

Get a Grip
On Anger
October 25, 2020

Good morning everyone. I'm very happy that you've chosen to join us whether you're onsite or online.

And I very much hope and pray that what we're going to do over the next 30 minutes or so will help you – and me – get a grip on an emotion that can so easily destroy ...

- Us.
- The people around us.
- The things that we value.
- And the things that matter.

And that emotion is ... *anger*.

And we'll get to that in just a minute but, first, for those who are here for the first time or for the first time in a long time ...

This is week four of an eight-week series called *Get a Grip – controlling your emotions so they don't control you* ...

Because that's what so many of us need to do these days. *We need to get a grip*.

Actually, *I* need to get a grip ... which, to be totally honest with you, is why we're doing this series.

Back in the beginning of September when Jetta and I had the coronavirus and couldn't really do very much, I had a lot of time to think about all that's happened since last February – and, most importantly, how I, personally,

have responded to it.

And I didn't like what I saw.

Far too often, I have been controlled by and driven by ...

- Fear.
- Anger.
- And judgmentalism.

I've been ...

- Fatigued
- Apathetic
- And dissatisfied.

And, as a Christian – as someone who

believes in Jesus; someone who knows and tries to follow Jesus ...

As a Christian, that is not the life God intends for me to experience.

I'm made for *more* than that. I'm made for something *better* than that.

And, if you're a Christian, so are you.

God intends for us, regardless of circumstances, to be characterized by what the Apostle Paul called "the fruit of the Spirit."

The effect of God being in control of your life ...

... is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Galatians 5:22 (NET)

And *that's* what I want to experience. *That's* how I want to live. *That's* who I want to be.

And, even if you're *not* a Christian, *so do you*.

Now, last week we took a look at the issue of *fear* which, as you know, is driving so much of the national dialogue around politics and justice and coronavirus as well as the personal concerns we all face every day.

And if you weren't here or watching online, I strongly encourage you to go the media section of our app and website and watch, listen to, or read the script of the message. It really will help you.

And if you know someone who is struggling with fear right now, send them the link because it will help them, too.

But, today, as I said, we're going to talk about *anger* ... which is the emotion that I struggle with the most.

In fact, it was an experience with anger that God used to confirm my decision to do this series. This is when I knew, "We have to talk about these things as a church."

The Price of Anger

It happened on my first Sunday back after recovering from coronavirus; after having had time to think about how poorly I've been responding to everything.

When I came into the building that day, I was not wearing a mask because, *according to the science, I don't really need to anymore.*

According to the CDC, the purpose of a mask

is ...

- Primarily, to keep you from giving the virus to *others*.
 - And, secondarily, to keep *others* from giving it to you.
1. And there have been no recorded cases of people who have had it, recovered from it, and then transmitted it to someone else.
 2. Once people have recovered from COVID-19, they're immune for at least 90 days.

And before anyone sends me an email, yes, I do know there are some cases of people who *have* gotten the coronavirus again.

Five ... in the whole world ... out of the 24

million people who have been diagnosed with it.

... which means, if you do the math, that I have a better chance of hopping a plane to Denver and playing QB for the Chiefs today than getting coronavirus again before Christmas.

That's the science.

And it seems to me that if we're going to *die* by the science, we've also got to *live* by it. You can't pick and choose only the pieces that fit your personality or your politics.

So, that's why I decided not to wear a mask that day.

Now, I should also add that when I came into the building that morning, I had a hunch that there might be some pushback on what I was

doing.

And I had a little bit of an attitude about that; a little bit of an edge, like, “don’t mess with me on this. I’ve suffered from COVID and I don’t need to anymore.”

So, when Mica St. George – our executive pastor – came to me after the 9:30 service and said, “hey, I have to tell you that there’s an issue with you not wearing a mask today” ... I was angry. I was livid.

And I went off.

“*That* is ridiculous. According to the CDC, I am *in* no danger and I am *causing* no danger.”

“And I am *not* going to let someone’s uninformed, unscientific, irrational *fear* make me wear that stupid thing when I don’t have

to. I'm not going to play that game *and I'm not going to do it.*"

I was mad.

And she said, very calmly, "well, I totally understand where you're coming from. And I even agree with you in principle."

"But there are people who came into the service today *who don't know* that you have had coronavirus. And when they see everyone else in the room mask up to sing except for you, they're wondering ...

- 'So, what's the deal with the pastor?
- 'Is he trying to make some kind of a political statement about this whole thing?'"

