



# SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau  
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**"How to Handle Our Anger" (How to Have Healthy Relationships)  
The Rev. Dr. Dan Chun**

**T**here are times in life when we get angry at people. How we handle anger can lead to destruction or restoration. We continue in our sermon series on "How to Have Healthy Relationships," and our topic for today is ANGER.

First of all, anger in and of itself, is not bad. So the trick is to handle it correctly. Handled poorly, anger can lead to more hurt and heartache. Handled correctly, anger can lead to reconciliation and safety. But let's look at our first point:

## **Anger in and of itself is not bad.**

Anger rises in us when we feel there is injustice to ourselves or others. It is with healthy anger that we fight injustice and we right wrongs. Like Popeye the sailor man, there is a point where we "can't take it no more" and so we fight back, especially for those who are oppressed.

There are good reasons to be angry. For instance, anger can motivate us to do good, like protect the weak, release children from poverty, and fight a system of prejudice and harm. The Bible acknowledges that it is okay to be angry, but it always comes with a warning. As it says in the Bible in a letter written by Paul the Apostle to the church in a city called Ephesus: "Be angry but do not sin." (Eph 4:26)

Notice the word "but." Be angry, BUT do not sin. One can be angry for just or fair reasons, BUT if anger goes on too long or if you handle it in the wrong way, you sin. How do we sin?

## **We sin when we let anger get out of control.**

When we can no longer handle, fence in, or harness our anger, our emotions get the best of us and harm will come to us and those we love. In the book of Proverbs, a book of wise sayings in the Bible, it says this about anger:

*Prov. 29:22 One given to anger stirs up strife, and the hothead causes much transgression.*

*Prov. 30:33 For as pressing milk produces curds, and pressing the nose produces blood, so pressing anger produces strife.*

In the movie *The Patriot*, there is a scene where Mel Gibson plays a father who is trying to protect his family. British troops ride in and take his land, take his employees, threaten his family, and burn down his house.

The character Mel Gibson plays is a plantation owner who is a widower who must take care of his family. He is also an army veteran who is highly capable of fighting and taking down enemies. He can be extremely violent to protect people, as we see

later in the movie. But in this scene he knows if he loses it, if he lets anger get the best of him, his family will get hurt.

As you watch his face, you see him controlling his anger, knowing that saying the wrong word the wrong way or physically fighting back at that particular time and place was not the wise thing to do. So he swallows it and tries desperately to find the right words and the right tone. It's also an example that we CAN control our anger even in the midst of fear or an attack. Anger can be a choice!

Let's look at this scene that I'm talking about where Mel Gibson tries keep it together in spite of great danger and great anger. (A clip from *The Patriot* was shown.)

Anger can be a choice. We CAN control our anger. But it is hard to do. Proverbs 29:11 says: "A fool gives full vent to anger, but the wise quietly holds it back."

How does anger work? Anger releases energy, adrenalin into our nervous system. It makes a situation of fight or flight. It is now our decision to either control the anger or let the anger control us. It's our choice – will we use this sudden burst of energy for good and constructive results or for bad and abusive results?

If we can't control anger and the anger controls us, then it will lead to sin. It can cause emotional, verbal, physical abuse or worse – violence.

**S**o when the Bible says “be angry,” it is saying channel your burst of energy for good. Healthy anger uses that adrenalin to be like a Martin Luther King who used it to fight racial inequality or a Gandhi to fight racial prejudice and economic injustice. Both used the Bible as a model for nonviolent protests.

Interestingly, church reformer Martin Luther (not to be confused with Martin Luther King) said: “When I am angry, I can write, pray, and preach well, fore then my whole temperament is quickened, my understanding is sharpened and all mundane vexations and temptations are gone.” (Hope Bible p. 692)

But unhealthy anger blinds us. We can’t think clearly or objectively. How can we control anger? Let’s look at some biblical principles. First one is this:

### 1. Slow down.

Here are six Bible verses that encourage us to be slow in anger or at least be gentle:

*Prov. 14:29 Whoever is SLOW to anger has great understanding, but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly.*

*Prov. 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

*Prov. 15:18 Those who are hot-tempered stir up strife, but those who are SLOW to anger calm contention.*

*Prov. 16:32 One who is SLOW to anger is better than the mighty, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city.*

*Prov. 19:11 Those with good sense are SLOW to anger, and it is their glory to overlook an offense.*

*Eccl. 7:9 Do not be quick to anger for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.*

If you or I lose our anger, there is NO ONE to blame but ourselves. We can say, “the Devil made me do it,” but it was actually us who made us do it. We can say “the situation made me lose my mind” or “that person made me lose my anger,” but in reality the responsibility is solely ours. We lose our composure purely by our own choice. Adam blamed Eve for giving him the fruit, Eve blamed the serpent, and Adam even blamed God for giving Eve to him in the first place.

I’m thinking that often times we say that we lose our temper, but actually it is more accurate to say we choose our temper. To lose or choose anger—that is really under our control.

