



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau  
October 30, 2016

**"Humility: Be Slow to Anger" (Real Faith for Real People Series)**  
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**T**oday I am going to talk about anger. There is one basic theme. I am going to hit it from different ways. And it may not be a guideline you would expect. And here it is: When we have a hard time handling our anger, it probably means we have a hard time with HUMILITY.

That might not be what you expected, but as we delve into the relationship of humility and anger, we might finally get a handle on issues that are deep inside of us and that really churn our stomachs and make us lose sleep.

Today's passage talks about the word of God itself and how we need to accept it. It will help us handle anger.

*James 1:19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.*

*James 1:20 Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.*

*James 1:21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.*

We see right out of the chute of our passage that handling our anger is a process. It begins with three steps, which we can find in our first verse. And I say the key to all this is humility, which comes up two verses later.

## **1) Be quick to listen.**

Let's start off with this scenario: You are getting angry because someone is mad at you, or is accusing you, or

accosting you. When someone offends you, be quick to listen. "Be quick" meaning – it is the first thing you do. Before you attack or think bad thoughts, listen first. But what are you listening for? You have heard me say before that you listen for the seeds of truth.

When someone is upset at you and your anger is rising, listen for the seeds of truth in what the person is saying. Maybe it's true that you have said or done something upsetting. Maybe it is partly or completely your fault.

Normally there is always a seed of truth to what that person is saying. Normally there is something you can ask for forgiveness for. Normally you can see why a person has a valid reason for being upset. So when someone is angry with you, be quick to listen.

But let's flip it. What if you're angry at someone because he or she has done something to you? For example – the restaurant server seemed rude, or your friend was unkind to you, or you felt you were not thanked, or maybe you felt someone broke a promise.

In this case, "be quick to listen" means listen to yourself. What are you saying? Are YOU saying things that are not helpful, mean, unforgiving, or unkind? Quickly listen to your thoughts. Is this all about your rights being violated?

The second step to handling anger is – try not to say a lot.

## **2) Be slow to speak.**

If you are slow in speaking to someone who has angered you, it means you really are filtering, sifting, and running through the database of your mind asking yourself: What is happening here? Why am I mad?

The old adage of "count to ten before you say anything" has wisdom. Be slow to speak. Don't say anything you will regret, anything unfair, or anything that will make matters worse. Don't say anything that might scar the person. Don't say anything that doesn't take into consideration something you might have done wrong. Being slow to speak also puts you in the driver seat, and you'll have a greater chance for reconciliation.

And as you contemplate all of this by listening and being slow to speak, one hopes you will be slow to anger.

There are other reasons one must be slow to anger, and those are the circumstances surrounding the person who's making you angry. We need to take those into consideration. For example: what if you want to blast that person but then you realize his mother or father just died, or it's that person's birthday, or their dog is sick.

It's best to be slow to anger at that point because what you say may not be well received and the chance for reconciliation drops. As my predecessor Bob Owens would always say, "Truth shared out of season is no longer truth."

**I**t was his way of saying, if you share truth at the wrong time, it will never be seen as truth by the other person. I think we have all regretted being too fast in the tongue and wish we never said what we just said.

But not all anger is bad. Jesus overturned the tables in the temple. That was controlled anger, and in His case it was righteous anger. But for us who are not Jesus – and that means all of us – our anger is often not righteous.

If you are defending someone who's being bullied for being socially awkward, nerdy, not good-looking, not smart, or not athletic enough, that is righteous anger. If you are defending someone who is being bullied for being gay – that is righteous anger. If you are protecting someone from being attacked for being an African-American, that is righteous anger. If you are protecting someone from being attacked simply because he is a policeman, that is righteous anger.

But there is an ungodly, human anger that is wrongful, hurtful, harmful, resentful, vengeful, and just not right. Let's go even deeper. As I said the key to this is humility:

*James 1:20 Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.*

*James 1:21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.*

There is human anger that is normally not controlled or thought out. Harmful words fly out of our mouths that do not produce righteousness. It is not, as we say here in Hawaii, *pono* – which means right living. If you don't live with *pono*, then you are not right with God and not right with others. It does not perpetuate the land in righteousness. In fact, looking at verse 21 – it seems that un-*pono* anger comes from filth and evil in our lives. The verse says to “humbly accept the word God

has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.”

Let's break that down. First, the word “humbly.” The core, the center of how we deal with anger has to do with humility. Humility doesn't mean you are a doormat, nor does it mean, “poor me, no one loves me,” or “I am unworthy and stupid.”

No. Humility is basically saying that we are not perfect. We are sinful. We don't know everything. We have a lot to learn. We have blind spots.

It would be transforming if everyday each of us would look in the mirror in the morning and just say, “I am not the Messiah. The world does not rest on my shoulders.” Just before you brush your teeth or comb your hair, look into the mirror and ask, “Who is the fairest of them all?” And then say, “Not me! I am not perfect.” That will not only take the pressure off of you in trying to always be perfect, but it will also lower your rage or anger. It is also reality.

