

Date: November 10, 2019

Series: *Some Final Lessons in Neighboring*

Title: *Good and Angry Neighboring*

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Scripture: Ephesians 4:26-27, 29-32

26 - "In your anger do not sin:" Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,

27 - and do not give the devil a foothold. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

30 - And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

31 - Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

32 - Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

I think it goes without saying that one of the potential barriers to healthy relationships with our neighbors is anger. Speaking of that, this week I found a story about some neighbors who dealt with THEIR anger with each other by using very creative notes. I want to share a few of them with you.

This first neighborhood dispute apparently had to do with one neighbor repeatedly asking the guy next door to paint his fence.

This is his reply. *"Look, I painted my fence."*

This next dispute had to do with a neighbor who owned a cat. They put this note on her door:

A MESSAGE TO LATE NIGHT CAT LADY

- 1. Do you really think standing in the street at 1AM and calling in a loud, high voice is the best way to bring in your cat?*
- 2. Do you really believe your cat can hear your voice and your neighbors cannot?*
- 3. Do you imagine your neighbors enjoy you waking them from sleep at 12M, 1, or 2AM on a nearly daily basis?*

SUGGESTIONS

- 1. Bring your cat in before 10PM*
- 2. Realize your voice carries and the houses on this street are close together.*
- 3. Consider getting another pet---maybe a goldfish.*

These next neighbors, who apparently live in North Dakota, seem to have had a constant feud over parking during the winter months as you can see in this angry note.

"I spent three hours digging this spot out. If you take it, I will spend six hours burying your car back in it!"

This next angry neighbor borrowed some lines from Liam Neeson in his note.

"To the person who stole the Amazon box off my porch.

I don't know who you are.

I don't know what you want.

If you are looking for a ransom, I can tell you I don't have any money.

But what I do have are a very particular set of skills---skills I have acquired over a very long career---skills that make me a nightmare to people like you.

If you bring the box back, that will be the end of it.

I will not look for you.

I will not pursue you.

But if you don't, I will look for you.

I will find you.

And I will ~~kill you~~ hit you really hard.

- APT F.”

One more, this angry note was an attempt to resolve a dispute over music tastes.

“Dear neighbors,

Someone in this building **LOVES** Christmas Music.

If that person could **PLEASE** remember that not everyone has the same bizarre taste in music, and that people around them can hear it **VERY CLEARLY**,

---and do not like being forced to listen to “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas” (and every other song) **AT 7AM IN MARCH** (or any other time of the day).

Thank you.

Merry Christmas”

I got a kick out of these written expressions of neighbor anger, but the fact is anger or rage is a real problem in our culture. In my Google research I lost track of how many stories I found about neighbors killing each other over disputes. Our nightly news almost always contains stories about road rage or airplanes being diverted because of angry travelers. The main way people use social media seems to be to angrily strike out at others. And did you hear about the man killed at a Popeye’s this week in an argument over a chicken sandwich?

Part of the problem, according to James Garbarion, a human development professor at the Carroll’s alma mater, is that there has been a major shift in our society’s ATTITUDE toward anger. He writes, “*There is a general breakdown of social conventions---of manners---of social controls. This gives a validation, a permission to be aggressive. Kids used to be guided by a social convention that said, ‘keep the lid on.’ today they are guided more in the direction of taking it off.*”

So, there has indeed been a progression in our society’s attitude toward anger. These days everyone seems to think they have a right to express their wrath, even over little things, in ways that we used to look at as being inappropriate. This is why it is so important to look to God’s Word for guidance. You see, society’s morals change but God’s Word doesn’t. With that in mind, this morning I want us to look to the Bible for two facts about to anger.

1. First, anger is NORMAL.

It’s part of our make-up, the way we are designed. Cain murdered his brother out of anger and he was only one generation away from the creation---so humans are obviously made with the capacity for anger. That capacity comes from our Heavenly Father for He gets angry. As a matter of fact of the 455 times in the Old Testament that the word “angry” is used, 375 of those times refer to the always-righteous anger of God.

