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**Series: Proverbs: Living Wisely in a Fallen World**  
**Message: Overcoming Anger**

**Transcribed Message**  
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By any measure, we live in a mad, mad, mad world. We live in what has commonly come to be called a culture of outrage. If you don't believe me, all you need to do is go to any social media site that is in any way provocative, and maybe even not provocative, and you'll see untold madness and untold outrage. It is a universal problem. This matter of anger, this struggle with anger is no respecter of persons. It is something that men deal with. It is something that women deal with. It is something that older people deal with. It is something even that younger people deal with. In one survey that was done, 39% of us do our best to try to hold it in. 23% try to walk away. 21% just explode, and 17% go into what is called rage and destroy. Thomas Jefferson is the one who said when you're angry, count to 10 and when you're really angry, count to 100. Maybe you've tried the NASA method where you count down from 10 before you blast off. Whatever method you have tried, you've probably tried those and a few others. Anger is the emotion that seems to consistently frustrate us, to disarm us, to rob us at times of our testimonies, to injure people within our own families that we love, and to hurt relationships with other people around us.

So we're not surprised in our study of the book of Proverbs that we have a whole lot of stuff in Proverbs about this matter of our anger. Let's look this morning at getting our anger under control because if we don't, our anger will definitely get us under control. Let's talk a little bit about this difficult emotion because anger is a difficult emotion. There are things about anger that we simply don't know. For instance, we don't know why one person's fuse is long and another person's fuse relatively short. Why is it that with one person it only takes a spark to get a fire going? How many of you know that is a song? It only takes a spark to get a fire going, but that's a different context. For the next person it seems they have no end to their patience. It just goes on and on.

Secondly, why is it that one person expresses their anger? They explode, and another person represses it. They suppress it. What is it that makes some people a volcano and they blow up and other people are like an internal nuclear plant meltdown that from the outside you can't necessarily even tell something is going on.

Why is it thirdly that what makes you angry doesn't even bother me? Why is it for instance when you get cut off in traffic, you get upset? Why is it that when the guy is going 15 or 20 miles an hour below the speed limit in front of you it bothers you? why is it that when you're coming on an intersection, the guy waits until you almost get there and then he pulls out and that bothers some of you? Why is it that you can be riding in the car and the kids are yelling and screaming and fighting and it upsets you? Why do we have all of these different things that seem on the one hand to anger one person and not bother somebody else? Is it genetic? Is it something we learn? Is it a matter of spiritual maturity? Is it a combination of all of the above? Those things and probably many others we don't necessarily know the answer to about this matter of anger.

Here are some things that we do know. Here are some things that we do know about anger. We know that it is a God-given emotion. We're made in the image and likeness of God. That means that God has given to us attributes that are similar to Him. Intellect, emotion and will are the ways we generally define that. Since God is Spirit, we're not physically a representation of God, but we are representing God in that His image is stamped on us and that image is reflected in our intellect. It is reflected in our ability to make choices, our will, and certainly in our emotions. God has given us a variety of emotions that He also shares in and anger is one of them. God also shares in this. Psalms chapter 30 and verse 5 says: "For His anger is but for a moment and His favor is for a lifetime." There are numerous verses especially the Old Testament that specifically speak about God being angry at a particular circumstance.

Secondly, we know it's not necessarily sinful. If we know this is a God-given emotion, then we must immediately say that we also know that it is not necessarily sinful. If God gets angry, then it certainly can't be sinful. For you and for me, that's where it gets a little bit different. It's not necessarily sinful when we express anger, after all Paul says in Ephesians 4:26 be angry. That's a command. Be angry but don't sin. It's not necessarily sinful but that is of course much easier said than done. There is

oftentimes within our hearts sinful anger. The Bible certainly allows for anger at sin. We should be angry when we see certain things in our culture and our society and our lives. When we see for instance injustice we should be angry. When we see the oppression of poor people, the taking advantage of those who can't defend themselves, that should make us angry. When we hear and observe and see a justice system that treats certain people in certain ways because of their social, economic condition or because of the color of their skin, we should be angry. We should be angry at those who have authority and abuse authority, especially when they're hurting and taking advantage of other people. There's a myriad of things that we can think of that should make us good and angry. The Bible commends us for that. In fact, the Bible, as I said, commands us in those regards.

