

The Ruin of Anger

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Proverbs 14-12 says, There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death. There's a way that seems to be right, but in the end leads to death.

In Matthew 7, Jesus says, There is a way that you can walk down, that will lead you to life. Enter through the narrow gate. Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life.

So we're having a break from our big series, working through the whole Bible, looking for Christ in Scripture, and we're in a series called Roads to Ruin.

And that's why we have a bit of a backdrop that's different, that's representing the roads, the gateways, the doorways of Genesis. There was a doorway to walk down in obedience and not take the fruit.

It wasn't an apple necessarily, but that's the image we have at the back, the forbidden fruit, the apple. There's another doorway that led to death. And so we know what happened there.

Christ, the cross is there because Christ has made a way for us to be rescued from poor decisions, amen? Going down the wrong doorway. I've preached this message many years ago here at church.

It's a different version of that message that I've worked on. It was originally from Tim Keller and the Bible. Very much from the Bible, but I just want to acknowledge that Tim Keller, he's gone home to glory now, but a great preacher.

And some of the ideas about anger were very new to me and helpful. And I'm sure they'll be a blessing to you as well. Some other scriptures that refer to anger that we might find helpful to be reminded about.

As we just heard, Ephesians 4 says, In your anger, do not sin. Don't let the sun go down while you're still angry. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, Paul writes to the church of Ephesians.

James says in chapter 1, Everyone should be quick to listen and slow to speak, slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.

And Jesus famously says in the great teaching, in the Sermon on the Mount, You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment, but I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.

So, how do you go with anger? I won't ask you to raise your hand if that's an emotion that you struggle with. I would imagine all of us know what it's like to experience times of anger.

Could I ask for a show of hands? That's a pretty universal human condition challenge that we have. What do we do with anger?

Does anyone remember this type of tennis racket? This picture up here. Is it there?

No, there's a tennis racket somewhere. There it is. You remember that?

The John Newcomb I had back in the 70s. And I was at French Asphorus Baptist growing up as a kid, and we had a tennis date that was organized, and it was sort of a family's outing at Bellrose Tennis Courts.

And I had my prized John Newcomb racket, and it was in a brown case. And I went, you know, excited to become, get involved in the doubles tournament.

And I went out to the net, took my cover off, and I was just so focused, I didn't realize that there's something wrong, was wrong with my racket.

And I got to the front, to the volleying position, and the guy on the other side, a guy a bit older than me said, you're not going to have much luck with that racket, mate. And I looked down at my racket, and it was completely smashed.

Like the side was completely bent in, like a full V. And I was just overwhelmed with, like, shock.

I didn't understand what was going on here, but also embarrassment, because I suddenly realized, in a fit of rage, I had smashed that against the hill's hoist, against the clothesline in the backyard. And that's a bit of a confession.

Like, I had to deal with anger as a child and also in my life. And a lot of you know what that's like. It's challenging.

Anger is normally caused by a blockage, we are told, by counsellors and therapists. Contempt is far worse. Contempt is putting people in a little box so that you can be angry at them anytime you want, isn't it?

So, Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, look out for anger, but far worse is contempt, where you are drinking poison constantly.

We are going to spend our time in the Book of Proverbs, even though anger is dealt with in many places, but we are going to look in the Book of Proverbs, where we find wisdom, and we have, as people found wisdom for millennia, we will see anger, we

will look at its dangerous power, its basic goodness, why it goes wrong and how it can be healed. And strap yourself in, there is a bit to cover here. We will hopefully get through it in a reasonable amount of time.

Anger, its dangerous power, the ruin in the road. Have you discovered that it's explosive anger? It's dynamite, when it goes off, it's pretty dangerous stuff, it disintegrates things.

It disintegrates your body. Proverbs 14, 29 says, He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered exults fully. A tranquil heart is life to the body, but passion is rottenness to the bones.

It can affect your body. I looked up some studies, and a particularly interesting one in 2024 had a randomised group of 280 healthy adults go through an eight-minute period of recalling various memories that would produce certain emotions.

And there was anger, anxiety and sadness, and what they found was nothing did more in the negative to the cardiovascular system than anger. It's fair to say that anger disintegrates the body over time, and also it disintegrates community.

Have you found that? In community, someone flies off the handle, and it's like, whoa, whoa, whoa, you are really angry. No one knows what to do.

It has an incredibly dangerous destructive power. Proverbs 15 says, A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel. So quickly, angry words destroy relationships.

Anger, thirdly, disintegrates wisdom. Our ability to make wise choices is hampered incredibly by anger. Proverbs 14, He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.

Has anyone had an expression, an outburst of anger, that afterwards you felt like a fool? Three people at the front. There's only three of you guys.

