

Anger Pandemic
Week 1: Fear & other scary things

Examples of angry people on Facebook and in traffic...

There is no political dialogue, it has been replaced by angry shouting. Life didn't turn out the way our culture promised over the past few years. Stuff got canceled, people got sick...

I am a man, therefore I can do anger. My anger at a tennis match...stay angry and you will eventually blow.

It's almost like anger is the second pandemic. People are angry about everything. And it seems that it **spreads**. When you are on the **receiving end of someone's misplaced anger**, it's very natural to get mad and return that emotion to others. It's almost like the old Motown song that says, **"I second that emotion."**

Right now, I have sensed that some of my brothers and sisters in Christ are the angriest people. I know this because they display it in conversations, on social media, in politics, from the pulpit, etc. **Is this ok?** Is this what God wants? **Is this an accurate reflection of Christ to the world?**

What is the proper relationship a disciple of Jesus Christ should have with anger? It's not like it is **always a bad thing**, but it also can lead to bad things. It's not **within human nature** to do away with it totally on this side of heaven, so how should we handle it. **There are some things that should make us angry because they are wrong and unjust.** Right now it sounds like many Christians think it's a good thing and that we should **stoke our anger** when it comes to certain issues.

Anger is an emotion. It is not a sin to experience this emotion. Our emotions are like the emotions of **God**, because we are in his image. **But because of sin and our brokenness, we don't handle them the same as God does or as Jesus did.**

The Bible calls that our flesh is the part of us that has been affected by sin. It is our gravitational force pulling us toward selfishness and trouble.

Another word from the Bible is **"the world"**. These are the **systems and structures** of this broken world that feed my flesh in its selfishness. The flesh and the world **work, hand in hand**, pulling in the opposite direction of God.

Anger is one of the ways that we can have an emotion that isn't, in itself bad, that when my flesh gets involved and the world influences, that is when things go in the wrong direction. Let's sum it up this way: God can be angry and not sin, we cannot stay angry and not sin.

Anger is not our friend we should hang out with. **It is too heavy to carry.** It causes many problems.

It is the gateway to many sins. When you are angry, you do not **make rational decisions**. In spiritual terms you make decisions based on your **flesh, fight or flight**. Both of these destroy relationships and relationships are everything.

Where does it typically come from? Many times it comes from fear. It can be **fear of losing** what is ours or what we feel we are entitled to.

⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Ask for what you need. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:5-7

What are people afraid of that is leading to so much anger right now?

- Political enemies who want to harm them or take away the way of life they enjoy...Biden or Trump.
- **CNN/MSNBC v. Fox...**They create fear and anxiety because those are great motivators to tune in, post on social media, and then vote accordingly. Because if you don't, _____ will happen.
- **People who are different** from me. Immigrants, different skin color.
- **Big Government.**
- **Big Business.**

- Russia, China.
- Radical Islamist.
- Getting old.
- Economic instability.
- **Biblical view of gender and sexuality** being replaced.
- What is happening with **younger generations and traditional values**.
- Global Warming.
- **Change or the wrong kind of change**.
- Death.

Now that everyone has plenty to be anxious and fearful about, let's listen to Jesus. ¹⁰ **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.** John 10:10 NIV

This is **God's promise** to us, as well as a look at the **enemy's strategy**, "steal, kill, and destroy." **Fear is living like that is about to happen.** Jesus is not a thief.

Anger comes from anxiety and fear that something vital will be lost or taken from me.

Fear is where most anger begins. It's that fight or flight reaction. **I attack an enemy** that I fear will take something from me, **or I run into my fort for protection** against an enemy who will steal from me and do me harm.

What do we fear is going to be taken or lost? Our **comfortable lives**, our **present way of life**, our **jobs**, our **kids**, the **American dream**, our **future**, **hope**, **stability**, or things being the way we are used to...