Then thirdly, we know it can be harmful if we don't follow Biblical guidelines. We know it can be harmful if we don't follow Biblical guidelines. In Mark chapter 3 and verse 5, Jesus encounters a man you might remember with a withered hand and it happens to be the Sabbath day. Jesus in His compassion is moved towards this man and He heals him. In the interaction that follows, we read in Mark chapter 3 verse 5 that Jesus, seeing the response of the religious leaders, was angry and He was grieved in His heart. He wasn't just grieved. In fact, it says specifically that He looked at the religious leaders with anger. That's a look that you probably don't want to receive, right? Jesus, the Son of God, looking at you with anger. He was angry because of what He observed in their callousness towards this man who had a desperate need. We know and we often think of the fact of Jesus going into the temple and overturning the tables of the money changers. That was Jesus being righteously indignant at the fact that there were those that were physically and spiritually abusing His people and abusing the temple where He intended for people to worship. So Jesus was angry.

But here's what you must keep in mind. Jesus was never angry at personal offense. There is not one indication. There's isn't anything even close to it in Scripture where Jesus was angry because He was personally attacked, because He was personally slandered, or mocked or hit. All of the things that Jesus endured that were directed at Him on a personal level, there's never an indication that Jesus ever responded in anger to those situations. That's why we need to think of Biblical

guidelines regarding this matter. We need to follow Biblical guidelines or anger is harmful. We're going to look at more of those but just think of the fact that James says we need to be slow to get angry. We'll see that further in a little bit from Proverbs. Paul said don't let the sun go down on your wrath. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. So there's an expiration date to the anger. If you are going to get angry even in a good anger there's supposed to be a limitation upon that anger. Anger keeps very bad company. When you go through the New Testament in particular and you look at Romans 1 or you look at 2 Corinthians 12:20, a verse we read last week in fact. You look at Galatians 5, Ephesians 5, or Colossians 3 or any of the lists of sins where the Spirit of God has said here's a list of sins. We see this compilation of sins and some of them we obviously are completely aware of and are rightfully concerned about that in our life or anybody else's. but almost always in all of those passages that I mentioned do you know what you'll find? Anger. Wrath. You find where somebody has stepped over that boundary of Biblical guidelines.

So here's the thing. Anger is the one sin the Holy Spirit says invites the ensnarement and the exploitation of Satan in your life. At the end of that statement in Ephesians 4:27 he has already told us to be angry and don't sin. But be mindful of the fact that when you cross over into sinful anger that you've opened an avenue for Satan to exploit and ensnare you into other sins. He gives a very specific warning about that. It is not that Satan makes us sin and makes us angry. We do it, but he's reminding us that it cannot be taken lightly.

So let's look at this matter of anger and let's learn to control it. If we don't, we acknowledge the fact that it is going to control us. So let's look at the negative side first of all. Your anger controls you when? Your anger controls you when you repress it. When you repress anger, it controls you. How is that? Well, it controls you when you deny that it even exists. When you repress anger and you suppress it, you're trying to deny that anger even exists. You're stuffing it. You're pretending that whatever it is that should bring some response isn't bringing a response at all. There isn't what you might expect. So when there is hurt and disappointment and frustration, it is not even acknowledged. How about this? I think this cuts the other way too but I think it's probably more prevalent this way. Guys, when your wife asks you what's wrong. See,

you're already laughing because you know the answer. You know the answer. We say "nothing", don't we? Some of us do. I do. When Bonnie knows I'm upset and I'm stuffing it and I'm repressing it and she asks what's wrong? I answer that nothing's wrong. What could possibly be wrong? All is right with the world. Pride won't allow us to even knowledge the existence of those emotions. That's wrong. We're denying this inner turmoil. And when we do that, it controls us.

