

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
Senior Pastor Titus Green
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SCHOOL OF WISDOM – Life Lessons from Proverbs
God’s Wisdom for our Anger
Proverbs 14:29-30

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Have any of you sensed that our world seems to be getting more and more angry?

I can’t tell you the number of times in the past few years I’ve heard someone remark about the amount of anger that seems to permeate our world – old and young, rich and poor, conservatives and liberals. Some mental health professionals are calling this the “age of rage.” And I don’t know if our world is actually angrier or if we are just more aware of it, but it feels like most of us agree that planet earth has a real anger issue. This morning, I don’t feel like we need to be convinced of that. What we need is to know what God has to say about it. So, for our final week of study in the book of Proverbs, we are going to study God’s wisdom about anger.

Proverbs 14:29–30

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. 30 A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.

In several ways, these verses are a microcosm of what Proverbs teaches about anger. First, we see a way to recognize sinful anger. Verse 29 says that a hasty temper exalts folly. That’s an expression of sinful anger. It’s quick tempered. Other proverbs describe sinful anger as “hot tempered” (Proverbs 15:18). Quick tempered means you have a short fuse. Hot tempered means you have too much dynamite. So, God is helping us identify sinful anger here.

Second, we see a warning about sinful anger. Verse 30 says that a tranquil, or peaceful, heart is good for you. But envy makes your bones rot. That word “envy” literally means “to make your face red,” like when someone gets really angry. It’s a passion or possessiveness that makes you angry if you don’t get what you want or if someone infringes on what you think is rightfully yours.

And when your heart is characterized by that kind of burning anger, it’s like a rottenness in your bones. It eats you up and destroys your life from the inside out. That’s a warning for us all.

Third, we see God’s wisdom to deal with anger. Verse 29 says that people who have great understanding are slow to anger. You won’t be quick tempered when you are slow to anger. This verse also implies that there are appropriate reasons to be angry. If anger was inherently sinful, the Bible wouldn’t celebrate being slow to get there. It would tell us to never go there at all. Jesus was angry on multiple occasions during His earthly ministry (John 2:13-17; Mark 3:1-6; Mark 10:13-16). So, God’s wisdom on anger is that there are appropriate times to be angry, but our constant disposition should be slow to anger. Lord willing, we’ll come back to this in a bit.

So, Proverbs 14:29-30 shows us a way to recognize sinful anger, a warning about sinful anger, and God’s wisdom to deal with anger. And that’s pretty much a microcosm of what the book of Proverbs has to say about anger.

And when you put all of that together, it gives you our big idea for today.

Big Idea: As we recognize sinful anger in our life, we should believe God's warnings and obey God's wisdom.

Sinful anger is dangerous. It will destroy your life from the inside out. So, don't ignore it or give in to it. Recognize it and deal with it according to God's wisdom. That's what I'm praying all of us will do this morning.

Now, let's look at the teaching of Proverbs in light of the three parts of our Big Idea.

WAYS TO RECOGNIZE SINFUL ANGER

One of the difficult things about sinful anger is that people who have it are most often blind to it. They don't see themselves as overly angry. They see other people as overly stupid or overly sinful or overly incompetent. So, they think their response is justified. They might even think they are the only person who is in the right and courageous enough to fight the good fights. And you'll never address your sinful anger if you think you aren't sinfully angry. So, it's kind of God to give us indicators, ways to recognize where sinful anger might be part of our lives.

- Indicator #1 – You Immediately Respond to Every Insult

Proverbs 12:16

The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult.

If you are easily annoyed at everyone around you and have to make it known, that's likely a sign of sinful anger. If you can't overlook anything or let things go or constantly feel attacked anytime someone disagrees with you and you have to respond and fight back immediately, that's likely unrighteous anger.

- Indicator #2 – You Stir Up Strife

Proverbs 15:18

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

Do you have a tendency to escalate conflict or to calm it down? Are you a bucket of water or a gallon of gas to the fires of conflict? Think about the dynamics in your family or at school or work. When a fight breaks out, do people hope you will step in because they know you will help calm things down? Or do they know that once you join in the fireworks will begin?

- Indicator #3 – You Are Quick to Quarrel

Proverbs 20:3

It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling.

Have you ever known someone who seemed to be like a conversational mine field? You know what I'm talking about. They keep you on pins and needles because you know that one wrong statement could result in an explosion. If you accidentally talk about the weather, they explode about global warming. If you mention the news, they explode about fake news or people who think all news is fake. If you mention politics, they explode about the idiots on the other side of the aisle. They are a conversational mine field. If that's you, then it's likely you need to deal with sinful anger.

- Indicator #4 – You Seek Revenge

Proverbs 20:22

Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you.

When you feel someone has wronged you, how do you respond? Do you have to punish them or repay them? That's sinful anger. Vengeance belongs to the Lord. He will repay in His way and at the right time. If you keep score in your relationships and seek to pay people back for every perceived slight or offense, that's unrighteous anger.

