

Pondering the Ruin of Anger

TRANSCRIPT (AUTO-GENERATED)

Well, hello, and welcome to Ponder by NorthernLife. We are having a conversation about the Word of the Lord as it was preached to us on Sundays and as we encounter it in our everyday lives. My name is Jack.

I'm joined by Ben, Tristan, and Jono. And we are talking about our Roads to Ruins series and looking at Jono's sermon on anger and we're doing these Roads to Ruins series as shorter 15-minute episodes, hopefully, just because there's two per Sunday.

So Jono, did you want to give us a quick reminder of what your sermon on anger was about?

Yeah, we looked at four main points. This is going to be harsh to listen to. Oh, gee.

It's dangerous power. Like, it really does have the capacity to disintegrate, even our bodies, community, our capacity to make good decisions. But there is a basic goodness in anger.

And we looked at this sort of gold nugget that in Exodus 34, when Moses asked to see the glory of God, part of that is his slowness to anger, but that there is a righteousness in God and his character expressed through anger.

And then we looked at how it goes bad, like why and how anger would bring about ruin. And then ultimately, how do you find healing through the gospel and through Jesus?

Yeah, fantastic. I think anger is such a... It's something we all deal with in some ways.

And so I thought it was a very practical, relevant talk. So I wanted to just sort of... This is going to be a little bit more open discussions.

But something we were talking about before we started recording, Jono, is what does ruin actually look like? And so I want to start to get things going by asking, what does the ruin of anger look like? What does anger wreak?

The sermon was quite helpful in that it talked about the ruin of both sides of anger.

I think when we talk about the ruin of anger, we first think of what it looks like to be constantly angry. People kind of walk on tiptoes around you because you're set to blow up.

But then you made the great point, which I think was Keller's point, that it's a sin to not be angry at the right time. And that's like, whoa, hang on. So anger is not always and only ever a bad thing.

They can also be the sin and the problem, the ruin of not being angry at the right things. I felt that challenge for me. I think in my life, I certainly have been angry and anger is a struggle.

But the more pointed struggle in my life is not being angry when I should. I think I shared that in a sermon, my sermon on power last week. My vice is more the neglect of power and of anger than the abuse of it.

And so, yeah, the calling to care deeply enough about things to stand up and have a voice when you need to is important.

Yeah, for me, the part where anger leads me to stumble more often than not is when it's my first reaction to something.

Like if something happens to me, usually I'm okay with it, but if it happens to someone else, my first, it's a very combative, like that's a reaction that I would have is just out of anger.

And I think the way it goes down the wrong path to ruin is, was what you said, when it breaks that connection between people and it ruins relationship, because you're not approachable, you can't have that level of conversation.

So the main part for me personally is when it's on a reactionary basis and then it sets the tone going forward with your relationship with others.

Yeah, and I was thinking about that same idea of, I find this really hard because it was a great sermon, but like, what do I do with the instantaneous reaction, right?

I mean, like, anger is such like a hot emotion that like someone does something and you just, it flares up and you're like, you don't often have time to think about it. As I was just trying to think about, yeah, what is that?

How do we respond to that? I guess we've got to do prep in advance, like, like practicing and practices, you know, as we always say. I don't know what you think.

It's a helpful idea that anger lives in your body.

It's just sort of there. And I feel like the idea of fists clenched, sort of tight, tightness in your body. And the other thing is contempt.

If you allow people to live in what we might call your box of contempt, then it will trigger. And I think that you can have whole groups of people, like racism is a group of people are in my box of contempt.

Or rage, road rage is I'm primed for whoever the person is that's going to come and tailgate me. Or the opposite, someone who's a bit slow in front of you. It's just primed, ready to go.

Yeah, you're so right, that's part of the ruin. That's rage-holic behavior. And everyone's on eggshells.

We had a great chat with someone on, a couple of people on Sunday, and we were just talking about anger. The Bible often talks, especially in James, about being slow to speak, quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger.

And we were just reflecting on anger, and it typically begins with words. It's thoughts. Contempt is probably in the heart and the mind.

But the guy that jumps out of the car and has a fist fight, he's said a few choice words in the car before he got out. And it's just sort of, I think that's something to be aware of. Anger manifests in words.

And so, as you said, the discipline of silence and solitude and submission, there's lots of things we can train ourselves through to help deal with anger.

