

- I. How to be offended (0-2:07 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-mju\\_gW3c8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-mju_gW3c8)) So why that? Not because we are talking about how to be offended but rather we are exploring how anger, or a form of anger known as “wrath,” is one of the seven deadly sins. Something that if we give in to, whether we are a Jesus follower or not, can bring us down.
  
- II. So is anger even a sin? If we read the Old Testament carefully we see God getting angry quite a bit. With good reason. The ancient Israelites didn’t act much different than a three-year-old. You tell a three-year-old not to eat a cookie, and what do they do? They eat the cookie. You ask them why they ate the cookie. Their response? *I don’t know*. It was about the same with God’s chosen people. He told them not to worship other gods in the Old Testament. What did they do? They worshipped other gods. And when God asked them why? The answer was about the same. *We don’t know*. Maddening. And of course, we are just like them, but that is another sermon. So if God got angry in the Old Testament and the New Testament, which we will look at in a bit, how can it be a sin? Well, it’s not exactly. I believe the Encyclopedia of Psychology offers a definition of anger as good as any. **“Anger is an emotion characterized by antagonism toward someone or something you feel has deliberately done you wrong.”** You are at Ruby Tuesdays watching the ACC championship on the big screen and someone changes the channel to QVC. Unless you are Gandhi, you are going to get angry. It is only natural. An injustice has been done and your body is ramping you up with adrenaline to address the issue. **Anger only becomes sinful in how we deal with it.** Paul, the guy who started out in life trying to destroy Jesus but became one of his most loyal followers, wrote to the church in Ephesus (**Ephesians 4:26 NRSV**). He is saying everyone is going to get angry. But while experiencing that intense emotion, we shouldn’t hurt, harm or destroy. And when possible we need to go ahead and deal with it before it grows and becomes toxic to our soul.
  
- III. Before we go any further, let’s look at good anger. Do these make you angry? (**images**) They should. If these things don’t make you mad, there is something wrong. In the gospel of Mark chapter 3 Jesus walks into a synagogue, a place where Jews would go on the Sabbath day for prayer and teaching, and he comes across a man whose hand is deformed. At this point the religious leaders are watching him very closely. This son of a wood worker who doesn’t have any higher education, no seminary degree or any credentials but is garnering a crowd of followers. So the religious leaders are feeling envious, like we talked about last week, and want to catch Jesus doing something wrong. And it doesn’t take long....as Jesus sees this guy’s hand, and he gears up for healing. But there is a problem. You are not supposed to do any work on the Sabbath as it is to be a day of rest. A day to focus on God and to be renewed. Some of the religious leaders took Sabbath law an extra step and made healing forbidden as well. Essentially they said you can’t even do good, like heal a man on the Lord’s Day. If your donkey is stuck in the ditch, sure. Healing, no. Jesus’, response? The literal response in the Aramaic is “that’s cray cray!” And then the religious leaders give him that cold, judgmental church stare. You probably know the one. And what was Jesus’ reaction? To go over and hug it out? No, he gets angry. They are using God’s command to harm rather than to help. And Jesus spends the rest of Mark’s gospel absolutely crushing such thinking.

