

Anger Pandemic
Week 4: Where do I start?

Have you noticed that people are really angry? It's like the pandemic after the pandemic. There is a sense that **something was lost or taken** from us. People had expectations about what life was to offer them and some of that didn't happen. That brings a sense of **disappointment and loss**. We lose something that we believe is **owed us** or that we **believe we need**, that is when anger begins.

But anger can spread like a virus. We get angry and **take it out on someone** and then **they get hurt and then angry**. Sometimes it spreads **because we want others to be fearful about the same boogeyman** we fear, so we get together because of the same fear and focus our anger in the same direction.

I believe that God has been speaking to us. We have noticed **anger in our world**, but **now we are noticing it in ourselves**. Maybe it's taken different forms, such as a short temper being more confrontational, or a sharp sarcastic tongue. Or maybe the complete **opposite side of anger** is avoiding, hiding, or pushing people away. **These are anxious responses, fight or flight.** And that's where anger gets started most often.

That brings us to **one of the building blocks of this series** called "Anger Pandemic." **Fear and anxiety leads to anger.**

Keep in mind, **anger is an emotion** and, therefore, **it isn't bad** in and of itself. **Actually it was intended for good**, but, **because of sin**, it has **been perverted**.

We have been giving out this **table tent** with some key verses for you to feed on. We are asking each other to put this someplace where you will see it regularly. Let's do that together right now. **Let God speak** to you through His word.

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

Living like a fearful slave means we believe we are going to get punished, that we aren't worth anything, or we will be someone who found out that we are frauds. The fear of all of this is completely changed when God, through Jesus Christ, says, "no you are priceless to me and that is why I'm willing to die that you might live and, not only live, but be adopted into my family." We go from fearful slave to having the identity of one of God's adopted children, fully loved and accepted, even though we are broken.

Now that we are God's adopted children, heirs to his kingdom, **here's how we need to live.**

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

So when we are fearful or anxious, we are **to take this to God.** That is the prayer and petition aspect. But we are also to not simply focus on what we are taking to God, **but also about how good he is.** That's the "with thanksgiving" part.

This is why we ask the question in all of our groups, **"God, how can you be so good?"** And then we tell of his goodness in the face of our faults, sin, and brokenness.

What do we begin to experience? Peace or a sense of wholeness, regardless of the circumstance, and it is that peace that will guard our hearts and our minds. **Maybe in small flashes at first, but those are promises of more to come.** We now have a **guard over our emotions and our minds.**

This is the new reality that we are to begin living into. This keeps us from going back into fear, which leads to slavery. **Fear can become our prison.**

People with social anxiety know what this is about. There are people who are afraid that, if they leave their houses, something bad will happen. Their house becomes a prison. Robin is a therapist and she sees this.

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. **Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.** 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 where we stop making excuses for why our anger is ok, and God even encourages it.

We will stand out in this culture if we are quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. But if we are **constantly offended, scandalized by the sinful behavior of others**, then we will look just like the rest of the people who are screaming at one another on social media.

I remember a Christian kid **tattling** on an unsaved kid. Why do you expect anything different, he doesn't know Jesus? **Sin is their master.**

Will we accept this word and allow it to be planted into our lives? If it is planted, it will save our souls and our lives. It will produce a harvest of things like **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.**

Here's what happens if we don't live this way and we **allow fear and anxiety to fester** and anger to grow. **...anger sustained leads to bitterness.**

Back to anger being **an emotion**; we will feel it because we are designed that way. We are human beings who get angry. The problem is experiencing it; the problem is **carrying it, living in it.** Anger is too heavy. If we carry it and don't release it, then there will be hell to pay.

This is the case, even if it is a righteous cause. Anger is too heavy. **We can't carry it and not sin.** We cannot have **righteous anger** because there is only one who is righteous and that is God. **We are saved because of his righteousness and goodness and not our own.**

³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. ³² Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.
Ephesians 4:31-32

This scripture is so counter-cultural right now. And many Christians have decided to **ignore these scriptures** and be the angriest voices in the crowd. **What if we were more like verse 32?**

Remember we cannot **fight like the devil for the things of God.** We cannot use un-Christ-like strategies for a Godly cause. **The end never justifies the means.**

That brings us to the **next logic block** in this terrible wall...**bitterness leads to sickness of mind and body.**

Matt did a great job last week of describing the chemicals that the brain releases when we are anxious or fearful. These were intended to help us with **quick decision-making and supercharged muscles** to get away from a lion or fight him off. They are meant for a moment.

