has the right to walk around in our lives and in this church – the devil or God. You can say, "Satan [each one of you], I want to give you access to this church. I want to give you access to my life. I want to give you access to my children, my family, and my friends by opening the door wide to sinful anger." If you are unwilling to be angry about what is sin, if you are unwilling to draw moral distinctions, you give Satan access and the devil has a foothold in that area. If you are unwilling to control your temper, unwilling to allow the Spirit of God to subdue your temper, if you are committed to hold on to your anger, to that degree the devil continues to have access to you.

On the other hand, if you say to God, "God, I want you to have as much access to me as you can possibly have. I want you to be able to get through to me. I want to be Christ-like and have this church be Christ-like and full of the Spirit. I want my family to be as Christ-like and full of the Spirit as we can possibly be. Then you are going to ask God to make you a person who is passionate about what is right and what is wrong. Ye that love the Lord, hate evil. Be angry when you should be angry,

but don't sin. Be self-controlled. Be long tempered. Be very quick to get over your anger. The Spirit of God has sway over your life.