- Indicator #5 – You Let Anger Control You

Proverbs 29:11

A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.

A full vent simply means that you're wide open with your anger. In other words, it's uncontrolled. And if you don't control your anger, then it controls you. Whether you have a short fuse and easily fly off the handle or you are working with way too much dynamite and get way more angry than you should, out of control anger is always unrighteous anger. And one of the ways you can tell if you are out of control with anger is by recognizing when anger is a primary motive in your actions. For instance, if you discipline your kids primarily because you are mad at them and not because you love them, that's being controlled by anger. Anger is in the driver's seat there.

So, unrighteous anger is quick to respond. It lashes out. It spouts off. It overreacts. It's defensive and argumentative. It's petty. It's divisive. It escalates situations rather than calming them down. It takes matters into its own hands. It stewes over offenses. It pouts. It won't let things go. It gives people the cold shoulder. It refuses to forgive. It turns discussions into arguments. It drives your decisions.

And if we are honest, we all struggle with unrighteous anger at one time or another. We all need to hear the wisdom of God. We all need our hearts awakened to what God has to say to our anger.

And that brings me to the second category of teaching from the Proverbs about our anger.

WARNINGS ABOUT SINFUL ANGER

- Warning #1 – Sinful Anger is Costly

Proverbs 19:19

A man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again.

Sinful anger will cost you. And if you don't deal with it, it will keep on costing you again and again. Someone once said, "When you lose your temper, you lose much more than your temper."

- You might lose your job. People don't want to work with angry people.
- You might lose your health. Studies have shown that anger contributes to everything from heart disease to stroke to digestive problems.
- You might lose your friends. It's hard to be a friend to someone who is easily angered.
- You might lose your testimony. The world doesn't see the joy-producing, peace-loving life of Jesus in people who are known for their anger.

- You might lose your family. Kids don't open up to parents who blow up. They don't want to be around angry parents. They don't want to bring their children around angry grandparents. Intimacy and communication in marriage is shut down by anger.

Ultimately, you will lose your life.

Proverbs 14:30

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.

Anger will destroy you from the inside you. It will eat you up and infect every other part of your life. You might live 80 years, but you won't have the life Jesus desires to give you. Sinful anger will cost you the abundant life Jesus offers to those who trust in Him. Uncontrolled anger comes with a penalty. It will cost you.

- Warning #2 – Sinful Anger is Contagious

Proverbs 22:24–25

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.

People who are given to anger spread their anger like a disease to everyone around them.

During an appearance on The Johnny Carson Show, Yankees legend Billy Martin shared a story about his friend Mickey Mantle. Knowing Billy loved hunting, Mickey invited him to a Texas ranch he often visited. They set a date and drove out early one morning. When they arrived, Mickey stopped at the ranch house and told Billy to wait in the car while he got the keys to the gate.

Inside, the ranch owner asked Mickey for a favor: his old, blind mule—practically a family pet—was suffering, but he couldn't bring himself to put it down. He asked Mickey to do it for him. When Mickey returned to the car, he decided to play a prank. "Billy," he said, "the guy won't let us hunt. I'm so mad I'm going to teach him a lesson." He drove to the barn, grabbed his gun, and told Billy he was going to shoot the man's mule. Billy protested, "You can't do that just because you're mad!" Ignoring him, Mickey went around the barn and shot the mule.

Suddenly, two more shots rang out behind him. Mickey turned to see Billy holding his own gun. "Billy, what are you doing?" Mickey asked. Billy replied with something to the effect, "When I saw how angry you were, I decided to really show him—I just shot two of his cows!"

Anger is contagious. It infects the people around us. Angry spouses spread their anger to one another. Angry parents spread their anger to their kids. Angry friends stir up anger in their friends. Anger is contagious.

And that warning works both ways. Not only will your anger make other people angry, but their anger will also infect you. For instance, have you noticed that nearly every news channel on TV revolves around a panel of angry people arguing about what's going on in the world today? You have two Republicans and two Democrats on every panel and all they do is vent their anger at each other. What do you think that's going to produce in you? Anger is contagious.

- Warning #3 – Sinful Anger Causes More Sin

Proverbs 29:22

A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.

When you allow sinful anger to be part of your life, you open the door to all kinds of other sins. Sinful anger opens the door to abuse – physical, verbal, and mental abuse. It opens the door to addiction as you try to soothe your anger through alcohol or drugs. It opens the door to rash decisions and destructive behaviors.

Unrighteous, uncontrolled anger is costly and contagious and the cause of all kinds of sin. So, don't let it live in you. Don't wait, deal with it today. And that brings us to the last category of teaching from Proverbs about our anger.

GOD'S WISDOM TO DEAL WITH ANGER

- Wisdom Principle #1 – Pursue Peace

Proverbs 14:30

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.