But if these are pumping all of the time, if we are constantly living in this fight or flight state, it will warp our thinking and it will destroy our bodies. We weren't designed to live in or carry this fear and anger because it is too heavy.

Living like this will **steal our joy.** Our focus is not on the goodness of God, but we have become **obsessed with the wrong done** to us. That's what happens to me. I think about it all the time. When we do this we are **unable to see the signs of the kingdom** of God around us, those expressions of God's loving authority being restored on earth as it is in heaven.

Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many. Hebrews 12:15

It not only poisons my body and mind, but it poisons those around us. If you lived with an angry, bitter, negative person, then you know that it affected you. My anger or bitterness is not about me, it's about my wife, my kids, and the church that I pastor. If I try to carry this, you will be poisoned.

So where do we start? We've been talking about these destructive things, fear, anger, and bitterness, but where do I start to deal with this? I believe that God is speaking to many of us. We are seeing our anxiety and our anger more clearly. Here's how to get started in dealing with it. It needs to be confronted. The question is...Where do I confront my anger?

Do your cards. I'm using it and getting more clarity on what I'm fearful or anxious about. It's important to get to what it is that you are fearful and anxious about. Anger is a symptom.

My right to be offended, instead of my willingness to suffer (with Jesus).

Do you find yourself always being offended?

I've spent way too much time being offended when I didn't really need to be. I could have chosen to see that I am secure in my adopted son of the king position, therefore, I have nothing that can be lost or taken from me because of what someone has said or done to me.

I look back on my life and I see that I have lived too long in seasons of fear and anger because I was just way too easily offended.

I'm not saying that the things that offended me are right or good. No, I'm not saying that at all, but why was I surprised that other broken people, just like me, would do and say hurtful things.

Jesus was never scandalized by people's sin. He didn't say it wasn't sin but it never offended him or put him off. He loved them and wanted to be with people anyway.

Here's where being willing to suffer with Jesus comes in. 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

Don't worry or be afraid of their threats. Ok, that sounds way too simple and a bit naïve. But there is that little word, **"Instead"** that gives you another option. Worrying or being afraid is to focus upon a perceived threat to you. Something is going to be taken from you. **But, instead of my focus being on the threat it says, "you must worship Christ as Lord of your life."** To worship this way is to praise God as the one who I put more trust in than my own ability to handle the perceived threat. Worry is me trying to work out what I'm going to do to combat this threat. **Worship is trusting Jesus in the midst of a threat. It believes faith over fear.**

Worry and anger are based on pride. I don't trust God that he will bring the conclusion that I want.

The proof of that trust is that I am able to respond with gentleness and respect. Then I can have a good conscience that I haven't thrown gas on a fire that really was about to go out. My anger reaction out of fear, could reignite something. Then further proof of my trust is if I have to suffer from this threat, I can do it for God.

I can lash out and suffer the self-inflicted wounds that come from anger and bitterness, as well as the further attacks of my now wounded enemy, or I can suffer and be like Jesus.

To release our right to be angry and even forgive, is to experience loss and suffering. When I give up my right to be offended and my desire to see myself vindicated, that means I am losing something that I have been holding tight.

I've been thinking about winning. Thinking about my foe groveling back to tell me how right I was. That is a loss to give that up. **That is to suffer because I let it go and allow God** to do something about it with no promise that I will be proven righteous in the end.

Years ago early in my ministry someone...

A wise counselor told me, after I explained what had been done to me, that I needed to get to the **real offense or wrong.** Not all of the stuff that I've blown out of proportion or what I perceived or took wrong. **Then write that down, look at it, and give up the right to have you vindicated.** I don't need _____ to do anything to make this right.

If I have wasted too much energy being offended. I have courted sin by hanging on to the offenses done to me and have harmed others. **Even when you are originally right in being offended, you end up being wrong by holding onto it.** We cannot carry or live in anger and not sin.

If we can live this way, choose to suffer, lose our right to win, or be vindicated, what will that do in our **relationship with people around us?** **"Our very refusal to take and hold offense is evidence of the existence of God."** *Unoffendable, Brant Hansen pg. 136*

Who am I like when I release my right to be angry and vindicated and then suffer for those who have offended me? That would be Jesus.

Where do I confront my anger? Look at my ease of being offended and my unwillingness to suffer in releasing and forgiving. **Then weigh these two options.** **Too quick to label an enemy to fight instead of an enemy to love.**

Michael Jordan propped off enemies and elevated slights to create anger and energy. He had a need to win and to dominate others. It made him a bad teammate, husband...**He was cruel** to people who didn't reach his standard.