The other way that it controls us in that sense is unseen results. You repress your anger and it controls you by all of these unseen results in your life. This bottled up anger is like a poison being released in our body. Physically it can affect us. People are wondering sometimes what is wrong with them and there's a spiritual element to it at times because anger turned inward can cause headaches and stomachaches and all kinds of disorders. Emotionally it distorts our thinking. Counselors tell us that anger turned inward often leads to depression. Relationally we know that resentment and bitterness, lack of communication, all have very negative consequences in our life. All in effect are repressed anger in some measure controlling us.

What about on the other side? What about when we express it? What about when we explode? What about when we're the volcano rather than the internal meltdown? This is what Proverbs say. Now we get to jump in to Proverbs. Proverbs says first of all uncontrolled anger causes us to act like a fool. In the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter verse 17: "A man of quick temper acts foolishly and a man of evil devices is hated." Jump all the way over to the 29<sup>th</sup> chapter and verse 11: "A fool gives full vent to his spirit but a wise man quietly holds it back." So you ask what happens when you express anger? What happens when you explode? a lot happens and a lot of it is really bad. Have you ever seen someone just totally lose it? They just explode in anger. if you've ever watched that, I don't think you thought to yourself that is a beautiful thing. There are a lot of things that we probably think and it probably depends on how this is unfolding but when we see this happening for instance with a parent and child in public and there's an explosion of anger. There are a lot of emotions, a lot of feelings and none of them are like I wish I could parent that way. Or we see two adults or two teenagers or whoever it is that lost their temper, their control and we see them ready to engage each other in some kind of a challenge. We're not attracted to that. We think rightfully like the writer of

Proverbs says those people are being foolish. They're acting like fools. It is an embarrassment at the least and a lot more than that.

Secondly, the writer of Proverbs says it causes quarrels. It causes quarrels and causes strife. Chapter 15 verse 18. This one should sound familiar because we looked at it last week. "A hot tempered man stirs up strife but he who is slow to anger quiets contention." That was the point of our study last week when we were talking about conflict and strife. Here we see the same point being made in this context. If there's going to be a disagreement, don't be disagreeable. If there's going to be a disagreement, focus on the problem and not the person. All of those things go into this matter of handling our anger.

Thirdly, it hurts oneself. It hurts oneself. Proverbs 14 and verse 29 says this: "Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot." The rabbis used to have an expression: "When the kettle boils over, it overflows its own sides." Just visualize this water boiling over the kettle, over the pot. The point is that the hot steaming water is going right over the sides and it's affecting the one who is expressing it in this way. We've already said that to open our life to anger in an uncontrolled expression of anger opens our life to the exploitation and ensnarement that Satan wants to bring into our life. He knows well that if he came to us and he said here I am. I want you to do this and it's a decidedly evil and bad thing. He knows we would look at that and go get behind me, Satan. But the Scriptures are rightly pointing out that here is an emotion, a God-given emotion that if not contained and properly controlled can have a very adverse effect in our life. Chapter 19 and verse 19: "A man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for if you deliver him you will only have to do it again." You see how you hurt your own self with uncontrolled anger? You get yourself into a predicament. There's an explosion with all of the debris that goes with it. All of the fallout. Somebody comes along –husband, wife, parent, child – and tries to put things back in place. The writer of Proverbs says okay fine, but guess what? With this kind of uncontrolled emotion, you're just going to get to do it all over again.

Another sad outcome is in Chapter 22. Chapter 22 and verse 24 says this: "Make no friendship with a man given to anger nor go with a wrathful man lest you learn his

ways and entangle yourself in a snare.” Here is another way that anger has a negative outcome in our life. We’re not supposed to pursue friendships with people like that. We’re supposed to avoid the angry person. I can remember back in between college and graduate school. I worked for a year before Bonnie and I got married as a warehouseman. I worked on a dock with a lot of guys that were pretty rough. One guy in particular I really liked. He was a married man and had children. His name was Mike. But Mike, for all of his normal kindness, had a terrible temper. People were afraid of him at work because we were handling heavy product and stuff anyway. You didn't want Mike to get mad and throw one of those things at you. I remember distinctly because I worked with him a lot. In fact, there were many times where I tried to get him to settle down, to keep him from getting in trouble. I remember doing this time with him for months and months and months, and I actually began to find in my own heart a desire to respond to things like Mike did. I found that my patience was shortened considerably because I was working 10, 12, 14 hours a day with an angry man. Proverbs knows what it is talking about. It will impact us. This will affect us. so that's the negative side.