And God’s anger is not limited to the Old Testament. The gospels record the fact that several times Jesus was angry. Remember the time He became incensed that the disciples would keep the little children from Him? And what about all the times our Lord was angry at the Pharisees for their religious hypocrisy or the times He showed His righteous anger by driving the money changers out of the temple?

Oswald Chambers writes, “*For thirty years Jesus did nothing, then four three years He stormed every time He went down to Jerusalem. Josephus says He tore through the Temple courts like a madman.*”

Anger is indeed one aspect of God’s character. It’s derived from His holiness, justice, and love.

- Since God is holy, He hates sin.
- Since God is just, He hates injustice.
- Since God is love, He condemns any action that is unloving.

God gets angry about these things. And, as beings made in His image, we have the ability to get angry as well. Have you ever noticed how little children will angrily say, *“That’s not fair!”* That’s because God’s *“fingerprints”* are on them, so they understand the concept of fairness and get upset when they perceive that they aren’t being treated that way. Anger is a God-given emotion that is normal for us to feel, natural for us to want to express. In fact, there’s something inhuman about a person who never gets angry. Only robots and Vulcans never get mad.

Think about it. We’d be quick to say, that a person who doesn’t show compassion---one who doesn’t love---well, we’d say there was something terribly wrong with them wouldn’t we? We’d say this because love and compassion are God-given emotions and we’re expected to express them. The same is true of anger. Anger is normal. And this leads to the second thing that God’s Word teaches about this emotion.

2. It tells us that anger is not necessarily BAD.

In fact, in our text God commands us to, ***“BE ANGRY---yet do not sin.”*** Nowhere in the Bible will you find a command to *“Be lustful but do not sin.”* or *“Be greedy but sin not.”* This is because lust and greed are wrong PERIOD. But not so with anger. In fact, if we learn to control it, anger can motivate us to do very GOOD things. It’s possible to be GOOD and angry. It was GOOD anger that motivated Lee Iacocca to fix what was wrong with Chrysler back in the ’80’s. After his success with that corporation Iacocca wrote, *“Wonderful things can happen when Americans get mad. I think some well-directed anger can cure most of what’s wrong in America today.”*

History gives us numerous other examples of the positive results of GOOD anger. It was good anger that led Candy Lightner to found MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers) after a drunken driver plowed his vehicle into her 13-year-old daughter and a Californian judge gave the repeat offender a light sentence. That anger-inspired organization has saved countless lives. It was good anger that led people in England and later in America to end slavery. It IS good anger that leads people today to work to right the continued wrongs committed due to racial injustice.

Ironically, the world would be a sadder place without GOOD anger---selfless anger---anger that is motivated by wrongs committed against other people. Don’t get me wrong. As we are all well-aware, it is very easy for ANGER to lead us to sin. But it doesn’t have to. It can motivate us to do a lot of good. With that in mind, let’s spend the rest of our time talking about how to make sure our anger pushes us away from sin and toward good, how to embrace what we’ll call: *“good and angry neighboring.”*

(1) Stay away from ANGRY people.

Our closest friends should not be people who can’t control their rage because we tend to become like the people we hang around. If we spend time with a rebel, we will become rebellious. If we hang around negative people, we become negative. And when we hang around angry people, guess what we become like?

In his autobiography, *Number 1*, the late baseball manager, Billy Martin described a hunting trip he once took with Mickey Mantle. Mantle had a friend who allowed him to hunt on his ranch and when they arrived at the ranch, Mickey told Billy to wait in the car while he checked in with his friend. Mantle’s friend, as always, gave Mickey permission to hunt, but asked Mantle to do him a favor. He had a pet mule in the barn that was going blind and he didn’t have the heart to put him out of his misery. So, he asked, *“Would you shoot the mule for me?”*

Mantle agreed but he decided to have a little fun. When Mickey came back to the car, he pretended to be angry. He slammed the door shut and Martin asked, *“What’s wrong, Mickey?”*

Continuing his faux-anger Mantle growled, *“He said we couldn’t hunt on his land. I’m so mad at that guy that I’m going out to his barn and shoot one of his mules!”* Then Mantle put the pedal to the metal and drove to the barn like a maniac. The horrified Martin shouted, *“We can’t do that!”* *“Just watch me!”* Mantle replied. When they arrived at the barn, Mantle jumped from the car with his rifle, ran inside, and shot the mule. However, as he was leaving, Mickey heard two more shots and ran back to the car. He saw that Martin had taken out his rifle as well.