Yeah, I was thinking, it's almost like there's an overriding virtue that covers several different negative things, the virtue of self-control, right?

You can be self-control, you need self-control for your anger, but you also need it for lust, for greed, for a whole other thing.

And you can, if I guess, if anger is an instantaneous response, you train your self-control on things that are less instantaneous, and that will make you better able to deal with the instantaneous sort of flare-ups of anger.

It's the genius of Willard's idea of indirect effort. You can't buy direct effort, be a less angry person, but you can do things which make you the type of person who's less angry.

I've been so obviously talk about Dallas Willard all the time, significantly formed by his idea that one of the things at the heart of anger is the violation of the will. Anger is the will to harm, but you get angry when somebody crosses your will.

And I found that like genuinely so helpful in life to realize that when I get angry and I feel tired, my fists clench, my heart starts racing, you kind of pause and think, hang on, where, what is my will and how has my will been crossed?

So a practical example is, you know, my daughter Esther has just pooped and she's reaching down to scratch the poo and make an absolute mess. And I get angry because my will has been crossed. And what is my will?

My will is that she would not touch the poo right now. But then when you step back, will arts whole thing is reordering your relationship with your own will to realize, I cannot control the world.

I should not control the world, but God controls this world.

And so I yield and submit my will to him so that when my will is crossed, if you're a sufficiently formed person in the way of Jesus, you can stand back and go, oh, it is well when things happen against my will.

I don't have to respond with anger because I'm yielding to God's will and not trying to hold on to my own will. I found that to be extremely helpful as a kind of diagnostic of what's going on when you do get angry.

The Ruin of Anger is a very ugly scene to paint, I think. As mentioned in the sermon, it disintegrates and it malforms, doesn't it? The Ruin of Anger in a home is that no one gets to be themselves.

Everyone's being shaped by the explosive damage that could turn up at any time.

No one feels safe.

It's very linked to violence. If you get rid of anger, you get rid of a lot of vice in the world. So when we talk about ruin, it's probably, sin is the basic description of ruin.

And anger has got a lot to do with a lot of bad stuff.

That's sort of the way that Jesus connects it in the start of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 21 to 26. He says, You've heard that it was said, you shall not murder, but I tell you anyone who's angry with a brother or sister.

And then he talks about words. Anyone who says, Raka or you fool, or Willard's translation is

moron, like idiot, which is that you talked about words as being the start of it. But Willard is connecting that on the spectrum.

Sorry, Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is connecting the contempt in our words with the very end of the spectrum of murder, which is the most violent thing you could possibly do. And they are not so far apart.

Jesus' whole point in that first kind of section of the Sermon on the Mount is to say that God cares not so much about the outward action as the inward heart.

And that inward heart of contempt very quickly leads to the ruin of violence, even up to the great degree of murder as well.

I mean, I think, cause that point is interesting cause I don't know if you've ever looked up road rage statistics in the US, where there's actually like a category of murder attributed to road rage, cause people can carry guns around everywhere.

So people have a gun in the car, they get really mad and they shoot people out of road rage. Luckily, it's not that bad here, but I think that illustrates how short the path is from anger, what might be a really trivial thing, to violence.

And to your point, Jono, I mean, like, as someone, I think we can all experience being around someone who is angry. And A, it dims your perspective of that person. You don't like, oh, I don't like this person.

They're always angry. And B, it often incites your other people's anger. Like if someone's getting angry at me, you know, the temptation can be to defensive, and I get angry in response.

And then it just sort of... Yeah, and it's not... It's really detrimental to the person who starts getting angry, right?

Because then they're getting anger directed towards them. They are... They're destroying their social relationships, because people like, I don't like someone who acts like that in anger.

Yeah, absolutely.

Yeah, it's funny that you brought that up. Usually when I get angry, it's not at the person that's either angry with me at the same time. Usually I'm angry with the person that's actually instigating everything in the middle.

And I struggle with that because they wouldn't know, or maybe sometimes they do know, that they are instigating anger in someone.

And it's up to your reaction to either invoke a response from someone else, or say, or consider your will in that situation of actually pausing and saying, is this helpful? Does he mean this?

But at the same time, I'm not wired that way where I'm going to be perfect every time. That's not a thing. You will always get angry at some point.

