

Good morning everyone. My name is Richard Kerry and I serve in two roles here at Fellowship – High School Pastor and Counseling Pastor. It’s a privilege to be with you this morning as we continue our series covering the Deadly Virtues. Gary started the series two weeks ago by talking about Vainglory and then moved on to envy last week.

I want to start this morning by introducing you to someone –some of you may know him – this is Bruce **(INSERT PICTURE OF MARK RUFFALO)**. By trade Bruce is a respected nuclear physicist – he’s 5’9”, 130 lbs, and appears very cool, calm and collected. Bruce is better known as Dr. Bruce Banner from the Marvel Comics and known most recently for his role in the Avengers movies.

But here’s one thing you don’t want to do. You don’t want to make Bruce angry. You wouldn’t like him when he’s angry. When Dr. Banner gets angry – he changes quite a bit. He goes from this nice looking man to this guy **(INSERT PICTURE OF THE HULK)**.

The Hulk is known for his destructive nature. When he’s angry he destroys entire cities – people – and anything else in his path. The Hulk, compared to Dr. Banner, is not a respected nuclear physicist. He’s not 5’9”. He’s not 130 lbs and he doesn’t appear cool, calm, and collected.

No – the Hulk – he’s 7’6” and weighs 1,150 lbs. The hulk is terrifying. The hulk is powerful. The hulk destroys everything in his way.

Every single person in this room has seen the Hulk. For some of you – you grew up with him. You had a mom or dad – that in the midst of stress – in the midst of pain – would come at you with aggression and intensity – calling you names, putting you down, physically intimidating you or worse. Some of you live with the hulk now. You have a roommate or a spouse and living with them is like walking on eggshells. You know that anything could be the next thing that sets them off.

And for many of us in this room – when we’ve had a bad day at work – or our kids just aren’t listening – or our friends cancel lunch with us as you’re walking into the restaurant – or let’s be honest, we live in Dallas so when we’re stuck in rush hour traffic – we get home and look in the mirror and we see something like this **(INSERT PICTURE OF RICHARD AS THE HULK)**. I’m clearly that muscular.

We’re staring the hulk right back in the face. We’re carrying around tension – carrying around aggression – sometimes it’s obvious why we feel that way and other times we can’t even explain what it is that sets us off – what causes us to snap at our children, spouse, or the poor server at Norma’s Café – what causes us to come home and complain and act rude and bicker.

We just know that in one moment we feel fine – we feel like Bruce Banner – and in the next minute we’ve turned red with anger – or in the hulk’s case green – we feel fine and then boom we’ve brought destruction into the life of someone else either by something we do or something we say. The Hulk within has shown up.

If it’s not clear to you yet – this morning we’re talking about the Deadly Virtue of anger. And the question this morning isn’t **IF** you get angry – the question is – **WHEN** you get angry –**WHY** are you angry and **WHAT** do you do with it?

Anger may be the most complex of the deadliest sins – because the feeling of anger on its own isn’t deadly and the feeling of anger on its own isn’t even a sin. You know that, right? In many Christian circles we’re taught not to be angry and we’re taught to suppress feelings of anger but Ephesians 4

actually gives us permission to be angry when it says in verses 26-27, "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity – some translations read "foothold." In other words – be angry – but deal with your anger so you don't give the devil a place to attack you or someone else. Whether it be anger caused by someone harming us or if it's righteous anger – which is anger that arises as we recognize the fallen-ness of our world and seeing it the way God does.

Righteous anger is the result of seeing some sort of social injustice or social immorality- watch the news for 5 minutes and you'll probably begin to sense this type of anger. As followers of Jesus – we SHOULD be angry about social injustices and pain the world. We should be angry about sin and death. Jesus was. He was angry that His temple was being defiled by people trying to make a buck and it hindered people from prayer and worship. He was also angry when people who claimed to love the Lord were more concerned with a strict adherence to rules than loving the hurting, the lost, and broken in the world. We should join Him in anger towards things that defile the temple – by the way – that's you and me now. We should be angry at our own sin – those things that are harming us and our relationships with people. And we should be angry when we see people being mistreated – no matter who they are – and for whatever reasons. And we should stand up for those people – that's what Jesus did. And we also need to know that God's righteous anger towards us is gone – that Jesus' work on the Cross satisfied any anger that God had towards us.

However, the anger I want us to really focus in on today – isn't anger about sin and evil and injustice and death in the world – but anger that arises in the midst of our personal relationships.

Anger itself is merely a feeling – often defined as "a strong **feeling** of displeasure, annoyance, or hostility."