“What are you doing Martin?” He yelled. Billy hollered back, his face flushed with anger, *“We’ll show that son of a gun! I just killed two of his cows!”* Martin had to pay the farmer \$800.

Anger is like the flu in that it can be highly contagious and for this reason wise King Solomon strongly urges us not to date, marry, befriend or go into business with someone who has difficulty controlling his temper. In Proverbs 22:24-25 he warns, ***“Do not associate with a man given to anger or go with a hot-tempered man, lest you learn his ways, and find a snare for yourself.”***

Here’s a second thing we must do in order to embrace good and angry neighboring.

(2) Take an EMOTIONAL TIME OUT

Most of the time our anger leads us to cross the line into sin in that first emotionally-heated response; when we fly off the handle and SAY things or DO things we shouldn’t. And, as I’m sure you know, flying OFF the handle is easy but flying BACK ON the handle can be a tricky maneuver. I mean so many times our initial unbridled anger causes us to say things that we can’t take back or do things that we can’t undo. So, whenever we first feel our blood beginning to boil, it’s wise to step back for a few minutes and think, to delay our reaction long enough for us to calm down and evaluate what’s going on. The fact is sometimes the only way to prevent an explosion of sin-filled rage is to physically remove ourselves from the “detonator,” the source of our frustration for a few moments. If we give ourselves a time out like this, if we step away for a bit or ask the person if we can call back later, well, we will be less likely to say something we will regret.

How many times have you been right about something but because you foolishly lost control of your anger in those first minutes, you ended up looking wrong? Isn’t that frustrating!? This is why Solomon says, ***“A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.”*** (Proverbs 29:11) and, ***“He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.”*** (Proverbs 14:29) One of the places most of us give full vent to our anger and exalt folly is when we are on the road, behind the wheel. No need to raise your hands, but have any of you yelled at another driver even though they couldn’t hear you? Anyone ever purposely tailgated a slowpoke or laid on the horn? One AAA researcher warns: *“Inconsiderate driving, bad traffic and the daily stresses of life can transform minor frustrations into dangerous road rage. Far too many drivers are losing themselves in the heat of the moment and lashing out in ways that could turn deadly.”*

The point is, when we get mad, the first thing we need to do is nothing. We need to stop and cool down. Here’s the second thing.

(3) Clarify the issue.

The purpose of an “emotional time out” is not to AVOID our anger but to give ourselves the time and space necessary to ANALYZE the situation. Many times, we are angry over things because we don’t know the facts. So, in these time-out moments, we need to look within and do some honest self-examination to try and find out why we are angry. In fact, I have come to think of my own anger as a God-given warning light to remind me that something inside is wrong. So, I pull aside for a while to try to cool down and understand what it is. In verse 26 when Paul says, ***“Be angry but sin not,”*** he is saying in essence, ***“Watch out---you had better find out what lies behind your anger before it leads you to sin.”*** So, we back off from the source of the conflict to give

us time to not only calm down but prayerfully figure out what it is that has made us mad in the first place. This helps keep us from crossing the line into sin. You see anger is actually a secondary emotion in that it is brought on by other things.

One example of “another thing” is HURT.

I mean, physical pain can bring on anger. Think about it. How many times has the volume level of your voice increased and the quality of your English decreased when you stubbed your little toe? I heard someone say once that the reason God gave us baby toes was to find blunt objects in the dark and they seem to be very good at that don't they! Well, when we are hurt PHYSICALLY we often get MAD.

