

# What's wrong with me? Anger

Message for Sunday, November 5, 2017  
by Bruce Fraser

Thanks to Bryan Wilkerson for lots of ideas in here.

**Scripture:** Genesis 4:1-8; James 1:19-20

**Children's Message:** Nehemiah 9:17, "You are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love."

I brought with me a stick of dynamite. Maybe you've seen in a movie how they use this: the dynamite has a fuse—a piece of string—sticking out one end. You light a match to the end of the fuse, and you've got about ten seconds to run and hide while the fuse burns down to the dynamite. When the flame gets to the dynamite—BOOM! Can we all pretend to be dynamite, when I count to 3: 1 – 2 – 3 BOOM!

Dynamite is sort of like an angry person. Sometimes we say that someone "has a short fuse." That means they get angry easily and blow up.

**QUESTION:** Can an angry person be dangerous, like dynamite? Yes: they can hurt others, with their words, or even by hitting someone.

We all get angry sometimes. Someone isn't playing fair, or is being mean. You don't like it and you get angry. You might feel like a piece of dynamite going off. Do you think it's a good thing to get angry quickly, to have a short fuse?

Does God have a short fuse? The Bible tells us that God is very patient, slow to become angry.

You know how much I love blowing up balloons. But what would *really* be fun would be blow up some dynamite! Let's try this, and see how it works. So here's my stick of dynamite. And here's the fuse sticking out the end. Who would like to light the match to the fuse? *Accept a volunteer.*

Great! Now pull the fuse out to the end. *Child starts pulling the string out of the dynamite, but it keeps coming and coming. There's about 20' of string in there!* Wow, that's a long fuse! If you light the match to that, you might have time to go home and have lunch before it reaches the dynamite.

You probably know that isn't real dynamite. But this gives us an idea about how slow God is to become angry. God is very patient with us, and he wants us to be like him: patient and slow to become angry. The next time you feel yourself getting angry, remember God's long fuse, and don't explode.

Thanks to Ruth Gilmore in her book *Barefoot in the Snow* for this idea!

**Message:** "What's wrong with me? Anger"

We're looking at the Seven Deadly Sins. It's a list of the most troublesome traits that people deal with. They affect everyone. In fact, the list was initially developed by people who devoted themselves to living holy lives—and they were frustrated by these things which messed them up. So if they had trouble with these things, it's no surprise that we do, too.

So far we've looked at pride, envy and gluttony. Today we're looking at anger.

Anger is special in a number of ways. For one, it's the most obvious. In your heart you can harbour lust, greed and so on, and no one will know about it. But when we're angry, everyone around us knows about it. It shows up in our words, our actions, even the look on our face.

For another, anger hurts others. The other sins do too, given enough time to spin their web of destruction. But anger hurts immediately.

Third, anger is the only one of these vices which sometimes is a virtue. None of the other six are ever good; but there are times when anger is the appropriate response. When we see injustice, anger is a good and proper response. But even there, it's tricky to deal with. You don't want to go overboard with your anger; you need to learn to manage it in a godly way. We don't talk about "managing" lust or greed; we want to get rid of them entirely. But we can't do that with anger. It's part of the way we're wired.

Fourth, it's the only one in the list which applies to God. The Bible tells of many times when God became angry. Jesus became angry, too, on several occasions, most of them when the religious leaders were so caught up in all the little details of religion that they lost touch with God's purpose.

## 1) Anger is a warning: something is wrong

Let's begin with a case study. We'll call it the "Case of the Angry Young Man," and it's found in Genesis 4.

Genesis 4:1-5, Good News Bible:

Then Adam had intercourse with his wife, and she became pregnant. She bore a son and said, "By the Lord's help I have gotten a son." So she named him Cain. Later she gave birth to another son, Abel.

Abel became a shepherd, but Cain was a farmer. After some time Cain brought some of his harvest and gave it as an offering to the Lord. Then Abel brought the first lamb born to one of his sheep, killed it, and gave the best parts of it as an offering. The Lord was pleased with Abel and his offering, but he rejected Cain and his offering. Cain became furious, and he scowled in anger.

The first thing we learn from this story is that anger is a natural human emotion. The human race is only one generation old, and anger shows up already.

"He scowled in anger," it says. We are emotional beings, made in the image of God. And those emotions are meant to be expressed. When we're happy, we smile. When we're sad, we cry. When we're mad—we scowl, we frown. That's normal. Emotions aren't meant to be hidden, buried, or stuffed. They're meant to be expressed—in healthy, God-like ways, of course.