And if you've been here for any of the past 8

months, you know that I have gone to great lengths *not* to do that.

And then she said, “And we have staff and volunteers who don’t want to wear a mask either and they’re saying, ‘well, if *Rick* doesn’t have to wear a mask, then why do *I*?’”

And then the clincher. “Do you know many conversations our leadership team will have to have every Sunday with volunteers and attenders to explain your situation? Is that really where you want us to spend our time?”

And, in that moment, it became crystal clear to me that the price of my anger – technically, my *righteous indignation* because *I am right* ...

In that moment, it became clear that ...

The tradeoff, the price, would be stress and

even chaos for the people around me; people who are actually trying to *help me* do what we do here.

And that's just crazy.

To think like that and act like that – to make that kind of a trade – would be as irrational as being driven by fear over five out of 24M people getting reinfected with COVID. It's foolish.

So, at the 11:00 service that day, I wore a mask. And I've worn it every service since and will continue to do so until this thing is over.

Not because I *want to* or believe I *have to* but because of the tradeoff. Being angry about it and stridently proving my case so I can have my way just isn't worth what it will cost.

A fool gives full vent to his

anger ...

When the emotion of anger begins to rise, a foolish man or woman doesn't take control of *it*. Instead, *it* takes control of them and they go wherever it leads them, regardless of the cost.

*A fool gives full vent to his
anger ...*

... but a wise man ...

A person who can look down the road and see the potential outcome of his or her actions
...

*... a wise man keeps himself
under control. Proverbs
29:11 (NIV)*

And this is why it matters that we "get a grip"
on anger, because ...

- None of us wants to be out of control when it comes to anger. We've seen what it costs.
- And no one who loves us wants us to be out of control when it comes to our anger.
- And we don't want anybody we love, or we have to work with, to be out of control with their anger.

Because it's horrible. And it's a terrible way to live.

Now, just to be clear, when we talk about getting a grip on anger, we're not just talking about *extroverted* anger where you go off and lose your temper like I did that day.

We're also talking about *introverted* anger where you *don't* raise your voice or lose your

temper but, instead, you get moody and you go silent. You don't do anything or say anything, but it's clear to those around you that you're boiling over inside.

That kind of anger is just as scary and just as intimidating as extroverted anger. It has the same effect on the people around you.

So, whether we shove our anger down or we shut people down with it, being controlled and driven by anger is bad news. And nobody wants that.

“Crusader Anger”

Of course, just because *being controlled by anger is bad* doesn't mean that *anger itself is bad*.

*In your anger, do not sin.
Ephesians 4:26 (NIV)*

Anger is just an emotion. It's what you do with it that makes all the difference.

For instance, anger can actually be controlled, directed, and channeled in a positive direction, which is what some have called "Crusader Anger."ⁱ

Crusader Anger is when somebody gets so frustrated and so agitated over an injustice in the world, or evil in the world, or a disease in the world that they say, "You know what? Somebody needs to do something about this."

And they go to work.

Crusader Anger is what led to many of the positive changes in our country. Things like ...

- The enactment of child labor laws

- The ending of slavery
- The Civil Rights movement.

Some of the social justice actions we're seeing today are motivated by Crusader Anger, although when it gets out of control – when it's undirected and unchanneled – it's *not* a good thing.

But we talked about that in a previous series, so we won't go there again today.

Instead, I want to talk for a few minutes about what, to me, is probably the greatest illustration of this kind of anger: how Jesus responded after one of His closest friends, a guy by the name of Lazarus, had died.

And we know about it because the Apostle John – who was also one of Jesus' best friends

– witnessed it and eventually wrote it down in what Christians call “the Gospel According to John.”

And, as we regularly point out around here, the only reason John wrote it down and the only reason we know about it is because of what happened to Jesus after *His* death.

If Jesus hadn't risen from the dead, no one would have cared what He said and what He did. He would have been just one more wannabe Jewish Messiah of which there were many in those days, all of whom wound up on a Roman cross and on the ash heap of human history.

But Jesus *did* rise from the dead and that's why we know about Him.

Anyway ... John tells us that he and Jesus and the other disciples were a long way from

Bethany (where Lazarus lived with his two sisters, Mary and Martha) when Jesus received word that Lazarus was dying.

Sadly, by the time they arrived, not only had Lazarus passed, his body had been placed in a tomb, and the tomb sealed (as was the custom).

