

Gospel Choices: Addressing Anger and Rage

Session 7

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Genesis 4:6-16; Nehemiah 5:6; Ephesians 4:26-27; 6:11

Session Outline

1. Righteous Anger (Nehemiah 5:6; Ephesians 4:26-27)
2. Sinful Anger (Genesis 4:6-16)
3. Shrewder than the Devil (Ephesians 6:11)

Theological Theme

In the Scriptures we see two sorts of anger. God responds to the wickedness and rebellion of people with righteous anger. Mankind often responds to affronts to their pride and preferences with sinful anger and at times to wickedness with righteous anger.



Leader Guide

Gospel Choices: Addressing Anger and Rage

Introduction

- ❓ Is anger ever justified? Explain.
- ❓ What are some situations in which anger is an appropriate response?

Imagine you are driving home after work and notice something strange in front of a home you have seen often. As you get closer, you see that a woman is on her knees in the front yard, and she is pounding her fists on the ground. Then, you can hear her screaming and crying. It is such a concerning scene that you pull over to see if you can help in some way.

You try to calm her down, but she won't be consoled. Finally, you ask, "Please tell me, why are you so angry?" She responds, "Someone put the empty milk carton back in the fridge!" Is her anger justified?

Now, consider if her answer was instead, "A drunk driver crashed through my yard and killed my child!" Is her anger justified?

Let's consider anger from a biblical perspective.

Session Summary

The book of Proverbs tells us that "the churning of milk produces butter, and twisting a nose draws blood, and stirring up anger produces strife" (Proverbs 30:33). The Bible is full of examples of anger. Cain became angry with his brother. Pharaoh was angered at Abraham's deception. Moses became angry toward Pharaoh's slave drivers. God was angered at the sin of Israel. David was angry because Uzzah touched the Ark. Jesus was angry at the moneychangers. And the list goes on.

Anger, rage, and indignation play important roles in the biblical narrative and these emotions are an integral part of our lives today. Anger can be both positive and negative. When we are faced with cases of wickedness, injustice, fraud, and oppression, we ought to be angry. Anger is an appropriate response to such things. Yet our anger is often much less noble than that. We may find ourselves angry because the restaurant mixed up our order, the dog chewed up the newspaper, or the car in front of us is going slower than we'd like.

1. Righteous Anger (Nehemiah 5:6; Ephesians 4:26-27)

Paul wrote to the Ephesian church these words: “Be angry and do not sin” (Ephesians 4:26a). Notice Paul did not say being angry is a sin, but that the Christian should not sin in their anger. Being angry about certain things in life is unavoidable. But what a person does with that anger is something that the person can control.

This means that anger in and of itself is not always sin. In fact, there are many times in life when a person should become angry, and a lack of anger may be an indication of sin in one’s heart. For example, if a man and his wife are walking in a park and another man sitting on a bench makes a lewd comment to his wife, this should produce in the husband a proper indignation and anger toward the offender. He is angry because his wife, whom he has been charged to care for, has been harmed and insulted. Of course, this does not mean that the husband should respond violently. That would be an inappropriate way to handle the situation.

 What examples of righteous anger do we have in the Bible?

We must take great care to not justify sinful anger. If we know Jesus, we should be the most joyful of all people. We should not be known as those whose tempers are shorter than their patience and who find themselves indignant with those around them at every turn. Yet, we should also expect to become angry at those circumstances that warrant righteous anger.

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to prepare the way for the return of the exiles and the rebuilding of the city, he listened to the complaints of those who were already there. He said, “I became extremely angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints” (Nehemiah 5:6). What was the occasion for Nehemiah’s anger? He learned that his countrymen were so poor and desperate that they were selling their own children into slavery! His anger was justified. It would take a heart devoid of any love and compassion to be apathetic to that horrific situation.

In the New Testament, when Jesus saw that the Israelites were profaning the temple of God, He “threw out all those buying and selling. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves. He said to them, ‘It is written, my house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of thieves!’” (Matthew 21:12-13).

 How ought we to examine ourselves when it comes to anger? How should we handle the anger that we feel?

Nehemiah’s Righteous Anger

Nehemiah was angered because the rich were taking advantage of the poor, and they were not working together for one purpose.

Consider this question, “Would this thing anger God?” The root and motive of righteous anger is a zeal for the hallowedness of God’s name. When wickedness and rebellion against God is blatant, then a righteous anger is appropriate. When wickedness and rebellion against God is blatant, patience and kindness is inappropriate.