It's interesting that the first record of anger in the Bible happens in a family. When police officers respond to a call, the ones they fear the most are domestic disputes. Families are where anger gets the most out of control. One officer said, "It's ugliest when husbands and wives are fighting. It's deadliest when brothers are fighting."

In this case, Cain was angry because his brother's offering was accepted, and his was not. That didn't seem right to him, so he got angry about it.

There's a lot we don't know about this story. We don't know why his offering wasn't accepted. We don't even know how they could tell which offering was accepted and which one wasn't. But the point is: Cain felt that something wasn't right, and he was angry.

Anger is like a warning light on the dashboard of your car. It tells you something is wrong. Anger tells us something is wrong: with the world, with a relationship, or maybe with us. Something's not right.

Anger in itself is not sinful. It's what we do with that anger that determines whether it's sinful or not.

## 2) Anger can be turned to good or bad

Genesis 4:6-8, Good News Bible:

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why that scowl on your face? If you had done the right thing, you would be smiling; but because you have done evil, sin is crouching at your door. It wants to rule you, but you must overcome it."

Then Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out in the fields." When they were out in the fields, Cain turned on his brother and killed him.

Anger tells us something is wrong. Our instinct is to fix what is wrong.

In 1979, a young man named Marcus Brown, aged 18, was killed by a drunk driver on a Florida highway. His mother, Beckie Brown, channeled her grief and anger into action, and she formed a local coalition of parents who had lost children to drunk driving. She began a campaign to increase awareness and prevention. The group came to be known as MADD—Mothers Against Drunk Driving—and over the years, that group has changed the culture and the laws surrounding drunk driving and saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

That was a constructive way of dealing with anger. It is possible to be "good and mad." When we get angry about the things that God gets angry about, when we act in ways that promote well-being and the purposes of God, it can be a virtue.

Unfortunately, our anger far too often prompts us to do something wrong. Instead of being constructive, it becomes destructive.

Cain's anger over his offering being rejected told him that something was wrong. But instead of finding out what was wrong, he tries to make the problem go away by killing his brother. Now, had Abel done anything wrong? No! Cain's problem wasn't really with his brother; it was with God. But

instead of directing his anger at God, he directed it at his brother and killed him. And did killing his brother help anything? No! All it did was increase the pain and heartache. His brother was now dead. His parents were now grieving. He was now guilty and afraid and more isolated than ever. Cain's anger was hurtful and misdirected, and it didn't accomplish anything.

### 3) The Healthy Virtue: righteousness

Throughout this series on the Seven Deadly Sins, I'm always including the positive, the Healthy Virtue alternative to the Deadly Sin. In the case of anger, the Healthy Virtue is righteousness. Righteousness means pretty much what it says: to live the right way, to do the right things. It's also about restoring the good: putting things right, putting people right.

This is what God asked of Cain, back in verse 7: "If you had done the right thing..."

**James 1:19-20, Good News Bible:**

**Remember this, my dear friends! Everyone must be quick to listen, but slow to speak and slow to become angry. Human anger does not achieve God's righteous purpose.**

Human anger—when it explodes, when it is in control rather than you in control of it—never does any good. It only destroys things, destroys relationships, even destroys people. It is the opposite of righteousness.

But what if we channelled our anger in a positive direction?

When your friend is speaking about women or some racial minority in an offensive way, the right thing is to speak up and say, "Wait a minute. That's not true." When you know that someone is in an abusive relationship, the right thing to do is to say to that person, "I hear what's going on, and I'm concerned for you. I'd like to help."

Sometimes the right thing to do with our anger is to let it go. I don't mean let it go off like a bomb; I mean let it go by forgiving whoever has wronged us.

**Ephesians 4:31-32, Good News Bible:**

**Get rid of all bitterness, passion, and anger. No more shouting or insults, no more hateful feelings of any sort. Instead, be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ.**

### Conclusion

I don't know who or what might be making you mad these days. All I know is that if you are human, you're going to get angry. And what you do with that anger will either be helpful or hurtful. It will either be righteous or sinful. Bring your anger to God in prayer. Bring it to him honestly and completely, because when we bring our anger to God, we're able to do something good with it.

### Next Steps:

- ) Be aware of your anger. What or who pushes your button? Why? What's going on there?
- ) Pray; ask God for wisdom and patience.
- ) Respond in a constructive way. Do what is right, not what feels right (i.e. do not let emotions control the situation).

Some of you may have a real issue with anger. I want you to know today that there is hope. God can take the deadly sin of anger out of your life if you will give it to him, and he will replace it with his peace and his patience and his presence. Peace with others begins with peace with God.