In scripture, **the story of Joseph** plays like this. He is the favorite son whose father treats better than his older sons. He gives him a colorful expensive coat as a sign. The brothers get angry enough at him to steal his coat, throw him in a ditch, and later, sell him into slavery.

What were they afraid of losing? The love of their father, status as elder sons, honor/respect, money/property, being passed over. **They were afraid of losing what they had coming to them.**

The Pharisees and religious leaders who knew Jesus fulfilled the prophecies and saw his miracles and heard his powerful teaching. **They were angry enough to have an innocent man murdered like a criminal.** What were they afraid of? Losing their position in the community and nation, their power and **their control of the teaching** that went out to the rest of the nation of Israel.

Example from real life...In my story, I was anxious about what was happening to the players that I coached and **they, we, me, weren't being treated with the respect we were due.** It wasn't fair and I was angry. Points were being stolen. **But, to be honest, I wouldn't have been that angry** or even angry at all if it had been about another team. **It was about me, I made it about me and, because of that, I almost embarrassed myself.**

There's a lot of stuff you aren't supposed to do when you are angry. Don't **spank your kids** when you are angry. Don't **call your kid's teacher** when you're angry. Don't drive angry. Play tennis, **surgery**, shout out at a sporting event, math, **have difficult conversations, sleep**, parent, our jobs, **put contact lenses in your eye**...And why? Because **our ability to respond in an objective, unbiased person is scrambled.** But, more importantly, for those of us who follow Jesus...**We don't represent Christ well when we remain angry.**

Anger is an emotion that is going to happen and sometimes it happens for something worth being angry about. **But to hang on to anger, particularly if it's really about you and not the greater good, is dangerous.** It clouds our view of reality and our ability to respond.

My dad used to eat Limburger cheese. If you aren't familiar with this particular cheese, then let me open you up to a whole new world. Take what you know about cheddar, American, swiss, pepper jack, gouda and all other types of cheese and throw it out the window. Those won't help you. Why? Because those won't immediately **clear a room as soon as the package is opened.** Limburger cheese smells like **something rotten**, mixed with something toxic, mixed with something that you think really stinks. My dad would eat it on crackers.

There was a story once of a particularly negative, surly, angry, man. He liked Limburger cheese. He ate some once and, without knowing it, he had some stuck in his mustache. He sat for a moment after putting the cheese away and then said, **"This house stinks."** Then he went to get into his car and said, **"this car stinks."** Then he drove to the store and said, **"This store stinks."** He went to the post office to mail a package and said to the postal worker, **"This post office stinks."** Finally, he drove up to a hill where he could see for miles in any direction and then proclaimed, **"The whole world stinks."**

That's what remaining angry will do if you carry it around and remain angry. It will color everything you see and will bias you against what you come in contact with. **It predisposes you to miss what God is doing** and see the stuff that you are afraid of, anxious about, mad about, and the anger will flow.

Another word for remain, is abide. That is the spiritual process of **remaining connected and open to the presence of God.** That is when we are **transformed** more into the likeness of Christ.

Here's how that works with Jesus...**You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.** ⁴ **Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.** ⁵ **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:3-5**

This is what we call abiding in Christ. We can also abide in a state of perpetual anger. Does that represent Christ? Does that sound like Jesus?

Yes, Jesus was angry once when he made a whip and chased people who had turned the temple of his father into a **rip off, sideshow casino.** That was once and he was God in human flesh that never sinned. **Also that wasn't something done to him,** it was to God and the people getting cheated in the temple.

This is why James said this about anger. ¹⁹ **Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow**

to get angry. ²⁰ Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. ²¹ So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. James 1:19-21

This is our **theme verse** for this series. We will dig into it next week. I want to encourage you to put it to memory.

We weren't created or intended to live in anxiety, fear, and ultimately anger because we, who follow Jesus, have his spirit in us. ¹⁵ So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." Romans 8:15 NLT

We were not created and then redeemed in order to operate out of fear and anxiety. We were created and then redeemed to operate out of trust that leads to peace that produces love. To operate out of fear and anxiety and anger is very likely and sinful behavior is inevitable.