 Application: What are some circumstances or issues you believe warrant righteous anger? What appropriate actions can you take in response that would be in accordance with God’s Word?

2. Sinful Anger (Genesis 4:6-16)

In 1973 the Supreme Court of the United States decided 7-2 in favor of “Jane Roe” stating that women in the US have the fundamental right to choose whether to have an abortion. This paved the way for the murder of more than 60 million babies. Could there be a more grievous and horrific wickedness in our land than this? Is it not right for those who love and fear God to be righteously angry at such iniquity? While Christ offers grace and forgiveness to all people, including those who have had abortions, we should be angry that this sin is a reality.

But we also find other far-less consequential reasons to become angry. The root and motive for righteous, godly anger is a zeal for the things of God. But the root and motive and sinful anger is a zeal for our own name and preferences. A prideful heart is easily angered. Consider Cain’s anger toward his brother Abel. He was angry because of his jealousy and pride.

 How can we know if our anger is sinful or righteous?

If the root of a person’s anger is because he or she has been inconvenienced, then the anger is sinful and should be repented of. If the situation merits patience and kindness, but only anger is shown, then it is a sinful anger.

For example, if a mother is helping her son with his math homework and he continues to make the same mistake even after she explains the correct procedure multiple times, she may begin to lose patience. Then, anger wells up inside of her, and she snaps at him saying, “What is wrong with you?” This is a sinful anger, and she should repent of the sin and ask her son’s forgiveness. In this situation, she should’ve controlled her emotions and disciplined herself to be patient and kind even in a frustrating situation.

In seeking to discern if our anger is justified, we may ask the question, “Would Jesus get angry in this circumstance?” This question can bring clarity and perspective to the situation and help take the proper steps to remedy any missteps.

If a man is driving his two children to the playground and suddenly, a car darts in front of him almost causing an accident, it’s likely that anger will flash across his heart. This is not sinful because the other driver did something foolish and endangered the lives of this man and his children. However, if the man begins to honk his horn and scream at the other driver, then his justified anger has crossed over into sinful anger.

 What should we do when we realize they have sinned in anger?

A person who has truly been born again will repent of their sinful anger. Repentance is not only necessary when one comes to Christ, but it is a gospel grace that is an integral part of the Christian’s life until they go to heaven.

 Application: Do you find it hard to repent of sin when it is pointed out by someone else? Do you struggle against sinful anger? Explain.

3. Shrewder than the Devil (Ephesians 6:11)

Paul told the Ephesians “Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil” (6:11). One of the most effective tactics of the devil is to convince Christians not to repent. If the devil can convince followers of Christ repentance is no longer necessary, then it won’t be long before they are filled with pride, blinded by sin, and trusting in their own self-righteousness.

 What is repentance in general? What would it look like to repent of sinful anger?

Repentance consists of two things happening simultaneously: repentance means turning away from sinful anger and turning toward the Lord in humility and contrition. Those two actions go together. They can’t be parsed, and they aren’t sequential. They always go together and happen at the same time. Implicit in the idea of repentance is faith. It’s impossible to truly repent without truly believing.

Consider Guy Richard's perspective, "Repentance and faith are inseparable. They are two sides of the same coin. Faith is the positive side of turning to Christ, and repentance is the negative side of turning away from sin. It is impossible to turn to Christ and to turn to sin, just as it is impossible to travel in two different directions at the same time. By definition, traveling east means not traveling west, and turning to Christ correspondingly means not turning to sin. Faith and repentance necessarily go together."¹



How does a regular practice of repentance and faith guard us from harboring bitterness over sinful anger?

It's critical to realize that regular repentance is good and necessary for those of us who have put faith in Christ. But what good is that knowledge if we have no idea how to produce it. How can we go about mustering up repentance?

It is wrong to think that we can, by our own power, produce repentance. Both faith and repentance are gospel graces that are generated in the lives of believers by the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ preserves His people by casting the oil of His grace on the work of grace that has been wrought in their hearts. He nourishes faith and repentance in His people. When we read the Scriptures with faith, the words expose sinful anger. As we pray with humility and dependence, the Holy Spirit will press conviction into our hearts. As we sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, their sin of anger will be brought to our minds. All these means of grace place us in a position where their sin is made clear, and we are led to repentance.



Application: Do you regularly practice repentance in your life? Where is God calling you to repent today? Where might you need to repent specifically of sinful anger? If you have never repented, how might God be speaking to you about that today?