When Jesus saw Mary weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled in his spirit. John 11:33 (NLT)

... which isn't necessarily what you would expect, right? You would expect, "When Jesus saw Mary weeping, He felt her pain and He comforted her."

But that's not what happens. Instead, Jesus

gets angry.

Unfortunately, the way Bible translators rendered that sentence from the original Greek language in which it was written into English, minimizes what was actually going on in Jesus' emotions.

It reads that "anger welled up" and "he was deeply troubled" which is in the *passive* voice, implying that it was something that just "sort of happened" to him; it was an emotion beyond Jesus' control that overwhelmed him in the moment.

But, in the original Greek, the statement is actually written in the *active* voice which means that *Jesus* was the driver. So, a more literal translation would be that "Jesus troubled himself" ... "Jesus agitated himself."

Instead of stuffing down his anger (because,

after all, everyone knows that Jesus is supposed to be meek and mild with a halo and all that) ...

Instead of stuffing down his anger, Jesus provoked it. He fanned it into flame.

He was hot. He was incensed. He was livid over what had happened to Lazarus.

*"Where have you put him?"
Jesus asked them.*

*They told him, "Lord, come
and see."*

*Jesus wept. John 11:34-35
(NLT)*

And, just so you'll know, the Greek word for weeping here describes a very private and quiet experience. It's not the loud wailing that was going on among the rest of the mourners.

... which makes you think "well, maybe Jesus has calmed down a bit. Maybe He's not so agitated anymore."

Not so.

Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. John 11:38 (NLT)

Jesus was *still* angry!

By the way, the Greek word that gets translated as "angry" is *enebrimēsato*, which is a word that was most often used to describe the snorting and the kicking of an enraged horse.

Have you ever seen a horse get mad and do that?

A couple years ago, Jetta got thrown from a horse that was *enebrimēsato* and she broke a hip. *Enebrimēsato* is scary. It's wild. It's fierce. It's amped up ...

... which means that in this moment, *Jesus* was scary and wild and fierce and amped up.

And, quite frankly, that's why I love this story so much and why I tell it so often at funerals.

Every time I read it ...

- I see the “*enebrimēsato Jesus*” – who is so unlike the scrubbed, sanitary, tame *Jesus* that most of us have in our minds.
- I see the snorting, slobbering, red-faced, tear-stained, nose-running, irate *Messiah of God* – *Jesus of Nazareth* – striding in rage towards the tomb of one

of his best friends!

- I see the exact representation of the God who's as frustrated and hurt and angry about the curse of death as I am and as you are.

"Roll the stone aside," Jesus told them.

But Martha protested, "Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible." John 11:39 (NLT)

Then He shouted: "Lazarus, come out!"

The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in grave clothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth.

Jesus told them, "Unwrap him and let him go!" John

11:43-44 (NLT)

Even 2,000 years later, it's still an incredible story; an incredible scene of an incredible display of emotion on the part of Jesus.

And I tell it to you, again, because it's one of the most vivid illustrations of Crusader Anger that I'm aware of. Jesus was incredibly angry because ...

- Suffering and death never was part of God's original plan for his friend Lazarus. And it never was a part of the plan for you and me.
- Weeping and mourning were never part of God's original plan for Martha and Mary. And weeping and mourning were never God's intentions for you and for me.

... and He directed His anger – a snorting and stomping kind of anger ... into something incredibly positive for Lazarus and his sisters.

But not just for them.

It was Jesus' *anger* – directed by His compassion – that compelled Him to do something about death for you and me.

And the day is coming when He will once again cry out as he did to Lazarus “come out!”

And all who have believed in Him and received Him as their savior, will be raised to a new life in a body that never gets sick and never dies.

And this, friends, is one more reason why you ought to know Him and love Him and follow Him. It's one more reason why you should

become a Christian if you're not already.

The Root of Anger

Anyway ... that's Crusader Anger. It's a good kind of anger because it's controlled. It's directed and channeled in a positive direction.

Of course, the difference between *that* kind of anger and the "sinful" anger that messes up our relationships and causes us to look in the mirror and think, "Why did I say that? Why did I do that? Why am I acting this way?" ...

The difference is ...

Well, let's go back to a passage we looked at several months ago when we talked about anger in the context of communication. The series was called *Can We Talk?* and, like everything else we do, it's online if you want

to watch, listen to, or read it.

And, in that series, we focused on some things that were written by James, the half-brother of Jesus, in a letter to a bunch of Christ-followers who had been forced to flee from Jerusalem because of their faith ... which was (as you might expect) very hard on them.