You were not born in a manger! You were not born on Krypton. Your father is not Jor-El! Your greatest weakness is not that you're just too awesome. You are only human, and you're not perfect.

You have heard me quote my friend, Max DePree, the former CEO of Herman Miller Company, who, in his great leadership book *Leadership Is An Art*, said: **The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant.**

All of effective leadership falls between those two things. Define reality for an organization and say thank you.

Part of reality is that whether you are the CEO or the employee, you must be humble. Humility means you don't know all of the answers. Everyone helped to make the company a success. Without the employees, it wouldn't be a success, so say thank you. A lot. To

each other. Saying thank you is an act of humility. Saying thank you a lot probably means you will listen more and get angry less.

When you are not quick to listen, it means you don't have a teachable spirit. Why listen when I know I'm right? Why listen when I can do it all on my own? Why listen when I have communication superpowers that enable me to know 100% of what people mean in what they say?

The reality is: If I am not slow to speak, it comes from pride. I will speak quickly because I think I already know everything. I am the fount of all wisdom. I am a living database of all knowledge. I am the Google god because I know so much! I will always be the winner in the TV show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* because I know all the answers! In fact I am so good that I'm not only the contestant in the show, I'm also my own lifeline!

But the book of James is saying—Stop it! Get rid of that know-it-all, prideful, controlling, superior, elitist spirit. If you don't, it will always lead to anger.

Even as something simple as when driving and someone cuts you off, why do you get angry? Do you think you are the President of the United States who should have all roads cleared just for you? NO ONE has all of the roads blocked off with a security entourage all around you, unless you are the President! It is illogical to think that you can have the road to yourself.

And speaking of government officials, please allow me to go off on a tangent here, I was walking my dogs one day when all of the streets and traffic were stopped because the Vice President had to go through.

And then at another time, also while walking the dogs, who should drive by but the President of the United States, with a slightly bigger entourage, on his way to the East West Center?

**T**his is what it looked like. (A video of the President Obama zooming by in and with several black cars was shown.)

The other day someone called me Forest Gump because I always happen to be standing in the right place when a famous person happens to come by, like Vice President Biden, President Obama, or Pope Francis.

But when we are driving, we should know we are nothing. The streets are not cleared for us. When someone cuts me off, I'm just a motorist among other motorists trying to get to my destination. No presidential motorcade for me.

By the way, did you know we have a presidential election coming up? Many people say this is a horrible election. They don't like either candidate. They think one or the other is immoral, unethical, inappropriate, petulant, childlike, and blessed materially more than you can imagine. This is a perfect season to work on being quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. Not that either candidates are models of that during a televised debate. Au contraire!

In fact, I was amazed how both presidential candidates used a fundraiser dinner for the Alfred E. Smith Memorial Foundation, which benefits children in poverty, to criticize and ridicule each other.

This is a great time to stop focusing on the candidates' faults and start seeing this election as a learning tool for how WE might need to improve OUR morals and OUR ethics. May we see how WE often act like a petulant child when we don't get our way.

If we criticize Hillary or Donald for being too rich, may we realize that compared to the rest of the world, all of us in this room are in the top 5% of those considered by the world as wealthy. We have all been blessed materially more than others. If ever you

go to a developing country, you would realize that.

When we get angry with the candidates, we need to stop and need to clean up our own acts. Are we ever like the candidates where we don't listen and talk over other people's points? Do we think that we are 100% right and others are 100% wrong? Do we build walls with other people when we feel threatened. Just saying.

Humility gets us to that point and makes us look at ourselves. Anger just keeps us yelling at our TV sets and seeing how bad OTHER people are while we are blind to our OWN bad behavior. It's bad for us to keep watching TV or reading opinions on how evil either or both of these candidates are. It raises our anger and our blood pressure.

Sometimes we can demonize a person, even a presidential candidate. Sometimes we can demonize a person we are angry at. And that is not what we are called to do as followers of Jesus.

In fact, if the person you are angry at is like an enemy, you must LOVE that person! And you may be thinking, "Awww, Dan, you are such a party pooper! What a wet blanket! Why did you have to say that? Love your enemies. Who says that? And that is so fluffy and idealistic – all this love-your-enemies-stuff. Right!"

Hey, church, guess what? That's not my idea. I didn't say that. That is what JESUS said – the man who had more enemies than all of us in this room. In fact, He had enemies who wanted to kill Him. Yet even when He was nailed onto a cross as a result of a kangaroo court that was truly RIGGED, He says on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Incredible!