That writer in Toronto, who slighted him, was not the enemy or the thing that was going to keep Michael Jordan from experiencing freedom and the full life he wanted. Michael Jordan was his own enemy.

Are you propping up fake enemies to blame for what is going on in your life or to motivate you on a particular path?

I'm about to **make a point using politics** as my example. **This is not a political statement, it is a theological statement.** I'm making a point about spiritual things. Joe Biden and Nancy Pelosi are not the devil. Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis are not the devil. The devil is the devil. We have only one enemy.

Don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying you have to agree with both of these groups of people. **I'm not asking you to change any political opinions** or beliefs you have. I'm saying don't demonize them and prop them up as an enemy to fight.

When we fashion enemies in this world to defeat, we are fanning our anger.

³⁴ So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples." John 13:34-35

Again, Jesus was willing to sacrifice and suffer for people who didn't like him or even think they needed what he was offering. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." We are to love others that way. And not loving others this way does not mean we agree with them.

But in the church it will be all roses and rainbows. We are all going to agree because we love Jesus. Right?

Ideally, however, the church itself is not made up of natural "friends." It is made up of natural enemies. What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything of the sort. Christians come together, not because they form a natural collocation, but because they have been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance. In the light of this common allegiance, in light of the fact that they have all been loved by Jesus himself, they commit themselves to doing what he says—and he commands them to love one another. In this light, they

are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus" sake. *Love in hard places*, D. A. Carson

The church is where we practice this Christ-like behavior. When we can't even do it here, then we certainly won't do it out there.

If that isn't bad enough, it gets even worse, even more uncomfortable and offensive. ⁴³ "You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be **acting as true children of your Father in heaven.** For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. ⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. ⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. *Matthew 5:43-47*

This is a part of the Sermon on the Mount. This is about how things will operate in the **Kingdom of God**, which Jesus came to initiate. **In the old covenant, it was the Kingdom of Israel and in that kingdom, enemies were enemies.** But Jesus has come to make a **new covenant with anyone who will turn to him**, put their trust in him, and follow his teaching. **This is a new creation.** And in that new creation, the lines between friend and enemy are not as nice and neat.

We are to view people, friend or enemy, through the lens of what Jesus has done for us.

Here's the best description of our real enemy that we are to fight. ¹¹ **Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.** ¹² **For we^[a] are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.** *Ephesians 6:11-12*

We need to confront our fear and anger by...

- My right to be offended instead of my willingness to suffer (with Jesus).
- Too quick to label an enemy to fight instead of an enemy to love.

Three Steps of Obedience:

1. Are you tired of being anxious and angry?

I believe there are some of us who are tired of living like this. Always anxious, always lashing out at people. Always offended by things broken people just like them say and do.

If you aren't tired yet, then there's nothing God can do for you. This is called coming to the end of yourself. Decide that you are the judge and jury. You're Not the one that has the right to demand that the offenses against you have been properly punished.

There are some of us that are still living in this bondage because of things that were done to you years ago. There was trauma, neglect, abuse, rejection and it's still keeping you in a perpetual state of fear and anger. Maybe it's time to deal with this. It's time to go talk to a counselor who can help you navigate your healing.

Are you wondering why you don't have many good real relationships? This is why. It's what Satan uses to keep you isolated with your secrets. God wants you to have good relationships with people, particularly within the body of Christ.

2. "Cast your anxiety" on Jesus,

If your anxiety and fear is debilitating, then you need to go see a counselor. Continue to read those scriptures. Get into a bridge group where you have people who are supporting you and praying for you and growing with you.

⁶ **Humble yourselves**, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ **Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.** 1 Peter 5:6-7 NIV

To be humble is to say, "I can't do this on my own." Then you give up your right to be bitter and hold grudges. Cast all of that on Him. Continue to do that, but by all means, don't remain isolated.

3. Affirm your identity as God's adopted child.

If you realize that you really haven't trusted in Jesus. **You haven't repented, believed, and began to follow him.** You've just been **doing religion or trying to get somewhere that pleases God** so he will take your burden away, then **today is the day you allow him to adopt you** into his family and make you a new creation.

God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. Ephesians 1:5

That's something to be joyful about. God not only did this, but it says that doing it gave him great joy. He didn't say to himself, **"Bill has been a little slow to come to me, but I guess I've got room for one more, so, OK, I'll give him a home."** He said, **"Come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest."**