And there was a lot of conflict among them as well as anger over what had happened to them.

So, James was writing to encourage them and to give them some practical pastoral advice, especially in the area of anger.

*What is causing the quarrels
and fights among you?
James 4:1 (NLT)*

And based on what he had written right

before this, I think he was baiting them just a bit.

As in “you guys and gals are smart. You guys and gals are wise. So, think about it. What’s the source of the hostility and the anger you’re feeling and acting out on? What’s at the root?”

And I don’t know what any of them would have said in response, but I know what a lot of us would say because I know what *I’m* saying these days.

What causes me to be angry, James, most of the time isn’t a *what*. It’s a *who*.ⁱⁱ

- It’s the people who insist that I wear a stupid mask.
- It’s the people who are so self-centered that they *won’t* wear a mask.

That's why I'm mad, James!

- It's Donald Trump and all the ignorant, mean things he says and all the bad heartless things he does.
- It's the media and the Democrats and their absolute and blind hatred for Trump and anyone who supports him.

That's why I'm mad.

- It's the racist police who just want to make life hell for every black person in America.
- It's the Social Justice Warriors with their insidious, demonic "Critical Race Theory."

James it's not always a *what*. A lot of times –

most of the time – it's a *who*.

- It's my mom. Every time she walks in my house, I feel judged.
- It's my boss. He's ridiculous and inconsistent and it grates on me.
- It's my brother-in-law, who thinks it's his mission in life to give me financial advice.
- It's my ninth-grade daughter. She knows everything and everything I do is wrong.

And James would say "no, no. You're wrong about that. It isn't a *who* that's making you angry, it's a *what*."

*Don't they – the anger and the hostility really – come from the desires at war within you?
James 4:1 (NLT)*

"I mean, you want to look out there at *them*; you want to look out at the world and point to *that* as the cause of your anger but, the truth is," James would say ...

"The truth is that the source of the anger and every negative thing it is producing comes from something that is *inside of you*."

And as long as you think the source of our anger is "out there" you will never deal with the root issue.

Instead, you'll keep feeding it. And it will keep growing and becoming even uglier and more destructive ...

- To you.
- To the people around you.

- To the things that you value.
- And to the things that matter.

OK, James, I'll bite. What is it that's going on inside of me? What's the root cause of all my destructive anger?

"Well, I'm glad you asked," James would say.

You want what you don't have

...

You want what you don't have.

... you scheme and kill to get it.

Not literally, but with your words.

You are jealous of what others

*have, but you can't get it, so
you fight and wage war to
take it away from them.*

James 4:2 (NLT)

And, friends, the reason some of you are angry right now – the reason I'm angry – is because there's something we want – that we think we deserve – that we aren't getting.

That's it. That's the bottom line.

And I know that sounds very simplistic so we're going to dig into it a bit deeper. But this actually starts at a very early age.

In fact, as I was preparing for this message, I came across several videos that illustrate that quite vividly.

Check it out.

Video Clip – Jimmy Kimmel Halloween YouTube

Challenge (3.5 mins)

(B) Kimmel: "It's time now for our beloved holiday tradition ..."

(E) Little Girl: "Dad ... you're ugly!"

Parents, I would *not* recommend that you try that at home next week.

But it *does* illustrate the point.

From a very early age, when we don't get what we want, our desires wage war inside of us and we respond with anger.

Not always – sometimes we just let it go – and some of the Kimmel videos illustrate that, too, where kids say, "It's OK, I'm sad but I still love you."

But this is the difference between Crusader Anger and the kind of anger that is destructive to us and to everyone around us.

For instance ...

- I want to not wear a mask because I've had COVID and it's not really necessary.

But I can't or people will get mad, which makes *me* mad because I'm not getting what I want.

For instance, some of you parents say ...

- "Look, I just want my kid to clean up their room when I say so, because I'm the parent and I deserve some respect."

Right. You are the parent. And you *want* to be treated like that but you're not, so you're angry.

Or ...

- “I just want her to come home on time. We’ve talked about this 10 times, *and she promised*, but she doesn’t do it.”

Right. You want her to keep her promise, but she isn’t. You’re not getting what you want so you’re angry.

Or ...

- “I just want to be given a fair shot. I just want credit for my ideas. I just want to be taken seriously. I *deserve* to be taken seriously.”

Right, but you’re not getting what’s fair. You’re not getting what you want and you’re angry.

See how it works? And it doesn’t even have to be something serious. It can be trivial.