EMOTIONAL SUFFERING can also bring on anger.

When we feel rejected or ridiculed or put down by someone else, we feel pain in the core of our being and this makes us angry. When this happens, we should think of this as a “warning light” going off reminding us that the potential for sin is very close!

Another root cause of anger is FRUSTRATION.

Things don't go our way in life. Promotions are denied or our kids don't do what we tell them to do and we feel helpless, frustrated, and ANGRY! You know, if you are a perfectionist you are regularly subject to anger. I mean, it's going to happen because things aren't perfect in this sinful world and so you are almost constantly frustrated and ANGRY!

And then a third thing that can trigger anger is FEAR.

Do you remember when Jesus and His disciples were caught in a terrible storm on the Sea of Galilee? As the disciples fought for their lives to keep the boat afloat, Jesus was sleeping on a cushion in the back of the boat. This upset our Lord's first followers. Mark 4:38 tells us that Jesus' disciples were terrified and woke Him up with angry voices demanding, *“Teacher, don't You care if we drown?”* Do you remember how Jesus responded? Did He ask, *“Why are you so angry?”* No, Jesus asked, *“Why are you so afraid?”* Jesus knew that their angry response was just a “warning light” indicating their fear.

And, you know, the root cause behind a lot of anger is fear. We're grumpy as we're attempting to pay the bills. Why? Because we're afraid we may not have enough to make ends meet. We ream out our teenage son because he gets the car home fifteen minutes late. Our anger is cause by our fear that he was in an accident. When we find out he is not dead, we feel like killing him! We angrily resent our bosses because we are afraid that his or her arbitrary decision could eliminate our jobs. So, when the warning light of anger goes off in our soul we must stop and ask ourselves, *“What is the real issue here? What is this anger really about?” Is it hurt, frustration, fear, fatigue?”* Are you angry about something that happened earlier in your day? Find out, because whatever is behind the anger is what you need God's help to deal with.

Then, once we have clarified the issue, we are ready to move on to the next step---

(4) Deal with the problem.

Often anger moves into the “sin” area because we suppress our anger or put off dealing with it. We bottle anger up inside and bottled up anger ALWAYS leaks and when it does it poisons our bodies our minds and our relationships. Anger that is internalized can be just as destructive as anger that is vented. I mean, burying your anger is a lot like the contemporary environmental problem of burying toxic waste. When the canisters of poison are buried underground just outside the city limits, everyone thinks the problem is gone but later people start getting sick as the poison leaks into the ground water. Bottled up, buried anger does the same thing. It poisons our bodies in the form of headaches, stomach problems sleep disorders and a host of other physical symptoms. It poisons our minds in the form of distorted thinking, irrationality, loss of self-esteem, confusion, cynicism, hopelessness, and despair. Dr. Paul Meier, co-founder of the Minrith Meier New Life

Clinics says that anger is probably responsible for 95% of psychological depressions. People are depressed because of the anger that is bottled up inside of them. Bottled up anger, anger that we never deal with ALWAYS eventually manifests itself in some way. So, we need to take the time to deal with it. After we analyze it and find out the problem we need to take the time to resolve it.

This is the principle Paul is getting at here in Ephesians, when he tells us not to let the sun go down on our wrath. He's saying we need to deal with the problem. There's an old Latin proverb that goes like his, "*He who goes to bed angry has the devil for a bedfellow.*" I would agree, Satan often uses our subconscious thoughts while we sleep to weaken us spiritually and make us more susceptible to his way of thinking. The longer we suppress our anger, the more easily it is for Satan to use it to lead us to sin. Solomon warns, "***For the churning of milk produces butter, and pressing the nose brings forth blood, so the CHURNING OF ANGER produces strife.***" (Proverbs 30:33) Simply trying to bury our anger without dealing with it constructively leads to the kind of "internal churning" that Solomon describes and the sinful strife that comes with it.

