

Sidestepping the Path of Anger

I visited the NY World's Fair when I was 10 and bought a 45 disc of the theme song at the UNICEF booth sponsored by Pepsi-Cola. The year was 1964 and with telephones, radio, TV, and airplanes shrinking the world, Walt Disney's songwriters had penned a song gushing with optimism for the world's future, "It's a small world."

*It's a world of laughter, a world of tears
It's a world of hope and a world of fears
There's so much that we share that it's time we're aware
It's a small world after all.*

*There is just one moon
And one golden sun
And a smile means friendship to everyone
Though the mountains are wide and the oceans divide
It's a small world after all.*

Yet, as small as the world has become, 41 years later there is little evidence of any hoped-for brotherhood on the world stage; there is only rage. Ironically the day we come to James' passage on anger, is the day we mourn for fellow citizens who died at the hands of 19 angry men 4 years ago. And our own anger flares as we remember.

A person's angry at someone from another tribe or religion, or sect. Angry at someone from a different political spectrum, or economic class. In the wake of the hurricane, people are mad; instead of pulling together, seems like we're pulling apart. I'm angry at my spouse, my mother, the person in line ahead of me, my neighbor, my boss.

God is deeply concerned about the human weakness of anger. He won't permit a quick-tempered, a quarrelsome or violent man to be a church elder. Instead, elders must be gentle (1 Tim.3:3) and self-controlled (1 Tim.3:2). He forbids a husband to be harsh with his wife (Col.3:19), insisting instead that he be considerate and treat her with respect (1 Pet.3:7).

In today's text on anger, I want to put the spotlight on 2 challenges that anger brings: one has to do with worship, one has to do with discipleship. READ Jas.1:19-20.

1. Seeing the worship challenge

I don't know what makes you angry but *things* make me angry: working on a project I cut a piece of trim too short, or damage the wood floor, or spill paint. But James is especially thinking about getting angry at *people*. Some of the people we get angry at, we just avoid; they are co-workers or acquaintances or even neighbors that we don't *have* to see much so we don't and that more or less solves the problem.

But it's a lot harder when we can't escape the relationship isn't it? We're members of the same church, or married to the person, or they are one of our children, or our parents.

If you're under age 18, how many of you always agree with your parents, raise your hand. Go ahead, raise your hand if you always agree with your parents. Now, we could talk about a lot of things that create conflict but let's take for example, the age old problem of staying up. You're 15 years old, a sophomore in high school, and all

your friends can stay up until midnight, even on school nights. For some reason known only to your parents' pickled minds, they insist you be in bed by 10:30 on school nights.

One Thursday night there is this dance that you want to go to, not school sponsored although it's chaperoned and run all the right ways. Ending time is 11:30. Mom and dad say, "Alright, you can go, but we'll pick you up at 10:15." The expression on your face looks like someone just informed you they intend to amputate your right arm. Which you will not stand for!

"What are you thinking! You are the most backwards, ridiculous, oppressive parents in the universe. The *universe!* I can't *believe* God ever let you conceive a child! Didn't he *know* what you'd be like!" And so forth, and so on.

What's the problem; interrupted worship. Because we tend to worship ourselves, we blow a gasket when someone opposes our point of view, or disagrees with me, or defies my wants. How dare they! Don't they realize *I* am the center of the universe? You see being self-centered makes us putty in the hands of anger.

So, God's counsel for us self-worshippers, is to step down off the throne for a minute. Which will make it possible for us to...

- Listen more
- Talk less
- Control my anger

What king is quick to listen? None, but a servant is.

What king is slow to talk? None, but a servant is.

What king restrains his anger? None, but a servant does. When we come to Jesus Christ we are no longer kings, no longer the center of the universe, but now servants of Almighty God. Gal.5:19-21 says *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: ...discord..., fits of rage...* This is the stuff that used to run us. But not any longer. For the Christian, fierce anger is not a disorder to be medicated but a disposition to be harnessed. God says, now that you are a Christian, *you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage...* (Col.3:8). It's a worship challenge.

Prov.19:11-12: A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.

2. Seeing the discipleship challenge v.20

It's also a discipleship challenge. Hard to follow Jesus while you're ticked off. REREAD v.20. Is anger itself always wrong? No. Jesus was angry at the temple merchants who were profiteering on a religious holiday. Moses was furious at Israel over their golden calf sin. I'm angry when I learn someone's mistreating his wife; or hear that someone's robbing the Salvation Army buckets at Christmas. I'm mad at the abortion industry and the artificial legalities that prop it up. Some things should make us mad.

READ Eph.4:26-27. Anger is a response of the mind to something, an emotion, a sentiment that is neither good nor bad by itself. However, if it becomes a houseguest instead of a dinner guest, the devil gains an ally. Either I abandon it quickly or it disrupts my ability to follow Jesus.

Ps.37:8: *Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.* A counselor once told me that probably 90% of the counseling problems he dealt with had bitterness as a key root. What's bitterness? Unchecked anger. And left to fester, Satan builds a monument of sin in our hearts with all kinds of side effects. And

then eventually, the side effects stand all by themselves, and we're mystified how we ever got that way.

You see, I can't live in anger and follow Jesus; I just can't. I can't serve two masters; either I will hate the one and love the other, or I will be devoted to the one and despise the other (Lk.16:13).

Concl:

Anger: a worship, a discipleship challenge. You know, everyone gets angry sometimes. It is something to keep in check, and more listening combined with less talking, can help us grow. But I suspect there are some of you are just plain angry. That's how you live. People have told you so, you know it, and you justify it. After all, even the psychiatrists say you need to get it out there, vent, relieve yourself of that emotion.

So you do; every chance you get. Your wife—or your husband—your children—or your parents—get out of your way. People walk on eggshells trying to pacify you at home and at work. Because they're scared to confront you, you've fooled yourself into believing, "I'm just fine." You aren't. Years ago, you played right into the devil's hands, and you are the star of your own show.

The place for you to start, is repent. Won't you get on your knees today, now, and admit who you are. You are the man Solomon described in **Prov.29:22: *An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins.***

Read the book of Proverbs, you'll see yourself everywhere in there. Once you've repented, go find someone you think you can't intimidate, and ask him/her if she'll be a prayer partner for you, someone to say hard things to you, and who will love you without giving up. You need someone like that.

If I've just described you, I'd to pray for you right now. Bow head. Ask for raised hands.

Prov.19:19: A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again.

Prov.22:24-25: Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.

Prov.25:28: Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.

Prov.12:16: A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult
(illustration: song, COWARD OF THE COUNTY)

Prov.14:17: A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated.

Prov.14:29: A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly.

Prov.15:1: A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger

Prov.16:18: A hot-tempered man stirs up dissensions, but a patient man calms a quarrel.

Prov.17:14: Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.

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