- IV. The point, here is God in the flesh is getting angry for a good reason. But note: Jesus uses his anger not to attack the religious leaders so much, but rather the false ideas that they were teaching. **God's anger is ultimately against the sin.** And His desire is to get people back on the right path not just to punish for punishment's sake. This is good anger and anger used rightly. Some of the best ministries and non-profits in our world today began because men and woman saw an injustice, got angry, and decided to do something about it. Like in the case of William. William grew up very poor in England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At a young age William became passionate about following Jesus. He became a part-time Methodist Pastor and part-time pawnbroker in London. He preached throughout the city about God's love and invited all people to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. But the poverty broke his heart. He saw how the poor were ignored and taken advantage of by the wealthy, and this made him deeply angry. So based on a military model he began a little ministry that started helping people not only with their spiritual needs but physical needs too. Listen to what William once said. "While women weep, as they do now, I'll fight; while little children go hungry, I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, as they do now, I'll fight—while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, where there remains one dark soul without the light of God—I'll fight! I'll fight to the very end!" You might have heard of this little ministry that this feisty William started...The Salvation Army. This began because of anger handled in the right way.
- V. But let's be honest here. Most of us here this morning, including me, don't use our anger for the good. And if you are like most of us, what we typically get mad at is not the fact that children are starving in the Sudan or are hungry in Winston-Salem. We tend to get angry at what are now called first-world problems. We get mad over insignificant things. Has an injustice really occurred when the barista gets our order wrong? When the cable guy is late? When they add cheese to your burger when you asked for none? That is generally misplaced anger. But this is not always the case. Sometimes we have a legitimate reason to be angry because someone has truly hurt us, but we then we can still handle it wrong.
- VI. Let's talk then about the anger gone bad by looking at two types. (**Crockpot**) Everyone know what this is? Crockpot, one of the greatest inventions since the wheel. Megan my wife will attest to this truth. You can throw a bunch of raw food in here...chicken, beef, potatoes, possum, flip the switch and hours later when you come home, you have dinner ready. How does it do it? By consistent heat over a long period of time. So that pink raw chicken that looks rather frightening transforms into an Italian gourmet meal. As many have pointed out, one of the most dangerous types of anger is the crockpot variety. Whether it is legit or not...instead of dealing with it appropriately, like confronting the person in love, we let it simmer. And over time it begins to change us and not for the better. Instead of a gourmet meal, it makes us bitter. And that bitterness left unchecked poisons all our other relationships. You ever been around these kind of people? Seems like just below the surface there is this deep, abiding anger. They might keep it in check but they never really seem happy and always keep everyone at arm's length. A classic example would be Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol*. Scrooge is one nasty fellow and later we find out why. As the first ghost reviews his past, we learn that Scrooge was sent to a boarding school by a cruel father as a young boy after his beloved mother died. He is rightfully angry about his situation...but

he never really deals with it, and it festers and simmers...until it eventually transforms him into a bitter, cynical, old man. That is crockpot anger unchecked.

**VII.** So what's this? (**hand grenade**) I got to throw one once. So small but such a big boom. Pull the pin and you can kill or maim anything within a radius of 16 feet. But it can send shrapnel up to a 1000 feet. An extremely dangerous weapon in a small package. And this is what I would call the second type of anger. Grenade anger...someone does something you find offensive and it's like they pulled your pin. You explode and damage everyone around. I was at a school some time back to pick up one of my children. Normally I took them in the morning but they got a ride in the afternoon. But not on this day. I thought the way you picked your kids up in the afternoon was the same way you dropped them off in the morning. How dumb of me! Not paying attention I pulled into the left lane like I usually do and bypassed all these cars that had been in line. That is when one very unhappy mother rolled down her window and unleashed the wrath of God on me. I immediately realized what I had done and hit reverse as fast as I could, apologizing the whole time. But she wasn't done with her tirade. She continued to scream...about rules, rudeness and something about my grandmother. It was truly like an explosion occurred. I crouched really low in my car and wished I didn't have my G3 magnet on my bumper as I reversed. I am sure this mother was later embarrassed about her outburst. Especially as I project her image now on the screen ☺. But this is grenade-type anger. It leads us to say and do things we will regret later.

**VIII.** So what do we do? **Genesis 4:2b-8 NIV.** We don't know exactly why God was pleased with Abel's offering and not so much with Cain's. Maybe God is a meat and potatoes type. Some commentators say this points to the beginning of the sacrificial system...involving blood that represents life, repentance, and reconciliation and so forth. Another commentator pointed out that God's rejection had more to do with Cain himself...the attitude of his heart rather than with the actual offering. Regardless, Cain becomes angry out of envy. He should have been snapping that rubber band. ☺ But look at what God says again in verses 6 and 7. "Sin is crouching at your door, Cain." Great image. When my kids were younger, I loved hiding behind the door and scaring the bejesus out of them. And that is the way sin is described here. But in this case, it is ready not to surprise but to consume. Take him over and bring him to places he doesn't want to go. And this is exactly what happens. In Cain's anger, which might be both crockpot and grenade variety, he sins terribly by killing his own brother. He does something he can never take back. So what can this passage teach us?