Oh, there's five. The reason that we feel like a fool is what? What does Scripture give us as a heads up?

If you express anger in a quick-tempered way, you exalt folly. That means you're sort of saying, make me a fool, Lord. Let me be a fool.

It's the truth. It's a foolish thing to be quick-tempered. And finally, anger disintegrates the will.

Proverbs 19, 19. A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty. If you rescue him, you will have to do it again and again.

Out of all the emotions, I think anger is one that is very much an addictive substance. It's hard to admit. It leads you to denial.

It's easier to say, I feel sorrowful or I feel worried. But harder to say, I'm angry.

One of the ideas we talk about in marriage preparation, often with couples, at least when I'm doing it, is early on in our marriage, Leanne and I working on communication, understanding one another, I said, you seem angry.

And she said, I'm not angry. I'm sorry, I like to just... She said, I am very annoyed, though.

Have you found that communication is a lot about semantics? Don't tell me I'm angry, but I am so annoyed. And I think that's partly because we sort of avoid saying, yeah, you've made me angry.

Have you ever justified your anger with these lines? I'm just sticking up for myself or for them. I'm just getting it off my chest.

I'm a straight shooter. I say it how it is. You know where you stand with me.

I rock the boat. When you deny your anger, it allows you to be angry.

And the more angry you are, it would seem the more problems psychologically, emotionally, physically and socially show up, and the more you have anger and the problems the anger brings in your life, the more angry you get.

So, it certainly snowballs, doesn't it? Anger is a real challenge and it disintegrates things. And yet, anger has basic goodness.

And this is where I just want to acknowledge Tim Keller's thoughts on this. Proverbs 16 says, He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who captures a city.

The idea and the ideal in the Bible is not no anger, nor blowing up anger. It's slow anger. Would you agree?

Not no anger, not blowing up anger, but slow anger. And Keller wrote this, and I found it a bit challenging in a way when I read it first. It is a sin to never get angry.

How does that sit with you? It is a sin to blow up with your anger. But in the Bible, because the idea is slow anger, it's a sin to never get angry.

That's an interesting question to talk about, isn't it? Is that true? Should we expect to get angry?

Well, Ephesians says, the wise person is slow to anger. He or she who is angry without cause, sins, biblically, yet he or she who doesn't get angry when there is cause, sins, is that true?

It has been said, unreasonable patience is a hotbed of many vices. That's truth, isn't it? Unreasonable patience is a hotbed of many vices.

I think that speaks to parents often who just don't set the thermostat of their home enough. They just use a thermometer and go, what's the temperature of our culture?

But we're called as leaders, as parents, as managers to hold the thermostat and set the culture. Unreasonable patience is a hotbed of many vices. We don't want to have unreasonable patience.

Not no anger, not blow anger, but slow anger. What I found fascinating in Keller's work on Anger is that he takes us to Exodus 34, which often we go to. It's an incredibly powerful and important part of the Bible.

Moses is getting to know God and he's like, can you show me your glory? And Exodus 34, God says, you can't see my glory. Look at it, but I'll sort of hide you and I'll pass by you with my glory.

And the showing of glory looks like this, Exodus 34, 6.

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Don't you reckon that's a classic truth? Show me your glory, Lord. And God's like, I'll show you that I'm compassionate, gracious and slow to anger.

Is anyone with me? You sort of can think anger is not a good thing. But here it is, in the character of God himself.

It's part of his glory that he gets angry. Angry. Anger at sin.

So the suggestion is, if you've never become angry about anything, maybe you've never loved anything enough to get angry. How does that sit with you?

To be angry and sin not is to love enough to get angry, because things aren't happening the way they should be. There is injustice.

In our men's ministry over the years, we've talked about a really helpful vision for manhood that came from Robert Lewis from, I think, Oklahoma in the States.

He talks about a vision for manhood is, reject passivity, accept responsibility, lead courageously, and live for God's reward, the greater reward. What that's a lot speaking to is this idea of, there are things that should make us concerned.

We should step up, certainly men and women who have leadership roles in the family. There are times to reject passivity and do something, and sometimes it comes out of anger at unrighteousness. True love gets angry sometimes.

Amen? So, we'll come to this in a sec, but I think what you get angry about tells you something about what you love. And that starts to become a bit probing.

So, Jesus clearly got angry. He was angry at the money changes. John 2, he was angry at the religious leaders.

Mark 3, he was angry at the tomb of Lazarus, just at death itself. John 11, but he never sinned in his anger. So, let's look at why anger goes wrong.

How does anger become ruinous? Proverbs 24, 28, Do not testify against your neighbour without cause, or use your lips to deceive. Do not say, I'll do to him as he has done to me.

