

Wisdom to Live By: Anger  
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I know some of you laugh at me when I talk about getting older, but it really is happening. For example, you know you're getting older when you make a reference to a movie that your young, youth pastor has never heard of. I'm bringing up movies to George like he knows exactly what I'm talking about and he gives me that deer in the headlights look.

I have a video clip from a movie that was popular in the early 90s (meaning, some of you may have never heard of it). The movie is *Father of the Bride*. Let me set the scene for you. Steve Martin's character, George Banks, is growing angrier and angrier as his daughter's wedding approaches. Nothing is coming together like he was hoping it would and he's about to snap. That's where we pick it up (VID).

Has this ever happened to you? Not removing superfluous hotdog buns from their packaging; have you ever lost it? Has your anger ever erupted like Mt. St. Helens? I know I have. But do you know what's different about my moments of anger then the one we just watched: my anger isn't funny. When I get angry the people I love the most get hurt. When I get angry I dishonor God. When I get angry I tear people down instead of building them up.

Here is something I want you to believe. Take a look at the screen. **Angry person = a fool**. That's what Proverbs tells us over and over again. An angry person isn't right (that's how we feel); an angry person isn't the only who gets it (we feel like that, too, when we are angry). An angry person is a fool. Can I ask you: Do you want to be a fool or do you want to be wise? Because you can't be angry and wise. Sure, righteous anger exists; it's just that we almost never have it. I'm talking about the anger we almost always have; the kind that's stupid, destructive, and sinful. I want to be a wise man; I want to be a part of a church family filled with wise people. But we can't be wise and angry. Angry people are foolish. I hope I'm motivating you. I hope your spirit is saying, "I want to be wise. But to be wise I'm going to need help so I'm not an angry person."

Proverbs says a ton about anger. Let's start by me showing you our equation is true: angry people are foolish.

Prov. 29:11 says, "A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back." Notice, first, how this Proverb agrees with our little formula. Anger equals foolishness. Did you see how this verse captures the emotive or expressive aspect of anger? Hey kids, do you ever get so mad you just blow up and hit your brother or yell at your sister? That's what this verse is talking about. We are foolish when we blow up and hit a brother or yell at a sister. It's not that we can't seethe quietly in anger (we do that), but oftentimes we vent our frustrations; that's exactly how the writer describes it. But look what he says: that's foolish. We think it feels good. And maybe it does in that moment, but how many times have you lost it and then afterwards

you've lived with regret? How many times have you blown your top, but then had a guilty conscience the rest of the day. I know I have. And then you have this inner debate. "Well, she deserved it!" But when your conscience is working well, you can't shake the guilt. You know your anger was wrong and it was foolish.

Prov. 14:29 says, "Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly." So an angry person exalts and praises foolishness; that's how out of touch we are when we are mad. Both this passage and the one we just read praises restraining anger. Did you see that? Prov. 29 says a wise man quietly holds back his spirit, his anger. This proverb says a wise man is slow to anger. Let's look at one more here at the start.

Prov. 12:16 says, "The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult." *Vexation* means frustrated or exasperated. Being indignant or angry. And it says that the vexation/anger of a fool is known at once. How so? Well, he gives vent to it like we read earlier from Prov. 29. And we've all seen it or done it; we just blow our top in anger. And what triggers this frustration or anger? The second half of the verse gives us our answer; an insult or a perceived insult. The video we watched earlier gives us a picture of this verse. George Banks was frustrated and annoyed. The wedding plans for his daughter were not coming along like he hoped. He's spending more money than he wants; he has to wear a tux he doesn't like; he's working with a wedding planner that drives him crazy. Do you know what all these things are to him? They are insults. He sees them as sins against him. He had a plan and nobody cares what he thinks and now he's angry... but he's the fool.