The problem for many of us is that we don't deal with the feeling of anger in an emotionally or spiritually healthy way. Instead – we hold on to it - we allow it to build up – we allow it to turn into resentment or bitterness – we DO let the sun go down on our anger. And that's when the Hulk shows up and that's when the devil DOES have an opportunity to "steal, kill, and destroy."

It's in those moments that our anger has moved from a sinless feeling into a sinful expression.

This morning I need you to know – **Anger never travels alone** – it always carries something else with it. If you don't deal with your anger – its traveling companions will be division – destruction – and pain because at some point it will be expressed with hostility.

Unbridled expressions of anger cause pain and destruction.

Unbridled expressions of anger are those that aren't contained. They're reactions instead of responses. They arise quickly without considering proper action.

Think about a couple of examples in Scripture.

Most of us know this story – and Gary actually mentioned it last week – in Genesis 4 we have the story of Cain and Abel. These brothers bring offerings to the Lord – and for reasons not given – the Lord enjoys the offering Abel brings but not Cain. Cain becomes angry with what he believes is unfair treatment – the Lord warns him about the sin that is crouching at his door if he remains angry – the Lord is essentially warning Cain that he's giving the devil an opportunity.

Notice the Lord doesn't condemn Cain's anger – but instead the Lord warns Him that His **feeling** of anger is moving towards an **expression** of anger and in the next couple of verses Cain rises up and murders his own brother. Cain's anger brings destruction to his brother, his family, and himself.

Consequences always emerge when rage takes over.

“...in most cases, anger kills relationships, damages self-esteem, steals joy, shatters communications, inflicts emotional damage, and creates a barrier between us and God.” Tracie Miles

We see that in Genesis 22 and we see it in Genesis 27 with another familiar story – the story of Jacob and Esau. I'll quickly remind you of the facts – these two men are twins – Esau the hairy redheaded older of the two is born with Jacob clinging to his heel – a little foreshadowing of their future. Jacob is the mama's boy. Jacob is probably the more sensitive of the two. Esau is the man's man – he's a hunter and he doesn't always make good decisions when he's super hungry – neither do I by the way – but Esau once sold his birthright to his brother for a bowl of stew. I'm sure it was REALLY REALLY good stew. It was so good Esau probably snapped a picture and Instagrammed it with a clever hashtag like #mostexpensivestewever or #goodbyebirthrightthelogoodeats.

And then later – when their father Isaac is dying – Jacob shows his conniving side as he conspires with his mother to steal his father's blessing from Esau. While Esau is out hunting in order to prepare a meal for the blessing ceremony between him and his father – Jacob swoops in with a prepped meal and his father mistakenly blesses Jacob instead of Esau. His father has been deceived and Esau has been betrayed by his own flesh and blood. So what does he do? He threatens Jacob. He verbally expresses his anger in a destructive way. He tells him – “My father is about to die and when he does I am going to mourn his death – and then you know what I am going to do – I am going to kill you, Jacob.” Esau is furious – and in his fury – he threatens the life of his own brother.

“Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret.” Ambrose Bierce

Remember, the question this morning isn't, “Do you get angry?” The question is, “What do you do with it once it arises?” In these two examples, these men take anger into their own hands. It's unbridled. It's uncontained. It's expressed in a way that brings pain and destruction, and for Jacob and Esau it even led to them being estranged for more than 20 years.

This week some of you, like Cain, brought destruction into the life of someone else physically. You didn't like something your spouse said and you threw the closest bowl or glass. Some of you had a child that disobeyed – and in an instant you reactively disciplined them physically and as soon as you did it you knew it was too late – the damage was done. Students and children – you took it upon yourself to physically intimidate or harm one of your friends or siblings. Some of you slammed doors, punched walls, or you did the opposite of physical intimidation and in your anger removed yourself from a relationship or isolated yourself – giving someone else the silent treatment.

Others of you went the route that Esau did. You allowed your anger to be displayed verbally. You can all probably help me finish this line because so many of us heard it. “You want something to cry about? I'll give you something to cry about.” There's threats – mockery – sarcasm – criticism – name-calling – and put downs. They're typically said out of anger – and although they're not physically harmful – they can be just as destructive because our words help shape the identity of others – especially young people.

Students some of you yelled things at your parents this week that were absolutely crushing. You said something to a friend that damaged their hearts.

In Ephesians 4 Paul gives us a list of actions or feelings that show up with anger – “bitterness, wrath, clamor, slander, and malice” and Colossians 3 adds to that list, “abusive speech.”