I'll pay that man back for what he did. Verse 29 says, someone is really angry. But verse 28 says, that person is angry without just cause.

This introduces an idea that anger can be disproportionate to the cause. And the problem begins when we get disordered anger. And you might remember, we've often talked about this.

Augustine once said a long time ago, the problem with humanity is disordered loves. Do we remember that? Disordered loves leads to idolatry.

When you love that which is not worth all of our love, we are called to love the Lord, our God, with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength.

When we love other things, we get disordered loves, which leads to idolatry, which then produces anger, because that which we love gets hurt or defamed, or there's a blockage to us loving that thing. It produces anger, which is disordered.

Do you follow? When you have disordered loves, it will naturally produce disordered anger. And that is a real challenge, if you think, why do you normally get angry?

If it's because they are stopping you getting what you want, who do you think you love a lot? We can love our ego a lot, can't we? We can love ourselves a lot.

When I've got angry, sometimes I feel ashamed to think, I think I just got angry because I felt like they disrespected me. And I love me. I love my reputation.

I love who I am. I love how I'm presented. And I'm like, you love yourself too much, mate.

Because if you're getting angry all the time because someone gets in your way of achieving what you want, maybe you have a disordered love, amen? So that's a real challenge to think about. Why do I get angry?

Often it's because of a blockage. But that blockage might reveal that I have disordered anger. I'm angry at the wrong things, but that's coming from a disordered love.

Again, if I just read a concise summary of what I just said, if you build your life on things and don't get them, or you do get them, and those things disappoint, which they will, they can develop a bedrock anger against life itself, which is

ultimately God. Keller says there are three sort of levels of anger. There's the normal level one anger. You get cut off in the traffic, or there's just a quick anger that's probably pretty surface level.

It might come from a deeper place, actually, but it's pretty surface level. But then there's level two anger that he talks about, like betrayal and injustice. But the third is just what I read out.

It's an anger that's deep. It's against life itself and ultimately against God. People live in a place of pain with a deep anger against God Himself, because life hasn't turned out the way people feel like it should.

And a lot of the time, that's just disordered. It's disordered loves, it's disordered expectations, it's disordered anger. So, how do you deal with anger?

How do you deal with it? How do you leave the road to ruin that anger takes you on? Three things.

Admit it. The key to being angry well is slow anger, which means we have to admit I'm getting angry. I'm aware.

I'm feeling angry. And recognizing, admit it, excuse me, is recognizing it's hard to acknowledge somebody has got the power to make me angry. Do you agree?

It's hard to say, you've made me angry, because I feel weak. I feel like I'm vulnerable and weak. You have the power to make me angry.

But it's the truth. So, to admit it is so important, because the Bible talks about getting rid of the root of bitterness, and roots become shoots, become trees, become forests, and that's how you become an angry woman or an angry man.

You just don't admit that it's there, and it's probably there from hurt, like we talked about last week. So, what's the second thing? We need to analyze it.

Proverbs 24 says, Do not say, verse 29, I'll do to him as he has done to me, I'll pay that man back for what he did. Do not say to whom? Who's he talking here?

He's talking to himself. He's reflecting the author of the proverb. This is self-talk.

And it's important to recognise, as we've talked about Roads to Ruin last week, what makes you angry is not what happened to you, but what you tell yourself about what happened to you.

What makes us the most angry is not what happened to us, typically, it's what we tell ourselves it means. It's not what you've lost, it's what you say to yourself that loss means.

Anger comes from what we believe, often not what they are doing to us, but what we believe it means. So this analysis is really important, really helpful. And I'm asking myself, what am I defending?

What is it that I love so much that it's making me angry? And then the last part, admit the anger, analyze the anger, and then come to God to receive transformation, healing.

Proverbs 15, verse 1, A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. How do you transform anger? Well, Jesus gives us the only answer, and this is a little bit rough, but this is the answer.

You have to get right up close to it and absorb it without paying them back. And when you're close enough to absorb it, you can gently point the person to the truth.

To transform anger, again, you have to absorb some of that anger yourself, not pay them back, and then gently point the person to truth. You might say that you're not angry at God, but the truth is humanity as a whole is angry at God.

It's quite shocking to think when God came up close to us to absorb our anger, what did we do to him in our anger? We killed him. That's what humanity did to Jesus.

When we were angry at God, think about this, it's so powerful, it really is. When we were angry at God in our sin, what did he do to transform it? He came up close and he absorbed our anger on the cross.

He absorbed our disordered rage without paying us back. I haven't had this, but I know many of us have, to have maybe a teenager say, I hate you. I hate you.