Anger is really the secondary emotion to an event. The first emotion, which happens maybe a split second sooner, is one of hurt or fear or frustration. Our feelings got hurt, we thought we were put down and so we get angry.

Someone put our life in danger and so we become afraid, and then we get angry at the person who put us in danger. Frustration – we are frustrated that the deadline for a project is too soon, and so then we get angry at the boss for being so disorganized.

The anger often is the secondary response to a first emotion of hurt, fear, or frustration. So by slowing down, it give us time to figure out what is truly our primary emotion. And when we find that out, it just might help us choose the right words in response. The old adage of “when angry, count to ten before you say anything” is a form of slowing down.

The second principle of handling the anger in our lives is this:

### 2) Have short accounts

In other words, if something bothers you, try to think of talking to that person who is making you angry. And best to do that sooner than later. Now that seems contradictory to the first point of slowing down. Yes, slow down, collect your thoughts, and maybe the next day or the next week contact that person and express your frustration and your desire to work it out.

The Bible puts it this way: *Be angry, but do not sin; don’t let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. (Eph 4:26)* Or, as one translation says, “do not give a foothold to the devil.”

Don’t let the sun go down on your anger is a poetic way of saying — don’t harbor that resentment for TOO LONG. Resolve or let it go. Hanging on to the anger will only hurt you in the long run not the person you are mad at.

In my marriage with Pam, when we have an argument we have agreed to never let the sun go down on our anger. We just stay up and plot our revenge. Just joking!

It is a profound point that if you let your anger go on too long, it will be a foothold for the devil. Evil will take a seed in you and grow, and there will be bitterness and toxicity in you.

Unforgiveness brings all sorts of spiritual and physical unhealthy and bad repercussions like – ulcers, a dark mood, hard heartedness.

That verse about not letting the sun go down on our anger is in actuality in the larger context of a passage where the Bible is saying, “Don’t be like the pagans. Don’t be like the unbelievers. Don’t be like how you and I used to live, before we knew Christ before we had the Holy Spirit, before when we didn’t know better.”

**W**e have the Holy Spirit in our hearts. We have the Bible. We have Jesus. There should be a difference in our lives when it comes to anger. Here's the entire Bible passage on that. Listen to St. Paul's words and see the context:

*Eph 4:17 With the Lord's authority I say this: Live no longer as the Gentiles do, for they are hopelessly confused.*

*Eph 4:18 Their minds are full of darkness; they wander far from the life God gives because they have closed their minds and hardened their hearts against Him.*

*Eph 4:19 They have no sense of shame. They live for lustful pleasure and eagerly practice every kind of impurity.*

*Eph 4:20 But that isn't what you learned about Christ.*

*Eph 4:21-22 Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from Him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.*

*Eph 4:23-24 Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.*

*Eph 4:25 So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.*

*Eph 4:26-27 And "don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil.*

A word about getting angry at strangers. When a stranger, a person you don't know makes you angry, I say let it go. When that salesperson or waitress or flight attendant treats you in a way that you think is not nice, I say, walk away and

let it go. If they are not in your community, it is not yours to rebuke or correct or feel you have to be the head of their employment training program.

Besides the Bible says that sometimes angels appear as strangers. So be nice to all. It is really not worth the effort. There are just so many battles you can fight, and I say having reconciliation in our community is far more important than getting mad at strangers.

A Bible verse like this comes into play: "Fools show their anger at once, but the prudent ignore an insult." (Prov 12:16) Ignore and be angry no more is what I say.

### **3) Remember what Jesus did for you**

If Christ has forgiven us, can't we show forgiveness to others? When we are really in touch with the fact that Christ has forgiven us for all of our piggish, proud, poisonous, arrogant, rude behavior, then surely we should be motivated to offer grace and mercy and forgiveness to others.

It is not right that we get forgiven for our sins but then we want others to be punished for their sin. Does not the Lord's Prayer say: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive the debts of others."

In Victor Hugo's famous book *Les Miserable*, the hero of the book is a man named Jean Valjean. He loves helping people, especially those who are destitute. He is generous to the poor. We learn early on, that the reason he is such a do-gooder is because long ago, when he was an ex-convict for stealing bread, when he was poor and destitute, he lived at the house of a bishop. But instead of showing gratefulness to the bishop, Jean Valjean decides to steal the bishop's silverware to sell it for money. But the police catches him.

Here's that scene from a movie version of *Les Miserables* with actor Liam Neeson as Jean Valjean. (A clip from the movie was shown.)

My friends, when we are wronged or when we get angry, can we get it into our thick skulls that when we promised to Jesus that we would follow Him to the ends of the earth.

It was also a promise to become a new person in Christ. We no longer belong to evil. We were bought with the HIGH PRICE of the blood of Jesus' life so that we would be given back to God.

I close with God's word from the Bible, the words again of St. Paul to the early church in Ephesus.

*Eph. 4:30 Do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, He has identified you as His own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.*

*Eph. 4:31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.*

*Eph. 4:32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*

Amen? Amen.