This verse helps us make a very important transition: where does anger come from? Prov. 12 says an insults stirs or provokes the anger. But what's underneath that? We can be angry without ever being insulted. I remember being in a hurry at the grocery store. I carefully scanned the open checkout lanes trying to reason which line I should choose. It's a simple formula. Fewest people with the fewest groceries is the fastest lane, right? Well, not always. There are all these other variables to consider. How fast is the clerk? Will the register run out of paper to print a receipt? Will the customer in front of you write a check for \$20 more to get cash back? Will someone help bag the groceries? So, with some deductive reasoning and a little bit of luck you pick the line that's *supposed* to move the fastest, but it's not. And the anger begins to build. Why? No one is insulting you; no one said *yo mamma is so ugly*. So, why are you so angry? Because this wasn't supposed to happen. If only the clerk would have been quicker; if only someone would have been bagging groceries, if only the register wouldn't have run out of paper, I wouldn't have had to wait to so long.

Anger is our response to a perceived injustice. Something wrong happened and now I'm angry. A key phrase in my definition is *perceived injustice*. It feels like something wrong happened. But did it? Did something wrong, did something sinful happen that caused me to get angry in the check out line? Was it wrong that the cash register ran out of paper? Was it sinful that the HS kid bagging groceries picked a different lane? Is the clerks relative slowness sinfu. (and would I not be angry if the clerk was fast, but made mistakes that cost me more money)?

No. No one did anything wrong; no one sinned or committed an injustice. But why am I angry? I'll tell you why: because I put my world, my needs, my preferences, my kingdom at the center of life. And in my kingdom I never should have to wait; I should never be overcharged; I should never have to give. So, here's a big take away, friends: you get angry when you wrongly prioritize your kingdom, your values, your preferences before God's kingdom, God's values, and God's preferences. In your kingdom, you want to get everywhere on time; in God's kingdom, he wants you to learn how to wait patiently. In your kingdom, you value neat and tidy plans; in God's kingdom, he values life-giving trials and detours that mature our character. In your kingdom, you value your way. In God's kingdom, he values his message, his word, and his way. If you're looking for the reason why you get angry, stop staring at your wife, stop blaming your boss, stop complaining about your family, your God or the universe; look straight into a mirror and the selfish person looking back at you is the reason why you're angry.

I wish I wasn't as angry as I am. I've mellowed in ton, but I still struggle with anger and I know it's destructive to others. I remember noticing years ago a pattern of anger in my life. In the evenings, after 8pm, I would get angry when my boys would come and talk to me or ask me for help. I had such little patience for the most innocent of questions. And I noticed it and didn't like what I was seeing. So, I began asking, "Why am I angry about this? They're not doing anything wrong. They're just asking a question. They're just looking for help." And then it hit me; I noticed how I put a fence around my evening times and claimed them as *mine - trespassers not welcome*. I've worked all day; now I'm tired. So leave me alone. And when they didn't I would get angry. My boys didn't make me angry; my anger originated from a sinful heart that idolized my desires above God's Kingdom. It's not that getting some alone time is bad and it's not wrong to need a break. What's wrong is prioritizing these desires to a greater degree than the worth, the way, and the character of God.

This is very helpful to us as we seek God's help in our battle with anger. You don't fight anger by telling yourself not to be angry. There's no power in that. The power comes from repentance. Power comes by confessing your selfishness and turning away from it. You find the strength to resist moments of fury by repositizing your worship. Worship God by prioritizing his way, his truth, his grace rather than your preferences, your desires, and your time. Your anger will go down then.

I hope you see that this is what it looks like to live a God-centered life. We talk about that a lot here at FBC. We use different words and phrases, but that's what we mean by Treasuring God. When God is your treasure, friends. When he's your greatest desire, your greatest hope, your greatest truth, your greatest way and value, you're spared from the angry thoughts and outbursts when you don't get your way. Why? Because you don't care about your way. You care about God's way. Fight anger there, my brothers and sisters.

But there's another place we fight anger. Let me show you in Proverbs 19:11; let's look at that verse. "Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense." I love how he writes, "Good senses makes one slow to anger." It's just good sense, FBC. You

care about having good, common, practical sense, don't you? You care about your own self-interests, right? It's in your own interests to resist anger. Prov. 22:24-25 says the same thing, "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." You want friends, don't you? You don't want to be caught in a snare that makes people avoid you? Wise men and women don't make friends with rageaholics. They know better; they know that their buddy's anger is actually going to be bad for them. Make friends: don't be angry. I just love the wisdom of God's word.

