

Anger

DAVE BAST

Think about how many of the words we use to describe anger have to do with heat or fire. An angry person we say is, “steaming, fuming, burned up, fried, hot under the collar. Their anger smolders until it boils over. They have a short fuse and then they erupt like a volcano.” All of those powerful, hot words are telling us anger is extremely dangerous. Anger is the sin that will most quickly lead to injury. So, let’s dig into scripture today to learn what we can do about it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and Scott, we are talking about the seven deadly sins. We are in the middle of a series on these seven attitudes that give rise to so many of the actions that are hurtful and harmful in our world; and today we want to look at the sin of anger.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and one of the things we have said in the earlier program was that, indeed, the seven deadly sins are generally attitudes in general that characterize a person’s life that lead to actions. Now, anger itself can almost sound like an action, but actually, anger is also an attitude. It is not an action, it is what leads you to action, it is what leads you to hit, what leads you to yell, what leads you to kick the wall. So, this, too, is an underlying attitude that characterizes peoples’ lives and leads to all kinds of mayhem and hurt.

DAVE BAST

Yes, exactly. We want to dive right into scripture on this one. There is a story in the Old Testament that I think really captures this aspect of anger and it has to do with Saul and David – Saul, the first king of Israel – David, of course, who was then anointed by the Lord to be Saul’s successor. This happened early on in their relationship, but one day we read as they are coming back, the women came out from the towns of Israel; this is I Samuel 18, beginning at verse 7:

⁷As they danced they sang, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.” ⁸Then Saul was very angry. This refrain displeased him greatly. “They have credited David with tens of thousands,” he thought, “but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?” ⁹And from that time on, Saul kept a close eye on David. Then here is the kicker, what comes next. ¹⁰The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully on Saul. He was prophesying in his house while David was playing the lyre, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand ¹¹and he hurled it, saying to himself, “I will pin David to the wall!” But David escaped. So, there it is. A classic example of what anger can do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

With Saul, he was generally an angry person. That is part of the reason why God finally decided this would not be the permanent king of Israel, and so Samuel anointed David. Saul is aware of this and he is just angry, and here is a perfect example of when you are just angry all the time, it is going to come out, and here in this case it just erupts one day for no particular reason. David was just playing some music and all of a sudden, Saul is going to pin him to the wall with a spear, and tries twice, according to the text, but David escapes. But

there it is, it just all of a sudden comes out and Saul is as though he is a different person in that moment.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is interesting, too, in this story, we can see the interplay of these various sins. One of the things we have said about the seven deadly sins – yes, they are all attitudes – but these attitudes often overlap in our hearts; so, we have already talked about the sin of pride, for example, and then the sin of envy; and we see both of those things operating in Saul. Saul says, “I am the King. I am the greatest! And they are praising David more than me,” And that wonderful phrase, “He eyed David.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

He kept his eye on him.

DAVE BAST

He began to watch him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

One of the things we said in the previous program on envy is that what happens with envy is you are in somebody’s else’s shadow and it gets a little chilly, and you do not like being in someone’s shadow. So, here they are saying, “Yeah, good for Saul; he has slain thousands; but David, tens of thousands,” and it sticks in Saul’s craw. It makes him very, very upset; it curdles into anger; anger curdles into rage; and all of sudden, he does something that, all things being equal, is not really characteristic of Saul; he tries to murder somebody who deep down he really likes. He really does like David; he loves him.

DAVE BAST

At one time he did, anyway. Yes, right; like a son.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But now, all of a sudden... but, that happens, right? I mean, we often refer to people who are angry as, “Oh, he is beside himself,” or “He just temporarily lost his mind.” That is what anger does, it transforms people into monsters, and if you have ever gotten angry in front of a child, you know later how much it stings when the child says, “Daddy, I didn’t know who you were.”

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; you know, that brings up a point I wanted to raise, and maybe ask you about, Scott. There is a phrase in this story that I think might bother some people. It says, “An evil spirit from God began to trouble Saul.” Now, what is the deal with that? God sends evil spirits? What do you think is going on there?

SCOTT HOEZEE

I have no idea, but it is not the only time in the Old Testament where something like that is credited to something that God was doing and that God was stirring. I think speculation-wise, it could be that Saul is receiving the punishment for the sins he will not repent of. These are some of the reasons God had to let Saul go ultimately because he was unrepentant. He was not trying to change, and so, it could have been that. But, it is not unusual in the Old Testament to read these things.