What about the positive side? What can you do to control anger? What do we do when we want to get this emotion under control? What does this look like? First of all, we need to understand why we’re angry. I think just asking ourselves some basic questions. You may not ask these questions right at the moment of exploding, but hopefully as you process these questions and then look back on that experience, these questions will help you to maybe do less of that. What provokes me? How do I react? What are my motives? Then I think these last two are really, really significant. What do I really want right now that I'm not getting? What do I want right now that I'm not getting? What is it that I want to control right now and I'm unable to? Those two really seem to me like signal type emotions and questions that really press into the issue. When I think of times when I get angry there is something that I want to control. There is something that I want and I want it right now.

Now here's the thing. When you look at that and you evaluate your anger in light of that, it really points to the fact that anger is driven by a desire. It's driven by a desire to want something and to want it right now. It's driven by a desire to control something and to control it right in that moment. What it is that we desire and what it is that we

want to control may not be a bad thing. You may want to be respected at work. That's a good thing. But you may have a supervisor that doesn't respect you at all and it makes you angry. Then, when you're in an interchange with that person, you want respect and you want respect right at that moment. Or consider the fact that maybe you simply want to be listened to. Or as a parent you want to be obeyed and that's a pretty good thing. But what if you're not being obeyed right now? What happens? Sometimes Mount Vesuvius goes off when we're not obeyed right when we want to be. There's all kinds of good desires that sometimes can trigger an uncontrolled angry response. Here's the point. Those desires can easily become idols in our life. They become something that we elevate to a higher place than love for God and love for others. We're to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We're to love others as ourselves. That certainly is helpful – understanding why it is that we're angry.

Secondly, you need to call it what it is. You need to call it what it is. Sin. Uncontrolled anger is sin. Righteous anger is not. Uncontrolled anger is sin. It's not just that you're crabby today. It's not you're irritable. It is not that you are kind of hotheaded. It is just exactly what the Bible calls it. Sin. Anger is not something out there. Anger is not something in here. Anger is not a thing at all. Anger is a moral choice. Anger is a moral act. The reason that is so important, that we understand what it is, that it is not some thing. it's a moral choice we're making. It's a moral act that we're choosing. The reason that is so important is that the answer to that is to come to God in repentance. It is another moral choice. It is another moral act to ask God for His grace. The solution to a moral problem is given to us in Scripture as being one in which we call it what it is. It's sin. We receive God's forgiveness.

Thirdly, understand what to do with your anger. What to do with your anger. Four things. Learn to ignore the little things. Oh, if it was just that simple, right? Learn to ignore the little things. That's what Proverbs says. Remember in that verse we already read 19:11 "Good sense makes one slow to anger and it is to his glory to overlook an offense." We actually read that last week too because that's often the cause of conflict. When we can't simply overlook a little offense. When we can't get past some minor inconvenience. When we have to receive every personal wrong as if it's directed right at us and purposely. So we need simply to overlook an offense.



There's a lot of children, young people, teenagers in here. I'm wondering this morning how many of you have brothers and sisters? How many of you have many brothers and sisters? How many of you like me had six brothers and sisters? What do brothers and sisters do? They annoy you. That's what they're after. That's their calling in life. Brothers and sisters annoy each other. I mean, I drove my siblings crazy. I know that's hard for you to believe. I was a terrible brother many times in terms of being an annoyance. But there has to be a point where we recognize every little thing that brother and sister do shouldn't be worthy of a response from me that's out of control. So a little thing that bothers us needs to be let go. That's where pride and selfishness so often come in.