Conclusion

Anger is a natural reaction to some circumstances in this world. When anger is produced by wickedness and rebellion against God, then it is righteous anger. However, if anger is a result of a zeal for personal preferences, then it is sinful anger. We must be diligent to not sin in our anger and repent of sinful anger immediately and whole-heartedly.

- ❓ How can we discern between righteous and sinful anger?
- ❓ What are some common areas where people become sinfully angry in our culture and community?
- ❓ Can you think of something that should produce righteous anger but doesn't receive much attention from Christians? Why should this also lead to repentance?
- ❓ How might regular repentance of sinful anger give us opportunities for gospel conversations with others?

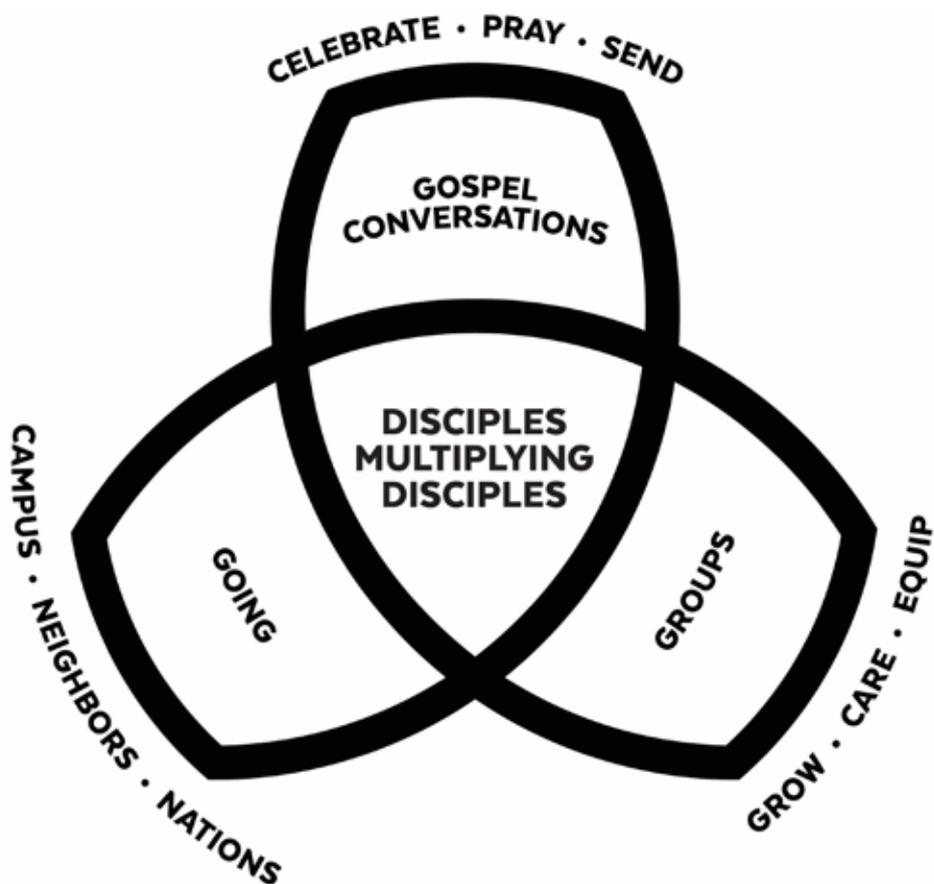
Prayer of Response

Give thanks to God for His provision for sin. Ask the Lord to help you identify sinful anger in your own life and for grace to overcome. Ask the Lord to help you to repent immediately and whole-heartedly when you sin in your anger.

Additional Resources

- *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande
- *Unglued* by Lysa TerKeurst
- *Anger* by David Powlison

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Call To Action:

Is there a time when your anger has led to sin? Take a step in restoring relationships that may have been impacted by choices stemmed from anger. Road Rage has become a common phrase, often used as a humorous antidote for a hard conversation. How can you help a friend deal with anger as it relates to driving?

Group Emphasis or Project:

As a group, we must be about speaking the truth and build each other up. If there is gossip, anger, or strife in your group, address this. Take time to focus on how Christ unites us and encourage each other.