DAVE BAST

Right. You know, one of the things about the Old Testament especially is that they tend to ignore secondary causes, or what we would think of as modern Psychology. Everything is attributed to God because God is over all, God is supreme, God is in control, God is ruling. I do not think we should read this and think that God somehow is in league with the Devil, and sending evil spirits. It may just be the Old Testament writer’s way of trying to say, “Saul did lose control of himself. He was a bit of a split personality.” But, for the Old Testament writer, it is all ultimately in God’s hands and God is over all. So, it is a way of speaking, perhaps, that we should not maybe press literally.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; I think that is right, because, clearly, one of the things that is true of anger is it is something we usually do indeed bring onto ourselves. We are going to talk a little bit later in this program about ways to overcome that; that the Holy Spirit will help us overcome that; but when we resist that, then we lose it and we boil over. What is interesting, too, here in this case Saul is the king, he is a powerful figure, and he feels diminished by David, and so forth, but in our own lives, it is interesting how often it is the trivial that brings it out in us; and how many times do we get really angry because we are disappointed in our own selves. We made a mistake. We are embarrassed. We did something and we think we should be better than that. "I should not make a mistake like that." And then we get really, really angry about our own goof. And it is an irrational response.

DAVE BAST

Or we blow things way out of proportion. I think anger can do that with us, too. It just makes us fume. There is a reason why the word *mad* became a synonym for anger for us. Mad originally, of course, meaning insane; out of your mind; and it is just seems so often like the trigger is not commensurate with the reaction that we have. So, again, look at the story. So, okay, they are praising David. Come on, Saul. It is for the good of your kingdom. If David is a great warrior, that is benefiting you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is on your side. But, Saul does not see it that way. He is still the king, but he does not see it that way because he loses all perspective. And that is why anger is... What is the number one emotion that people report right before they pulled the trigger; right before they shoved somebody and they accidentally fell into traffic and got hurt; what was it? "I was angry. I wasn't thinking. I was angry." So, anger is very, very dangerous, but of course, we need to talk a little bit about how sometimes there are situations where we should have a form of anger – a form of indignation – and we need to make some distinctions about that, and we will do that in just a moment.

BREAK:

DAVE BAST

This is Groundwork. I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and today we are talking about the deadly sin of anger; and Scott, just a moment ago you were pointing out that there are some times when we should be angry, really. So, it is not just a totally negative emotion. In fact, if a person is never angry, if they are just totally apathetic, that is not good either. In fact, that is another one of the deadly sins.

SCOTT HOEZEE

One we will talk about in a future program, the sin of sloth; the person for whom no matter what the situation, their response is, "Whatever." That is not healthy either, because if we are people who are in love with God's world and God's creation, if we are in love with goodness, if we have a sense for how things are supposed to be in our Father's Kingdom, then when we see things that are radically out of step with that, there is a level of indignation, there is a level of anger that should be a proper response. We saw it with Jesus. We miss it sometimes in the way it is translated, but when Jesus is at the tomb of Lazarus, many translations say, "He was troubled, or deeply troubled in spirit." The Greek words there are far more powerful. They were that He was indignant at death. He knew that death is, as Neal Plantinga said, "Not the way it is supposed to be." And Jesus was indignant that this had to happen to His friend.

DAVE BAST

A literal translation of Jesus' reaction there at the gravesite of his friend is that He snorted. What we often take away from that story is that Jesus wept, and that is true; that comes later; but before He feels this grief, He is just filled with rage against what is actually an intrusion into God's good world and good order of creation. God never intended that we should die, that we should face this terrible, terrible thing. And it is the fruit of sin, as we know if you know your Bible; but then, you also think of Jesus during the course of His ministry, He was far from passive and serene at all... completely unruffled... The famous story just before His crucifixion, when He drove the moneychangers out of the Temple, the moneylenders who were kind of

extorting – taking advantage – of pilgrims who would pour into Jerusalem for the Passover feast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And making no room for the poor, for the Gentiles. They were occupying the part of the Temple that was supposed to be dedicated to those folks, and it made Him very, very upset. Some of the scripture passages that He quotes there, “This is supposed to be a House of Prayer for all nations. You have made it den of robbers. It is a place where you come and hide out from your own sins.” The Temple, of all things. There are situations where, when we see some gross example of injustice or corporate scandal or millionaire CEOs who get golden parachutes even though they took all the money from senior citizens and lost it all through bad business deals, but they get away with it and they get millions of dollars and they go off into the sunset while other people are left behind destitute; you ought to get a little upset about that!