So, don't put off dealing with the source of your anger. Go to the person you're angry with and in a Christlike manner talk about the issue until it is resolved and peace is restored. By the way, I have found that e-mail can be a real "anger incendiary." Even e-mails sent to try and make the recipient understand an upsetting issue can spark anger. Do you know what I mean? It's the same with any social media. It tends to escalate problems which makes sense because this tactic of dealing with a potentially divisive issue is not Biblical. Remember? In Matthew 18, Jesus told us to go TO THE PERSON and talk about the problem face to face. This is the clearest form of communication and it makes it much easier to resolve any issue.

But the point here is that we need to DEAL with the issue soon before our anger becomes a settled disposition. You see, when we don't resolve our anger, we become more than angry---we become ANGRY people. And this leads to the final bit of Biblical guidance when it comes to good and angry neighboring.

(5) Forgive.

Think about it. VENTING ANGER---EXPRESSING IT doesn't work. It only increases our rage. SUPPRESSING it isn't effective either. As I just said, it always comes out in some way. So, what DO we do with our anger? Well, the best way to deal with anger is to REPLACE IT with Christlike qualities. Look at Ephesians 4:31 where Paul says, "***Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.***" Paul says, "***Don't choose it. Get rid of anger.***" And then what does he say we are to replace it with? Look at verse 32. "***Be kind and compassionate to one another, FORGIVING each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.***" Paul is encouraging us to replace our anger with Christlike qualities.

As many of you know, our own Cathie Burke has served as a missionary in Kenya for a couple decades now. The products many of you bought last weekend come from the center where Cathie serves. In her ministry with refugee women, Cathie has seen firsthand the results of the racial fighting in Rwanda between the Tutsi and Hutu tribes. Years ago, she met Yvonne MOSS-SO-SAHN-GO-HAY, a devout Christian who learned to apply this principle in dealing with the anger in her own life. Her husband, Fidel, was the general secretary for the YMCA in Rwanda.

When the fighting broke out there years ago, he and Yvonne could not understand the anger that could prompt so many horrible killings. People were being massacred all around them in their predominantly Tutsi neighborhood as the Hutus brutally killed any Tutsi they could find.

Yvonne's husband, himself a Hutu, took it on himself to rescue any Tutsi who needed his help. He and Yvonne opened their home to wounded Tutsi's. At one time they had 16 injured people living with them whom they were nursing back to health. Soon word spread to Hutu terrorists that Yvonne's husband was doing this and a

radio broadcast went out urging anyone who saw him to kill him. A big reward was offered. When this happened, Yvonne's husband told her to gather their four children and leave the country so that their lives would not be jeopardized. Not long after they left, Yvonne received word that her husband had indeed been murdered for his actions in helping the "enemy." Yvonne never told her children how their father died. She said, *"My husband has left our children a rich heritage by dying for doing what was right. I want to pass on that rich heritage to them and help them see people as God sees people and as their father saw people---as human beings created in His image."* Yvonne returned to Rwanda through the ministry of *Amani ya Juu* several times to minister to the very people who murdered her husband. Now, Yvonne could have responded to her husband's murder with malice, bitterness, or rage. She could have instilled those feelings in her children and many of us would have thought her justified in doing so. But she chose to follow the guidance in today's text and rid herself of those things and then to replace them with Christlike qualities of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. You see you don't have to be angry and sin.

You can choose to respond by choosing to replace your anger with something that will edify.

But the truth is that, like Yvonne, we cannot make this choice on our own strength. We can only forgive as Christ forgives. We can only be as compassionate and kind as Jesus if we have Jesus living in us, empowering us to do so. As Paul said ***"It is Christ IN YOU---the hope of glory."***

This morning many of us may need to prayerfully confess, *"Lord, I need your power to rid myself of this foothold that I've given the devil into my life. Help me to rid myself of sinful anger."* Or you may be here this morning and you feel that you are losing in your battle with anger because you don't have access to this power source, you don't know Jesus personally. Well then today is the day to claim it, to ask Jesus to forgive you of your sin and to come into your heart and life. As we sing, will you come forward and share your decision with me?