For Next Week

Session Title

- Gospel For Everyone: Seeing Social Issues Through the Lens of the Gospel

Main Passages

- Luke 5:17-20; Ephesians 2:10; James 2:14-17

Session Outline

1. A Biblical Example (Luke 5:17-20)
2. Good Works Prepared (Ephesians 2:10)
3. The Purpose of Good Works (James 2:14-17)

Memorize

*Be angry and do not sin., Don't let the sun go down on your anger,
²⁷ and don't give the devil an opportunity.*

- Ephesians 4:26-27

Historical Context of Genesis

Purpose

Genesis lays the groundwork for everything else we read and experience in Scripture. Through Genesis we understand where we came from, how we got in the fallen state we are in, and the beginnings of God's gracious work on our behalf. Genesis unfolds God's original purpose for humanity.

Author

Since pre-Christian times authorship of the Torah, the five books that include the book of Genesis, has been attributed to Moses, an enormously influential Israelite leader from the second millennium BC with an aristocratic Egyptian background. Even though Genesis is technically anonymous, both the Old and New Testaments unanimously recognize Moses as the Torah's author (Jos 8:35; 23:6; 1Kg 2:3; 8:9; 2Kg 14:6; 23:25; 2Ch 23:18; 25:4; 30:16; 34:14; 35:12; Ezr 3:2; 6:18; Neh 8:1; 9:14; Dn 9:11, 13; Mal 4:4; Mk 12:19, 26; Lk 2:22; 20:28; 24:44; Jn 1:17, 45; 7:19; Ac 13:39; 15:21; 28:23; Rm 10:5; 1Co 9:9; Heb 10:28). At the same time, evidence in Genesis suggests that minor editorial changes dating to ancient times have been inserted into the text. Examples include the mention of "Dan" (14:14), a city that was not named until the days of the judges (Jdg 18:29), and the use of a phrase that assumed the existence of Israelite kings (Gn 36:31).

Setting

The Torah (a Hebrew term for "law" or "instruction") was seen as one unit until at least the second century BC. Sometime prior to the birth of Christ, the Torah was divided into five separate books, later referred to as the Pentateuch (literally, five vessels). Genesis, the first book of the Torah, provides both the universal history of humankind and the patriarchal history of the nation of Israel. The first section (chaps. 1–11) is a general history commonly called the "primeval history," showing how all humanity descended from one couple and became sinners. The second section (chaps. 12–50) is a more specific history commonly referred to as the "patriarchal history," focusing on the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants: Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons. Genesis unfolds God's plan to bless and redeem humanity through Abraham's descendants. The book concludes with the events that led to the Israelites being in the land of Egypt.

Special Features

The book of Genesis is the great book of beginnings in the Bible. True to the meanings of its Hebrew and Greek names (Hb *bereshith*, "In Beginning" [based on 1:1]; Gk *Geneseos*, "Of Birth" [based on 2:4]), Genesis permits us to view the beginning of a multitude of realities that shape our daily existence: the creation of the universe and the planet earth; the origins of plant and animal life; and the origins of human beings, marriage, families, nations, industry, artistic expression, religious ritual, prophecy, sin, law, crime, conflict, punishment, and death.

Extended Commentary

Genesis 4:6-16

4:6–7 The Bible makes it clear that God had rejected Cain’s offering because of Cain’s wicked lifestyle (1Jn 3:12). The animal-like description of sin as crouching is reused in 49:9 to describe a lion. The parallel use of desire in this verse and 3:16 suggests that sin wishes to be as intimate with humanity as a woman is with her husband. The only way to avoid this is to be its master, not its companion.

4:8 In a move that demonstrates premeditation, Cain led Abel to the field and attacked him in a place where there were no human witnesses. Though the blood of animals had been shed prior to this (v. 4), Cain’s killing of his brother brought about the first death of a human. The curse of human death pronounced against Adam (2:17; 3:19) had now been realized.

4:9 God’s use of questions with guilty sinners continues here (v. 6; cp. 3:9–13). By claiming he did not know where his brother was, Cain added lying to his sin of murder. God once made Adam a guardian (Hb shamar) of the garden (2:15). Cain now asked if he was to be his brother’s guardian (Hb shamar). The Bible’s answer to Cain’s question is yes (Lv 19:18; Mt 22:39; Gl 5:14).

4:10 Unlike his father Adam (3:12), Cain never confessed his guilt, even though God directly confronted him with his sin. Though Abel never spoke in the preceding narrative, his blood now cried out from the ground.

4:11 God’s judgment began with a curse whose wording in the Hebrew parallels the curse placed on the snake. This is particularly fitting since both were liars and murderers (Jn 8:44). It is possible to translate God’s statement here as “You are more cursed than the ground.” The curse against a murderer is repeated in the law of Moses (Dt 27:24).