But did you notice another remedy for anger from Prov. 19? Instead of being angry, overlook an offense. What do we call that? Forgiveness. Let me package it this way and then we'll open it up and explore it more: You might be angry because you're unwilling to forgive. Or put another way: you can fight your anger by forgiving others. Let's explore this more.

Prov. 19:11 flat out say that the opposite to growing angry is overlooking an offense. That's how you resist living an angry life. It is glorious to do this. Think of it, friends. It is to your glory to receive an insult, to be sinned against, and overlook it. That's impossible, right? What does our soul say when we are sinned against? Our soul says: if nobody is going to do anything about this, I will! So for you not to blow up with anger or to seethe quietly with rage, but to forgive, it must a be glorious work of God in your life producing the kind of character to overlook sin.

And we notice this. Here's what I mean: when someone flies off the handle at a perceived injustice, who looks foolish? I remember waiting for a pizza at Little Caesars many months ago. And a guy walked in and asked for his pizzas. But they weren't done. Apparently, he felt they should have been done and started dressing down the teenage attendant. Let's just say for the sake of the argument that the pizzas were late (we've all been there, and yes, sometimes, those delays interrupt our plans); but I'll tell you who looked like the fool: it wasn't the teenager making pizzas. It was the grown man who felt he was justified scolding a kid over pizzas. Friends, it's our glory to overlook offenses.

And seriously, can you not overlook someone cutting you off in traffic? Can you not bear with a slow teller at the bank? Can you not forgive a minor mix up at the post office? How in the world will you be able to love your enemies, forgive somebody 70 times 7 if you can not overlook, forgive, and bear with the minor insults that we experience during the week?

But I know that some of you aren't angry because of minor offenses; you've been a victim to some major sins. And with those sins have come some serious pain and betrayal. I understand and there is a place for righteous anger in there; that's when anger is right. We should be angry at sin that robs God of his glory and damages what God has made glorious. But like I said and I'm hoping you can readily admit, oftentimes are angry isn't holy or righteous. I understand that it's not easy to forgive sometimes and we're angry because of it.

But we must. Jesus, our gracious Lord and Master is the one who said (Mt 6:14-15), “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Do you know why Jesus can say that while teaching and preaching a message of salvation by grace alone? Jesus can say this because our inability and unwillingness to forgive others shows God, us, and others that we don’t know God. We don’t know his mercy; we don’t know his grace if we won’t forgive. Because here’s what Jesus teaches: people who know God, who have received the forgiveness of their sins, are willing and able to forgive others of their sins. It will take time; it’s a long and painful journey just like Jesus’ path to forgiving us was filled with pain. But people who know God and his grace for sins are willing and able to forgive others.

Some of you are living a life of hell because you are constantly angry. But you’re angry because you’re unwilling to forgive. You need to ask yourself a question: Do you know God or not? Are you a child of God or not? Because God’s children are people forgiven by the mercy of Jesus Christ. And God’s children people are willing to forgive others the way Jesus has forgiven them. Are you one of those his children? I say this with love in my heart for you, FBC: I know you feel like you’re the one who deserves an apology, but if you’re a follower of Jesus, but you’ve been unwilling to forgive, you’re the one who needs to say, “I’m sorry.” You’re not representing your master well. This is absolutely a way we should fight our temptations toward anger. When I’m offended or insulted or I feel sinned against and my anger starts to boil, I tell myself (literally, audibly!) “Brian, haven’t you been forgiven? Hasn’t Jesus overlooked your sin? Doesn’t God bear with you?” And when I remind myself of Jesus’ forgiving grace displayed on that cross for me, by the power of the Holy Spirit, my anger starts going down. Friends, believe in the miracle working power of God and end your anger today by offering forgiveness to others.

Key vs: Prov. 19:11

#### Questions for the week

- Would you describe yourself as an angry person? Would others describe you that way?
- Do you believe anger is largely due to selfishness? If so, what should you do to fight anger?
- If anger is due to an unwillingness to forgive, who do you need to forgive to have less anger? Ask God to help you.