Instead of anxiety and fear that leads to anger, live in the new reality of your adoption!

It's one thing to be born into something, it's a totally other thing to be chosen. In our adoption as children of God, we were chosen and then invited to join this new family with a heavenly father who would do anything for you.

"But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, **whom I have chosen**, you descendants of Abraham my friend, ⁹ I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, '**You are my servant**'; I have **chosen you and have not rejected you.** ¹⁰ **So do not fear**, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:8-10 NIV

We don't need to be anxious about our standing in God's eyes. A righteous God sees Jesus, not my sin when he looks at me. I don't have to jockey for position or leverage anything. God has settled my position through Jesus' death and resurrection. He went that far for me! Therefore I don't have anything to fear. And if I don't have really anything to

fear, even death, then what is there to be perpetually angry about. God is good and he is good to me.

But wait, it gets even better. ¹³ Now, who will want to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. **So don't worry or be afraid of their threats.** ¹⁵ **Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life.** And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it. ¹⁶ But do this in a **gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear.** Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ. ¹⁷ Remember, **it is better to suffer for doing good,** if that is what God wants, than to suffer for doing wrong! 1 Peter 3:13-17 NLT

First, don't worry or be afraid of their threats. That will lead to anger and all kinds of bad things.

Instead of worrying or being afraid, turn that energy to worshipping Christ as the Lord of your life. Focus on God and not what you are afraid of and what makes you angry. That's why we ask the question at the beginning of every bridge group, **"God, how can you be so good?"**

Then focus on your response, "gentle and respectful." This will allow you to have a clear conscience. Then when people speak out against our faith, they will look foolish. **This is reflecting Jesus accurately, which as we said earlier, is impossible if we remain angry.**

Or you can scream at them, mock them, call them names, and do this all in anger. This won't work and it will perpetuate more fear and anger.

¹⁸ Such love has no fear, because **perfect love expels all fear.** If we are afraid, it is for **fear of punishment,** and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. ¹⁹ We love each other because he loved us first. ²⁰ If someone says, "I love God," but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? ²¹ And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers. 1 John 4:18-21 NLT

This verse talks about fear in our relationship with God. When we experience perfect love, we are no longer afraid that God will punish us. We aren't waiting for the other shoe to drop. Then, because we have experienced perfect love in relationship with God we must express love for other believers. This verse doesn't talk about those outside of Christ, but Jesus does when he commands us to love our neighbors and even our enemies! We not only must love out of this perfect love, but we also can love out of this relationship of perfect love in God. He only commands it because he can enable and empower it.

Steps of Obedience:

1. Think about what makes you constantly angry.
2. Connect that with an anxious thought or fear that you carry. Or even a false view of God. Thinking that God isn't really good.
3. Take your prescription.

What is your prescription? It's the truth from God's word. I want you to think through these questions and take these scriptures daily, regularly throughout this series. Place this table tent where you will see it.

¹⁵ So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." Romans 8:15 NLT

Fear is not where you live anymore. You visit, but you don't need to live out of fear any more.

⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:5-7

Because of Jesus, I don't need to live in anxiety because I can take my cares and fears to him and I can fill myself with thankfulness toward God. The end result is that I will experience peace in spite of all my fears and anxiety. Not only that people will see the gentle way I care for and treat people.

¹⁹ Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. ²⁰ Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. ²¹ So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls. James 1:19-21

And now the challenge: listen more than you speak and be slow to get angry. Get rid of what is dragging you down. Accept what God is saying in this scripture and the other two as truth. And because it is true, align your life to it.

What our culture wants us to align our lives to goes something like this: "there's plenty to be afraid of because they're out to get you and, unless you fire back, they will take what belongs to you. Stay angry because then you will stay vigilant. To not remain in a perpetual state of anger is to mean you are either passive, naïve, or both."

So, what's it going to be? Are we going to spread this virus of anger or are we going to pass on the peace that comes from love.