**IX.** First, we need **to admit** to ourselves when **we are angry**. I like in this passage how God names what Cain is feeling. This is an important step. Do you freely admit when you are angry, or do you stuff it or pretend it is not there? I have done this myself many of times. I will be angry about something and it is about to boil over and then someone asks me, "Are you angry?" and I am like, "NO. I AM NOT ANGRY." Because being angry is not nice, and Christ followers have to always be nice, right? Wrong. We are human, we are going to get angry from time to time. Don't try to hide it or stuff it. Getting angry is normal human emotion. Admit it. And sometimes it is good share that anger with a trusted friend or even the person him/herself, if you can do so appropriately.

- X. Second, step back and **ask yourself, “Why am I angry?”** That is what God asks Cain. So, slowly count to ten and consider why you are experiencing this intense emotion. Is it because you need to address a wrong or an injustice? Or is it something that’s petty? This is a vital question because it guides us on what we do with our anger next. If there is injustice occurring against someone who has no power to address it...then channel that anger into action. You see a young child locked in a car on a hot day. You get angry which leads you to calling 911 or even breaking into the car if the child’s life is danger. And if there is a real injustice is being done against us, in the most loving way, use that intense emotion to confront the person. But, again, ask why you are really angry? And how did the person or people wrong you? Going back to the mad mother...I got angry because she embarrassed me. So I wanted to find her and yell right back at her. I even fantasized what I would say. It was good, too! But I cooled down and questioned why. No real injustice occurred against me. And I did cut in front of all those parents who had been waiting patiently. The mom was probably tired of watching people do this time and time again. Or maybe this mom had a terrible day, lost her job, or her pet fish just died...who knows. Regardless, there really was no need for me to chase her down and verbally lay down the smack. Plus, she gave me a good sermon illustration. I just had to let it go. But cool down and ask why you are mad, and that will lead you to what you should do next...if anything.
- XI. And third, we need to follow God’s advice to Cain to **not let the anger master us**. Not let it control and lead us to do things we will regret later. One way to do this is to admit our anger to God through prayer. “Lord, this person really embarrassed me. Can you smite them? ☺ Help me, Father, give my anger to you.” Many of the Psalms are just like this. Especially 137...it’s the Psalm for the furious. But the idea is not really trying to get God on our side to take revenge on our enemies, but rather to help us release that anger to Him before it masters and controls us. God says that vengeance is His. That righting a wrong is ultimately His domain, not ours. When we try it, it just makes matters worse. Will Willimon met a woman in Belfast, Ireland working among the poor of that city. She shared with him her story. Her husband went to work one day, and as he got into his car two men with the IRA emerged and shot him five times in the face. And then they went after her and her daughter. But they were able to escape. Her husband was a superintendent of the local jail and therefore he and his family were considered a fair target. His face was so badly damaged they didn’t allow his own mother to look at him at the funeral. Willimon on hearing this said to her, “That is horrible! How did you manage to go on?” She told him as she stood over her husband’s bloody body that she began praying the Lord’s Prayer. She got to the part “Forgive our sins as we forgive the sins of others...” she paused...and prayed, “Okay God, you have forgiven me of all my sins, so I know I must forgive the sins of these men. You punish them or whatever you choose to do, but I choose to forgive...but I need your help. “ And she told Willimon, “Those gunmen killed one of the most wonderful men in the world but my anger was no match for God. God wouldn’t let the anger kill me too.” Don’t let unresolved anger kill us either. We need to turn it over to the One who took our worst...the world’s anger, hate and sin...and absorbed it and overcame it at the cross.