Because many of us in this room claim to be a follower of Jesus, let's hear the words again from the one and only true Messiah, our Lord. Jesus said –

*Luke 6:27 "But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you.*

*Luke 6:28 Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.*

*Luke 6:29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also.*

*Luke 6:30 Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don't try to get them back.*

*Luke 6:31 Do to others as you would like them to do to you.*

*Luke 6:32 "If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them!*

*Luke 6:33 And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much!*

*Luke 6:34 And if you lend money only to those who can repay you, why should you get credit? Even sinners will lend to other sinners for a full return.*

*Luke 6:35 "Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked.*

*Luke 6:36 You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.*

*Luke 6:37 "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven.....*

*Luke 6:41 "And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?*

*Luke 6:42 How can you think of saying, 'Friend, let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,' when you can't see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye.*

Jesus is saying that before you think the people you are angry with have problems, look in your own backyard first. Are you Mr. or Ms. Clean in all you do? Remove the log in your own eye before you say there is a little speck in someone else's eye. But we say, but I'm not as bad as so and so. Hey, but you know what? Part of our life as followers of Jesus is that we should be life-long learners.

**E**very time a good thing or a bad thing happens, we ought to be asking ourselves, “What is God teaching me? What can I learn from this experience?”

For me that takes some of the edge off of hard encounters with other people whom I’m mad at or who are angry with me. God is teaching me something in this. God is with me.

But you say, “Dan, I don’t know if I can do that.” The last verse talks about how we must humbly accept the word of God that has been implanted in us.

*James 1:21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.*

James is saying the day you became a Christian, the Word of God came into you. His Holy Spirit is in you. In a very real sense, you were born again. You were given a whole new life.

Many of you have experienced that. When you accepted Christ into your life, things changed from monochrome to Technicolor as one person said. You saw life differently.

The word “planted” in that verse is not used anywhere else in the Bible! Amazing. The word *planted* in Greek, the original language of the Bible, is *hapax legomenon*. Legomenon. See, there’s always a Lego set somewhere.

It’s a word that, in Greek literature, that means *natural* versus *acquired*. In this context, when you accept Christ into your life, the WORD is *naturally* planted in you. Something that’s planted is natural to you rather than acquired. This is an amazing claim. If a tourist reads a book about Hawaii and learns about Hawaii, that is *acquired* knowledge. But someone born in Hawaii knows a lot more about Hawaii than just book knowledge. It is *natural* to that person.

That’s not to say mainlanders living here for a long time can’t be *kama’aina* who are *akamai* and savvy. Of course, they can. But it’s different for a tourist who just reads a travel book.

James is saying that when we committed our lives to Jesus, we were NATURALLY born into His kingdom. We NATURALLY have the power and the access to control our anger, and to even love our enemies.

We just need to, in HUMILITY, accept this word OF GOD that has been planted in us.

The opposite of anger is not self-control, although self-control helps. Rather, the opposite of anger is humility because it is out of a deep well of humility that self-control, patience, and wisdom flows.

It is this word in us, both the living Jesus and the Holy Spirit, and the written word in us that give us the chance to be humble and not proud. It is pride that leads us to unrighteous anger.

There is only ONE person who can break through our pride. And that is the One who started planting in you the humility to accept the word of God. And that is Jesus.

When we accept Jesus, we become born again...the word of God naturally is planted in us. Hapax Legomenon! There is a toxic, poisonous anger in us where a person says, “I must not allow anyone to destroy my perfect image, therefore, I will attack anyone who hurts me or thinks ill of me. After all, it’s not my fault. No, not my fault. It’s THEIR fault. My boss’ fault, my spouse’s fault, my friend’s fault. But not my fault! And how I choose to respond to that incident is not my fault.”

This person can also say, “There is no way I am going to accept the message

that says I need Jesus and that I am a sinner.”

But Jesus is the only one who can break through our pride and still love us because the full gospel says, “Yes, you are a sinner and in many ways a moral failure. But you are a totally LOVED, morally failed sinner. In Jesus you are completely loved.”

You say, “I can’t be a failure AND be totally loved. But the gospel story says you can be both a failure and totally loved.

When we get angry, we can forget what it means to be a sinner. What it means to be selfish and make stupid choices. We can forget that we need Jesus as much as everyone else. We all have a debt to Jesus due to all of our sin.

When we are quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger, it is like the garden of our heart can allow the word of God that was implanted to grow and transform us more with God’s loving power. The landscape of the Lord in our hearts becomes more beautiful and fruitful.

In closing, I am going to ask everyone to stand again. And together we will read our passage again, but this time in a paraphrase from a book called *The Message*, and then I will close us in prayer. Please stand and let us read this together from James chapter one.

*James 1:19 Post this at all the intersections, dear friends: Lead with your ears, follow up with your tongue, and let anger straggle along in the rear.*

*James 1:20 God’s righteousness doesn’t grow from human anger.*

*James 1:21 So throw all spoiled virtue and cancerous evil in the garbage. In simple humility, let our gardener, God, landscape you with the Word, making a salvation-garden of your life.*

Amen! Let’s pray