Many of you had anger arise in you this week and expressed it in a way that scared people around you and in some instances maybe even scared yourself.

That’s because unbridled expressions of anger cause pain and destruction.

Let me tell you a story – a heavy story. When I was in high school my parents – who I rarely saw in any type of heated conflict – had one of those moments. What started small – quickly grew into a wildfire. Words were flying around the room – non-physical threats were being made – and it led to my mom wanting to leave our house. As I am watching this – I am sensing the anger build up for me. All of us can tell when anger is building – muscles tighten, fists ball-up, faces change. As she attempted to flee – my dad asked her to stop and in a non-threatening and non-violent way – grabbed my mom’s shoulder and she fell to the ground. In that moment – my mom thought my dad had intentionally hurt her. The yelling got louder and when I saw that moment – all the anger that had been building in me came rushing out.

I did the only thing I thought I could do. I reacted. I began pounding my fist on our kitchen door – screaming at both of them to just stop. Just stop. Just stop. I pounded the door so hard that I put a hole the size of my fist in it.

Richard SMASH.

(INSERT PICTURE OF RICHARD AS HULK)

I remember that night – calling someone that I trust – someone that knows me well and asking him to come over. I remember that night crying – crying in shame because of my actions. I had let anger get the best of me and in it I caused literal destruction and scared myself at what I was capable of.

I know most of you in this room have had moments like that too – when your anger gets expressed causing someone pain.

Before we go any further this morning I need you to know that God’s grace extends beyond decisions you’ve made in the heat of the moment this week or anytime in the past. But there’s also a better way to deal with your anger going forward. That’s where we’ll spend the rest of our time this morning.

There’s actually a way to let anger work FOR us instead of against us. There’s a way to express it that leads to health in relationships and in this world and it’s by pursuing a particular virtue.

That virtue is Patience. Patience cripples sinful anger. It puts sinful anger to death.

In the Old Testament we’re told that our God is, “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness (Psalm 103:8). In the New Testament James directs us with these words, “You must all be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger (James 1:19).”

Someone once said, “Patience is the ability to count down before you blast off.” – Author Unknown

Patience helps us answer the question, "Why am I angry?" Far too many times – anger becomes detrimental because before we understand what's happening inside of us – we've already acted. We feel angry – we react. James 1:19 is calling us to be patient. It's calling us to respond instead of react. If we respond with patience – we're able to take a step back for self-assessment – to become more aware of what's going on inside of us. And that's the first thing that patience allows us to do – it allows us to...

Pursue self-awareness.

Anger – in its purest form – the feeling of anger – is meant to be a signal to us. It's meant to be the light on the dashboard letting us know something is wrong. If we ignore the light – we'll have bigger issues later. If we address the light – it benefits us and everyone around us.

"...simply expressing anger whenever it surges is as unwise as never expressing it at all. Maturing Christians are those who are able to discern and 'decide what makes us angry.'" Andrew Lester

Self-awareness helps us understand what is happening on the inside of us. When anger has arisen due to some sort of harm done to you then you need to remember – anger never travels alone. It is always, always, always the result of other feelings. That is why it is called a secondary emotion. Other emotions always precede it. No one experiences anger for the sake of experiencing anger. So if someone asks you why you're angry – an answer that is never true is, "I'm just angry." If you're experiencing anger – let it be the signal that there's something else happening inside of you. Stop – take inventory of yourself. Something you heard, something you saw, something you remembered, or something you thought of triggered feelings in you that led to your anger. Those feelings are typically pain, shame, guilt, loneliness, or fear.

Think back to our Biblical examples this morning...

When Cain kills Abel in his raw display of anger and fury – it's not about anger – it's about envy and shame. It's about intense pain stemming from the perception of rejection. Cain believes he's not good enough – he's not valuable to God. He's hurt. Cain doesn't show any patience or restraint – he reacts.

When Esau threatens the life of Jacob – he's not doing so out of anger. He's doing so because he's been betrayed by his own flesh and blood. He's experiencing incredible pain and jealousy. And in his culture – he's also experiencing shame because all that should have been his has been given to his brother. So before he knows what's truly going on for him – Esau threatens the life of his brother.

In *The Dance of Anger*, Harriet Goldhor Lerner says, "Our anger may tell us that we are not addressing important emotional issues in our lives, or that too much of our self-our beliefs, values, desires or ambitions-is being compromised in a relationship...."

The next time you sense anger – whether it be low-level like frustration or annoyance or higher level like fury – stop. Check-in with yourself. What is it that you're feeling that has caused the anger?

Once we're aware of the issue behind the signal – once we've become self-aware – we can continue on putting sinful anger to death. We do that by...