Jay Adams has been in Christian counseling for decades. I read something that he wrote this week that startled me. He said a majority of counseling problems involve sinful anger. I was so taken aback by the number. He said that in his counseling practice, about 90% of his counseling with people involves in some way shape or form anger at some level. Oftentimes they don't even realize that they've got this issue with repressed anger. So we need to learn to ignore a lot of things that really don't rise to the level of that kind of response.

Secondly, slow down. Slow down. 19:11. We can just stay right there. "Good sense makes one slow to anger." If you look at chapter 16 verse 32 it says "Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." This is a consistent statement of Proverbs. Something that is closely related to anger is this matter of impatience. We get exasperated and we get annoyed and we get bothered. The bottom line is all of those things are unloving, aren't they? Do you know the very first attribute of love in 1 Corinthians 13? What is the first thing that he says? Love is patient. Isn't that interesting that the Spirit of God would put it in front of the list? When you read through that list of things about love, almost every one of them speak to this issue before us here of overlooking a minor offense, of just slowing down and being patient. Slow down. Wait. Listen.

I can't help but think that a certain amount of anger in our culture is just due to the hectic pace that we think we need to live life. I've got to tell you. I'm glad I am where I am in terms of this whole child rearing and all that. Now we get the grandkids and they

get to go home when we're done. But you know, in regard to the whole parenting scene today, it seems that parents choose this incredibly hectic pace at which to live life. And then they wonder why they're angry all the time because of interruptions and exasperations and all of the rest that seem to go with it. Well, that's not the topic for this morning.

Let's go to number three. Keep a close check on your tongue. Keep a close check on your tongue. That shouldn't surprise us. That seems like a very solid answer. Proverbs 15: "A soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger." There's so many statements in Proverbs about the tongue and about anger and about bad things that happen. It doesn't surprise us at all. With anger, so often one of the first things that gets unleashed if it's not fists in that setting it's the tongue and usually the tongue is first. The writer of Proverbs would agree with James. Be quick to hear. Be slow to speak. Be slow to get angry because the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Finally, realize that God has provided the victory over uncontrolled anger. Realize that God has provided the victory. Anger does not get to control me. I'm not left to my own devices. That is a part of what God wants us to see. We turn to Him in whatever that struggle might be. In this case, it is uncontrolled anger. We turn from our wrong desires. We confess those for what they are. They're sin. We believe the gospel. We believe that I'm utterly and completely dependent upon God for every moment of every day. I ask him to help me in response to things that might otherwise upset me. God does not point out our sins to leave us stuck there. The Holy Spirit who lives within us is exceedingly faithful to check our spirit if we're listening and to say to us don't go there. Don't respond that way. Slow down. Don't speak. All of those things point us rightfully to Jesus. Jesus, who has given us the victory.

So what do we take away? I want you just to remember three things. God is in control of every situation. This is just an acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God. Just think back to the last time you got uncontrollably angry or upset. Then think about the fact that God in His providence is fully aware of that circumstance. So you're going to an appointment and the traffic begins to back up and stall out. You're going to be late. All of the things that you can think of as to why that's not a good thing and then the

anger begins to build up in you as people try to merge in front of you. God has that. God knew that. When you get to the appointment, you apologize. You acknowledge that you got caught up in traffic and you hope they're going to be able to still carry on with the meeting. Maybe they will be aware of the fact that you handled this totally different than somebody else might have. His Word shows me a better way. That is the whole point here. The book of Proverbs shows us a much better way. It always points to Jesus. It always brings me back to Jesus. Jesus is always the better way, a better choice. It is because of the gospel of His grace that we can even respond in this way.

Let's pray. Father God, thank You so very much for the work of Your Spirit in our lives. Lord, we confess and we acknowledge that anger often seems to get the better of us either by repressing it or by releasing it in inappropriate ways. We thank You that in Your grace and Your mercy You have shown us a better way. You have pointed us to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross so that we could be in this personal relationship with You and we can experience new beginnings every day. We're grateful for that. Receive our thanks. e pray in Jesus's name, amen.