4:12 Cain’s punishment destroyed his livelihood as a farmer and turned him into a restless wanderer.

4:13 Cain’s response has several possible English renderings. The CSB—which reflects the unrepentant attitude Cain showed earlier—expresses Cain’s anguish, but no remorse. The Septuagint and Martin Luther translated it as, “My sin is too great to be forgiven,” while early rabbis took it as a question: “Is my sin too great to forgive?” In view of Cain’s previous and later actions, the CSB’s translation seems best.

4:14 Just as his father Adam had been driven out (Hb garash) of the garden, Cain noted that God was banishing (Hb garash) him from the face of the earth. Since he would hide (or possibly, “be hidden”) from God’s protective presence, he feared that other descendants of Adam and Eve (5:4) would kill him to avenge Abel’s murder.

4:15 True to his compassionate and forgiving nature (Ex 34:6–7), God made two provisions for Cain to protect him despite his sin.

4:16 Cain’s departure from the Lord’s presence was both physical and spiritual (Jnh 1:3, 10). Nod means “wandering.” The land of Nod is never mentioned again in the Bible. Perhaps the phrase simply referred to any location in which Cain resided. The notation that Cain departed to live east of Eden identifies him with other sinners who also moved east.²

Ephesians 4:26-27

4:26–27. Sometimes a Christian may legitimately become angry. Jesus became angry at times. In those times we must be extra careful how we act, for anger gives no excuse to sin. Sinning in anger would include things such as saying unkind things or acting in harmful ways toward others. We may not always be able to keep from getting angry, but we can keep from sinning when we do. When we do get angry, we should deal with it before the day is through. When we allow our anger to become sin or when we allow ourselves to keep our anger for more than a day, it gives the devil an opportunity to gain control over our attitudes, our actions, and our relationships. It gives him a foothold to lead us into greater anger and more sin.³

References

1. Guy Richard, “What is faith?” TableTalk, Ligonier Ministries, December 24, 2014, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-faith>.
2. *CSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).
3. Max Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 155.

Author Bio

Guy Richard (What is Faith?)

Dr. Guy M. Richard is president and associate professor of systematic theology and Reformed Theological Seminary in Atlanta. He is author of *What Is Faith?* and *The Supremacy of God in the Theology of Samuel Rutherford*.

Max Anders (Galatians-Colossians)

Dr. Max Anders is the author of over 25 books, including the bestselling *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, and is the creator and general editor of the 32-volume *Holman Bible Commentary* series. He has taught on the college and seminary level and is a veteran pastor. Max provides resources and discipleship strategies at www.maxanders.com to help people grow spiritually.

Ken Sande (The Peacemaker)

Ken Sande is the founder of Peacemaker Ministries, the Institute for Christian Conciliation and Relational Wisdom 360. Trained as an engineer, lawyer and mediator, Ken has conciliated hundreds of family, business, church, and legal conflicts. As president of RW360, he now focuses on teaching people how to “get upstream of conflict” by developing skills that strengthen relationships and reduce conflict in the family, church and workplace. He teaches internationally and is the author of numerous books, articles, and training resources, including *The Peacemaker*, which has sold over 500,000 copies in seventeen languages. He is a Certified Relational Wisdom Instructor and Conciliator, Emotional Intelligence Certified Instructor (through TalentSmart), and has served as a church elder and as an Editorial Adviser for *Christianity Today*. He and his wife, Corlette, have married children and a growing number of grandchildren, and love to hike and ski in the mountains near their home in Billings, Montana.

Lysa TerKeurst (Unglued)

Lysa TerKeurst is a *New York Times* bestselling author and speaker who helps everyday women live an adventure of faith through following Jesus Christ. As president of *Proverbs 31 Ministries*, Lysa has led thousands to make their walk with God an invigorating journey. For over 15 years, her message has encouraged and equipped women to live with confidence, peace, and trust.

David Powlison (Anger)

David Powlison, MDiv, PhD, (1949–2019) was a teacher, counselor, and the executive director of the Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation (CCEF). He wrote many books and minibooks, including *Speaking Truth in Love*; *Seeing with New Eyes*; *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*; *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context*; *Good and Angry: Redeeming Anger, Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness*; *Making All Things New: Restoring Joy to the Sexually Broken*; and *God’s Grace in Your Suffering*. David was also the editor of *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*.