DAVE BAST

Well, yes; or even just looking at the pain and suffering of the world. When you consider the fact that there very well may be children in your city who go to bed hungry tonight, that should not just make you feel, “Oh, how sad.” Shouldn’t there be a little bit of anger that we have allowed this kind of thing to happen, or that somehow the problems seem too large for us to solve, or that there are people who are being bankrupted by medical bills, or that there are homeless people in our world, or that children of 10 and 11 years old are being sold as sex slaves in Southeast Asia. I mean, if we don’t get angry in the face of this kind of blatant evil, then there is something wrong symptomatically with us as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And ideally, when you feel that way, it will lead you to constructive action. You will found a shelter for the homeless; you will do something that will be constructive and helpful; your indignation leads you to positive service in action. But, one of the things of the people who compiled the list of the seven deadly sins knew was that even righteous anger is dangerous. The anger is an unstable compound. It has a room temperature flashpoint, such that even righteous anger – even getting angry with the right things – can go very, very quickly bad, and then all of a sudden you justify some terrible actions that you take because, “I was right to be angry in the first place,” but now, you are just angry in general and you are hurting people. Anger is an unstable compound. It is dangerous, even in its best form; for all of us who are not Jesus, we can go bad.

DAVE BAST

Yes, well, it is one thing for Jesus to make a whip out of cords and go after the moneychangers, but to me, I think that is a great point that you made. Even when we are angry, perhaps justifiably, we need to really be careful because it so quickly spills over and our ego gets caught up in it. I think the classic example of that – we see it all around us all the time – is road rage. It is an epidemic – road rage. And what happens?

Somebody cuts you off or somebody does something bad, and yes, it’s dangerous, “Did you see what they just did?” And then, what happens? You suddenly go after them. “I’m going to get them back.”

Scott Hoezee;

And it is always in history, too, we have seen it many times that a group of people who were oppressed, who were aggrieved, who had a right to be angry about how they were treated by somebody else; they then turn that anger into a license to then do the same thing to another group. We have seen that again and again in history, and that is one of the things that we need to be very, very careful in thinking about anger. There is a reason why in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “You have heard it said, ‘Do not murder,’ I tell you, when you are angry with somebody and call them names you have essentially killed them in your heart.” That is how quickly anger goes wrong, and it does so routinely. So, one of the things we need to do is find a way to deal with it.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, watch out, anger is dynamite and it can blow up in your face. Thankfully, there is advice in the Bible, there is counsel about how you can manage anger, and what to do when you find yourself angry, and there is one classic text especially in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, so let’s look at that next.

BREAK:

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are talking in this series on the seven deadly sins today about anger. We have seen, and we have talked, Dave, about how dangerous it is. Maybe we do not even need to work too hard to make the case. Many of us have been the victims of someone else's anger. We know how bad it is, how dangerous it is. We know how self-perpetuating anger can be. One of the things that happen to people who are angry is they get insulated from criticism. "You want to tell him that he has a problem with his temper?"

DAVE BAST

"Right; you tell him. I'm not touching that with a 10-foot pole."

SCOTT HOEZEE

And eventually it goes untreated.

DAVE BAST

Perhaps someone knows that they have an anger problem themselves. Frankly, I have been known to lose my cool inappropriately more than once. So, what can I do? What can I do to get a handle on this?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Interestingly, you referred a moment ago to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, in Chapter 4, verses 26 and 27, and Paul says,

²⁶In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are angry ²⁷and do not give the Devil a foothold.

What I find interesting about that passage, Dave, is that Paul does not say, "Don't ever be angry." No, he says, "When you are angry, essentially, make sure it does not go too far." And, "Don't let the sun go down, get it taken care of, get it dealt with, because otherwise you are giving the Devil a place in your life you do not want him to have."

DAVE BAST

Yes; do not give Satan an opportunity. Very interesting, well, I know you know this because I told you earlier, I do not know if you knew this before, Scott, but, why do we say, "Gesundheit," or "bless you," when somebody sneezes? The reason is, it is a carryover from paganism, really, because people in ancient times believed that when you sneezed you were momentarily vulnerable to attack by an evil spirit. Of course, I do not think that is true, literally, today, but it is true that when we are angry we are momentarily vulnerable, really, to an attack by the evil one.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We might laugh a little bit about that old thought about sneezing, and so forth, and you have to say, "God bless you," right away to keep the Devil at bay. We do not tend to think that way about sneezing, but one of the problems sometimes in the modern world, and I know it is true of myself, is we do not realize we are at danger for attack by the Devil in general. We just do not think that way. We think that is an old-fashioned way of thinking, but Paul here writing to the Ephesians says, "Look, the Devil is lurking and he is at your elbow more than you know, and if you let your anger go too far, in he rushes."