Risk vulnerability.

If self-awareness answers the question, “Why am I angry?” Vulnerability helps answers the question, “What do I do with my anger?”

Vulnerability requires humility. Putting aside pride and ego for the sake of love. Ephesians 4:2 says, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Ephesians 4:25 tells us to, “Speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.” This is the thing that Cain and Esau weren’t able to do. They reacted out of anger instead of letting others into their world. They let their anger become sinful instead of moving towards unity – which is what risking vulnerability does and what the bulk of Ephesians 4 is all about.

Anger divides. Vulnerability connects – it unifies. Anger is defensive and protective. It keeps us from being fully known – and in the process from being fully loved. Vulnerability is risky. It’s uncertain. But it’s the only way to be fully known and fully loved by someone else.

Risking vulnerability means we take the feelings that we become self-aware of – pain, loneliness, shame, guilt, confusion, fear – and express those to people we trust or the person who has offended us.

Back in June Erin and I got into an argument because – well – I am not the stereotypical guy that doesn’t talk about feelings. I am sensitive. So being the emotionally sensitive and borderline needy guy that I am – I didn’t think Erin and I were getting enough time together. I was feeling lonely and I wanted us to have some quality time together but due to the nature of her job – which requires attention in the evenings – she was distracted and not able to give that attention to me. This went on for three days before I finally spoke up – after a miscommunication – where she thought I wanted to watch the NBA finals and I was just watching it until she finished her work for the night. And that’s when it started. I made a comment to the effect of “I am really frustrated we’re not hanging out tonight.” And she responded, “I thought you wanted to watch the game – I was waiting on you.” So then I got more defensive believing I was being blamed for our lack of time together and so I made that that statement, “Don’t blame me for this – you were working!” At this point my tone had changed and she pointed out to me – as the wife of a counselor should – she responded with an empathizing statement, “It sounds like you’re angry.” It was a thing of beauty – she did great.

I gave a proper response of course, “You’re dang right I’m angry.” And that’s when it clicked. That’s when I realized what was really going on for me. I wasn’t angry. I mean I was. That’s the emotion I was showing. But that wasn’t what was at the heart of the matter.

And in that moment my anger was preventing me from being fully known and fully loved.

What was really going on was I was feeling lonely – feeling neglected – and when I feel neglected that hurts – I feel pain. So in this moment of frustration where my tone has changed and my demeanor has changed – I had to come to the realization that I was hurt...I was able to share that I was actually feeling alone and wanted some time for us to connect.

You see, anger never travels alone – and that day my anger was accompanied by multiple feelings. Opening myself up to those feelings allowed me to move from a defensive posture that prevented my wife from knowing me – to an open and vulnerable posture – letting my wife see the depths of my heart and soul.

After a few minutes to collect myself – I was able to apologize to my wife – to express my regret for my tone changing – and she was able to extend forgiveness to me and as I came to understand her reasons for not approaching me that night – and I was able to extend forgiveness towards her as well.

And that right there is our final step in putting sinful anger to death. When we're able to be patient – to become self-aware and vulnerable – it leads us to be able to...

Choose forgiveness. And it allows us to forgive quickly.

Listen to what Ephesians 4:31-32 says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

When you refuse to forgive – when you hold onto the anger instead of expressing it – it leads to resentment. You know that's what resentment is, right? "Resentment is unspoken anger." It leads to bitterness and a disdain for the other person. You've probably heard the phrase, "Not forgiving is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." Not forgiving hurts you more than the other person.

But forgiveness – it brings healing. It brings freedom and just as importantly it reflects the gospel – it reflects Jesus' forgiveness towards us.

How does God respond when something important in His world is wrong? He responds with redemption – redemption that cost Him His Son. He sacrificed Christ so that His people can be forgiven, transformed, and restored to a right relationship with Him and with others.

Some of you have been holding on to sinful anger – and you need to seek forgiveness. Some of you were harmed personally this week and you need to extend forgiveness to someone. Some of you did things this week you need to seek forgiveness on.

In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul gives the church at Corinth instructions on taking communion. He leads into that by telling them that he's heard there are divisions amongst them and that there are to be no factions amongst them – that there should be no division. He later tells them to examine themselves regarding the taking the elements. I believe he wants them to examine themselves to see if there are any relationships that need to be right and to make sure their heart is in the right place with the Lord before taking the elements.

At this time – our ushers are going to come forward to pass out the elements for us to take communion together and I would ask you to examine yourselves in the same way Paul instructed the Corinthians.

²³ For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵ In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.