A tranquil heart is a heart at peace. That means your issue with unrighteous anger isn't someone else's fault. The problem is a lack of peace in your own heart. Sinful anger is the result of something that is unresolved in your own heart. It may be hurt that you've never brought to the Lord to heal. It may be bitterness from something that occurred in childhood. It may be unforgiveness for an offense that you've never let go of.

Pursue peace. And only Jesus can bring you peace. So, bring your pain to Jesus today. Ask Him to heal your heart. Ask Him to wash away your bitterness. Ask Him to enable you to forgive. Pursue Peace through Jesus in a way that enables you to quickly pursue peace with others.

- Wisdom Principle #2 – Practice Patience

Proverbs 16:32

"Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city."

Patience is the antidote to sinful anger. Patience is willing to be slow to speak and quick to listen so that you can spend time actually getting to know the people in your life and understanding what is going on with them. Patience is willing to wait on the Lord to repay the wrongs that you've suffered. Patience is critical to fighting unrighteous anger. But patience isn't something you can produce on your own. Patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit who lives in us as we trust in Christ.

So, if you struggle with patience, turn to Jesus today. Ask Him to fill you with the power of the Holy Spirit. When you feel your patience wearing thin, stop and pray. Yield yourself, your thoughts and your words, to the control of the Spirit.

- Wisdom Principle #3 – Love what God Loves

Proverbs 14:29

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

This is primarily a call to be patient. But there's something here that we can't overlook. That phrase "slow to anger" is a really important phrase in the Bible. Do you know the first time it occurs?

In the book of Exodus, God shows His glory to Moses. And when He does, He proclaims something about His glory.

Exodus 34:6

The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,

God's glory is that He is slow to anger. That means anger isn't wrong. God is angry about certain things. But His anger is attached to His love. As a matter of fact, all anger is attached to love. What we love determines how and why we get angry. If we love our free time, we get angry when our free time gets threatened. If we love our children, we get angry when something threatens to harm our kids. If we love being in control, we get angry when something threatens our control. Anger flows from love.

So, godly anger flows from godly love. God loves His people, so He is angry over the sin that threatens to destroy them. God loves His glory, so He is angry over the sin that attempts to steal His glory. Being angry isn't a sin. It's actually a virtue. It's godly to be angry. But only when we are angry about what God is angry about, which only happens when we love what God loves the way He loves it.

Sinful anger is what happens when we fail to love what God loves the way He loves it. If you are part of our Wednesday night Bible studies, then you saw a vivid illustration of this last week. We were studying the life of Jonah. God sent Jonah to the city of Ninevah to preach a message of repentance to them. But Jonah hates the people of Ninevah. They are his enemies and are a threat to take over Jonah's nation. So, Jonah rebels and runs from God. God wins because you can't outrun a God who is present everywhere. Jonah goes to Ninevah and preaches the message God sent him to deliver.

Then, Jonah goes outside the city and waits for God to destroy the people Jonah hates. But God doesn't destroy them. God blesses them because they repent and turn to God. And what does that do in Jonah? It makes Him angry. He doesn't love what God loves. He doesn't love mercy and grace and redemption. He loves His comfort and security and his way of life. And he is angry when those things are threatened.

So, God decides to teach Jonah a lesson about anger. In the middle of the night, God causes a plant to grow up over Jonah. Its leaves block the heat of the sun. It provides comfort and relief for Jonah. And Jonah loves him some Jonah, so comfort and convenience and control are his love language. Then, God causes a worm to come and eat the plant during the night so that it withers and dies. And Jonah is enraged. It was basically like stealing a man's recliner in the middle of a football game. He loses his mind.

And that's when God confronts him. He asks Jonah, "Do you think you are doing well to be this angry?" Jonah says, "Yes. I do well to be angry and I'm angry enough to die." And that's when God reveals the root of Jonah's crazy anger. He says, "Jonah, you love that plant more than you love those people. You love your comfort and convenience and way of life more than you love those people. And I love those people more than I love your plant. I love those people the way I love you." Jonah was trapped in sinful anger because he didn't love what God loves the way God loves it. And the same is true for us. That means the only hope we have to be rid of unrighteous anger is for our hearts to be transformed by God's love. And that's why we need Jesus.

Jesus came to this earth to live the life we have all failed to live – a perfect and sinless life. Jesus went to the cross to die the death we all deserve to die – as a sacrifice for our sin. As He hung upon the cross, God placed our sin on Jesus and poured out His righteous anger on Christ.

Jesus rose from the dead and promises to raise us up to a brand new life if we are willing to trust in Him. Jesus will live in us and enable us to live like Him – loving what He loves the way He loves it. Pursuing peace. Practicing Patience. Jesus will provide us His power if we will trust in Him. So, if you are struggling with unrighteous and unhealthy anger, come to Jesus. Trust in Him to do for you what you can't do for yourself. Because God's wisdom and righteousness isn't ultimately found in a principle or a proverb. It's found in a person. And His name is Jesus.