I think that is the reason why we should consider more about what have sometimes been called the spiritual disciplines. One of the reasons Paul wanted people to nourish and nurture the fruit of the Spirit, as he wrote about to the Galatians, is because these are ways you keep that Devil at bay – you keep temptation at bay.

DAVE BAST

So, let's talk a little bit about some of the practical things we can do to replace anger with more positive things. Maybe the first thing to point out is what Paul says here. "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." If you are angry, to put it positively, do not nurse it. Sometimes we treat anger like a kind of pet. We like it; we love to carry it with us and we keep dredging up those memories of what that first offence was, and, "Oh, wait a minute; I am in danger of losing my anger here. Let me stoke it up again by remembering just how badly I was treated." And Paul says, "Let go of it." And especially, I think this is great advice for married couples. Do not ever go to bed angry, and if you have to, get it out and apologize or tell your significant other what it is that is bothering you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Because if you do not, it is like a wound you purposely keep open. I remember Lewis Smedes said, "In all of our lives, we run across people who, if later someone says, 'Hey, what's Albert like?' You would say, 'He's angry.'" Because there are some people who wear their anger like a badge, and you spend five minutes with them and you will find out how they got a raw deal from their boss 25 years ago, and how this happened, and this happened, and this person did this to them. For five minutes you have a conversation with somebody and you find out every grievance he has been nurturing for years. The sun has gone down on that anger again and again and again and again, and now it defines them. So, we have to get rid of it quickly. We have to nourish these fruits of the Spirit, as Paul lists them in the letter to the Galatians; so many of them, when you think about them, are anti-anger.

DAVE BAST

Love, joy, peace...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Gentleness, kindness, self-control – that is a big one – so many – and patience... these are all things that could thwart anger in your life. Be patient with yourself. Be patient with other people. You are not perfect; they are not perfect. Just because you make a mistake, just because they make a mistake, it is no reason to blow your stack. Forgive, be patient, be gentle, as you would like people to be gentle with you. These are all good ways to chase anger out of our lives.

DAVE BAST

Forgiveness, you mentioned just now, is a big one. Paul actually pairs that in another passage – a similar passage, in Colossians with forbearance, where he says, "We need to forbear one another," and I have always loved that because to me forbearing means, you just put up with some stuff, and it is related to patience. There are some offences that maybe make you angry or they get under your skin a little bit, we say; but if you step back and put it in a bigger picture, you know, maybe, okay, that is just being human. Let's give each other some slack.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes even psychologists and counselors today will say, "You know, sometimes really, it helps to count to 10." And learn to absorb other people's annoyances; learn that this is what it means to live in a community together. I remember Neal Plantinga saying once that one of the things that patience does for you is the same sort of thing that oil does for a car's engine; it holds a lot of irritants in suspension. It keeps it from building up in your heart and allows you to go on. And have a sense of humor. You would think that something as volatile as anger would require something other than laughing at yourself, or the ability to laugh at yourself, but counselors and others will tell you, that is not a bad thing: Be able to laugh at yourself.

DAVE BAST

You just brought a flashback. When one of our kids had done something and I was so mad that I was literally chasing our 12-year-old, and he kept running around the table, you know, it was one of those classic scenes,

and finally, the other kids just started laughing at me, and that was enough.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That defused it.

DAVE BAST

Yeah, wait a minute, what are you doing here? So, a sense of the ridiculous, when we totally blow our stack; come on, it is absurd at times.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, sometimes it is not a bad prayer to say, “Lord, help me not to take myself so seriously.” That is actually not a bad prayer.

DAVE BAST

Here is one last thing; maybe we can end on this note: Jesus described Himself as meek. The meek, the lowly, the humble, those are people who tend to not have an anger problem. One of God’s jokes on the world, as He says in the Beatitudes, is that the meek will inherit the earth. So, someday all of the angry people, all of the revolutionaries, and all of the terrorists, and all that are going to discover that it is actually the meek who will get what God has promised.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is a very great promise indeed. Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, and I am here with Dave Bast, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So, visit groundworkonline.com and tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next, here on Groundwork.

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