- Arrrggghh! I want this stupid computer to just work!
- I just want my clothes to be washed and put away!
- I just want our politicians and leaders to act like mature adults instead of middle-schoolers.

I want I want I want ... and I'm not getting what I want, so I'm angry ... just like those kids in the video.

Getting a Grip

So, what can we do about this? What's a better way to respond than losing our grip and letting anger control us?

Well, I think three things.

Admit that part of the reason you're angry is you; that you're not getting what you want.

And you might even need to do that *literally*.

In the moment when the frustration or anger or rage starts rising, you might just stop and say out loud even, "You know what, part of the problem is? Not the whole problem, but part of the problem, *my part* of the problem is that I'm not getting what I want. Part of the problem is *me*."ⁱⁱⁱ

And what happens when you do that – when you own your part of the problem – is that the temperature starts to come down because you are getting a grip. You are taking control of the anger and rage and frustration instead of letting those things control you.

Sometimes we lose sight of what really matters. Sometimes, what we want – and

what we get upset about not getting – really doesn't matter all that much in the overall scheme of life.

For example, today I'm going to watch the Chiefs game. And at some point, I'm probably going to get mad because I *want* them to win ...

- But the refs blow a call.
- Or Andy doesn't manage the clock well.
- Or one of the players makes a bonehead mistake.

But before then, right after church, I'm going to NKC hospice to visit with a guy from NHCC who has cancer and probably doesn't have long to live (which is why they asked me to come).

That won't be fun. In fact, I really dislike those situations because I hate death and what it

does to us and to the people we love.

But it will give context to the rest of the day. It will remind me that as much as I want the Chiefs to win, it's not all that important in the overall scheme of life.

So, admit you're part of the problem ... right size whatever it is that you're angry about ...

Then, the final implication of what we've talked about today is to ...

That doesn't mean that what you desire isn't good or necessary. It doesn't mean that you shouldn't pursue it. It just means that you don't try to put it in the place that only God deserves.

As I was preparing for this message, I came across a blog post that I think illustrates this so well.

“Even though I do have some control over what I do in life, I don’t have total control. And even though I can have certainty in God and his promises, there is no certainty in life on this earth.

And for a fear freak like me, this idea sparks a rebellious, temper-tantrum attitude:

- But I WANT certainty!
- I WANT control!
- I WANT a promise, a guarantee!
- I WANT a contract that states that this thing I fear most in all the world WILL NEVER HAPPEN!

But even if I had such a contract, unless it was signed and handed to me by Jesus Christ

himself, I would know that it wasn't real because there are no guarantees.

- There are no guarantees that my children won't get horribly sick and suffer terribly before my eyes while I'm powerless to do anything but watch and pray.
- There are no guarantees that my spouse and kids won't die in a car crash on their way home from visiting relatives.
- There are no guarantees that my spouse won't leave me for another woman.
- There are no guarantees that I won't get cancer.
- There are no guarantees that I won't get sued or slandered or imprisoned or beaten or robbed.

- THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES while living on this earth.

... which means ...

I have to LET GO. LET GO of my desires and demands for control and certainty. Give up the struggle for control that I just can't win. Give up craving a certainty that I just can't have.

Because here's what I *do* have:

- A God who promises to be with me no matter what happens.
- A God who promises to supply every need of mine at just the right time.
- A God who promises to love and care for me like no one else can. No one else

knows me like he does.

- A God who is faithful, true, good, kind, loving, perfectly just, gentle, all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere.
- A God who is incapable of messing up, lying, making a mistake, contradicting himself, forgetting, slipping, abandoning me, or ruining me.
- A God who is incapable of exploiting or abusing me; incapable of leaving me alone and helpless and will never go back on any of the things he promised in his Word, the Bible.^{iv}

Conclusion

Friends part of getting a grip on anger is believing and accepting that you don't need what you think you want in order to be happy.

You need God.

So, as we close out this service, we're going to give you an opportunity to experience that.

1. Next week ... communion / online folks get stuff ready beforehand
2. Next week ... Get a grip on Judgementalism ... probably worth doing before Election Day because we're all going to judge those who vote for the wrong candidate.
3. This Wednesday evening – final food truck – especially good night for families with younger kids ...
4. Offering online

¹ Andy Stanley, *You're Not the Boss of Me: Anger.*

ii Stanley

iii Stanley

iv Adapted from <http://readwhatiwishicouldsay.blogspot.com/2011/07/no-guarantees.html>