You've done nothing for me. What did he do as a parent? There are a few things more painful than that, to hear probably what is patently untrue.

You have done nothing for me. I think all we can do is come up close and absorb that anger and allow the power of the cross to do a work inside of us. We draw them close and let them know that we love them.

I want to read from my notes. This is an important summary again. When the Lord Jesus Christ agreed to drink the cup of God's wrath in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was agreeing to take not only our anger against God, but God's anger against humanity.

An anger that far from disordered was ordered and righteous against sin. Amen. Isn't that a beautiful picture?

When Jesus died on the cross, He was absorbing all of the disordered rage of humanity against God. And it's real, it's there. It was enough to kill Him.

And He was also taking the ordered rage and anger of God against sin. The cross was an epicenter of absorption of anger. I love that.

I just feel like that is so powerful. And we have to walk that journey. Can you see why Jesus says, you can't be my disciple without carrying your cross?

Can you see how that's how we deal with the anger that gives us pain? We have to follow Jesus to a cross. We don't die on the cross for sin.

Jesus has already done that. But we take what someone has done to us, the frustration that's in our heart. We say, God, help me absorb some of this as I carry my own cross through the power of Jesus who did it all.

I have been crucified with Christ, Galatians 2 says. It's no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me. So admitting the anger, analyzing the anger, allowing God to transform the anger.

Anger has dangerous power, but also basic goodness. It is ruinous when disordered, but it can be transformed. Last week, maybe it was last week, or the week before, Ben had a...

No, it was last week, in his night sermon, he talked about Martin Luther King Jr. It just happens that there's another closing illustration of Martin Luther King Jr. Let me read a quote of his.

Again, this is just next level cross carrying. He said in a speech, Jesus said, love your enemies so that you may be children of your father who is in heaven. Of course, you say loving your enemies is impractical.

Life is a matter of getting even, of hitting back and of dog eat dog. My friends, time is cluttered with the wreckage of communities which surrendered into hatred and violence. We are going to follow another way.

We will not abandon our righteous efforts. With every ounce of our strength, we will continue to rid this nation of the incubus of segregation. But we will not in the process relinquish our privilege and our obligation to love.

While abhorring segregation, we will love the segregationist. This is the only way to build the beloved community. To our most bitter opponents, we shall meet your physical force with soul force.

Do to us what you will, and we will continue to love you. We cannot obey your unjust laws because no non-cooperation with evil is as much our moral obligation as cooperation with good. But throw us in jail, we will still love you.

Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our communities, and we will still love you. Be assured, we will wear you down. Isn't that an amazing line?

One day we will win freedom, but not only for ourselves, we will so challenge your heart and conscience, we will win you.

The great military leaders of the past have gone, and their empires have crumbled and burned to ashes, but the empire of Jesus built solidly and majestically on the foundation of love is still growing.

May we solemnly realise we shall never be like our Father in heaven until we love our enemies and those who persecute us as He does. It's a powerful quote, isn't it?

The only place to deal with anger is at a cross, because in the cross, justice and grace meet, anger and love meet. What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about anger? Are you on a road to ruin?

It's interesting, isn't it, when you've experienced betrayal that produces anger. It's a funny mix of, is it righteous anger that I feel?

I would put it to you, yes, it is righteous anger if there has been injustice, but we don't get to pay them back. Amen? We don't get to do that.

We're not the ones who dispense the justice. It's God, and we entrust those that have hurt us to Him. I wonder if for you, there is a deep, deep pain, and it is anger against God.

I just want to encourage you if you feel angry about who God is and what He's done for you. That's very normal. Humanity feels angry about God, but Jesus has shown you like a loving parent how much He loves you and I.

Amen? He has come up close and embraced us and said, I get you're angry, but let's work on why you're angry. And sometimes it's because of our own sin.

Lord Jesus, we give you all the praise for the greatness of your life, the greatness of your death and resurrection. We're sorry that we have constantly reordered our loves, putting idols on the top shelf of our hearts' loves.

And we're ashamed and embarrassed that we sometimes get angry about completely the wrong stuff. Help us to get angry about what you get angry about, Lord. Help us to be slow to anger, and slow to speak, quick to listen.

Help us find freedom. For those of us who are bound up, and we're still manifesting anger in our lives, and it's disintegrating our lives, our bodies, our close relationships. It's disintegrating our capacity to make good, wise decisions.

Our will is being affected. Lord, would you prompt anyone like that, who just needs the blessing of prayer to come forward and receive what you have for them? We know you can transform.

We know the Son said that He has set us free, and when He said that, it's the real thing. If the Son sets you free, you'll be free indeed. And Lord, we pray that you would do all work in our midst, and set captives free from anger.

In Jesus' name, Amen.