It's a very real thing. And what you guys were saying earlier, just camping there for a second of how short the tolerance level is from anger to absolute ruin. I think when we use our words wisely, it can lead to life.

And when we use our words horribly, it can light a world on fire. Like that's the level of how quickly the simple things can go so sideways. So yeah, the series is really like important to sit with afterwards, I feel.

I was thinking conversely to the quick jump to anger.

I think for me also who is maybe a less confrontational person, when I get angry, I tend to bury it inside. And there's those who are more self-controlled know not to let it out so much.

But that can also be very damaging too in that it can lead to contempt. But I was wondering if that not letting it out gives you more a chance to deal with it and process it slowly?

Or is there a danger it will just sit there and fester as well, I guess?

I think it's ruinous on both sides. Like you, Jack, I'm more in that end of the spectrum.

I had just many times going to bed kind of seething with anger, holding it in, not kind of lashing out at anyone or anything, but rehearsing the offense in my mind of what this person dared to say to me today or the way that they crossed my will.

And there's a twisted kind of pleasure in holding on to the anger, feeling like you're getting back at the other person.

But it's just that idea of holding on to contempt and anger is drinking poison and thinking it's going to kill the other person, when really it's poisoning you from the inside out. And so those three words that I said before, it is well.

I'm taking that from the hymn, It is well with my soul. They're really helpful words. When you feel your will has been crossed, you have the will to harm, which is anger.

Breathe and say, it is well. That's quite helpful to try and diffuse the building anger in your heart.

Yeah, I was reading a book that was talking about, or one of the chapters was on wrath or disordered anger. And the author said, we sometimes lust after being angry, because it feels good to just be angry at something.

There's almost a self-righteousness, don't you think, that wrong was done to me, and I'm in the right, and I'm justified in being angry at this?

Anger is such a secondary emotion. Something else has happened to me. There's pain that's occurred, and it just, it happens, it just explodes.

It's hard to analyze. It's hard to know where it comes from, because it's just overwhelming.

Yeah, I can attest to what you were saying, whether you keep it in or let it out.

I've also found both ways are in us, because one, there's two reactions, where you let it build up, and you just pop off like a fuse later on, or you let it and you continually just dwell on it, and keep recycling that same anger.

And I remember I went to a little therapy session at school, a school therapist, and he told me the weirdest thing. He was like, if you're angry, keep it inside, but just don't show it on your face. And I was like, what do you mean?

And he was like, just like, because when you're angry, you do this, or...

For the listeners, Tristan just frowned.

Yeah, I just frowned. You didn't say that, but he frowned. Like, it's such a quick thing to see sometimes.

And I think even, my friends used to tell me, one of my best friends, Kumiko, she always used to tell me, fix your face.

Like, she'll know I'm upset about something because she knows me, but everyone else will know that doesn't know me because my face is frowning.

So I think even if you are angry about it, like, remember that it is well, it's all up to God at that point. And another helpful tip from the outside is just, like, fix your face. Like, really just surrender that to God.

I think it's very important.

The amazing truth that we touched on in the sermon is that to heal anger, Jesus absorbs both God's anger, propitiation, and the anger of humanity against God, which is at the core of sin, which I find interesting because we're talking about, you

don't want to internalize anger. But the way to deal with anger, someone else's anger to me, is to actually draw them in and hold them like a child, close, because they're struggling and they're wanting to hit you.

It's like, no, I'm going to become most vulnerable to stop you hurting yourself and me. And I love that picture, which was from Tim Keller, that Jesus on the cross absorbs both ways. It's beautiful.

It's so powerful. Like, he took the anger of God. He's always angry against sin.

And Jesus, with Lazarus, remember he was angry? Like, he was just angry at death, at what sin had done to humanity. But he also took the rage of humanity against God.

So powerful. And it's like, well, what are we called to do? So we're called to represent Christ through the power of the cross.

We carry across ourselves, and there's an absorption of anger. So there's a powerful reframing, I think, but how do we deal with our own anger? We ultimately, we take it to the cross, and we allow Jesus to absorb it.

And we find the healing that's there in the cross.

That's how you ended the sermon with those three points. Admit the anger, analyse the anger, and then allow God to transform the anger, rather than bouncing it back, which only ever builds more and more anger between two people.

Yeah, absolutely. Well, with that, we might close it out there. Thank you guys for chatting, and we will catch you on the next one.