

Sermon Series - The Building Blocks of Healthy Relationships

Sermon Title - The Building Block of Self Control

Text: Ephesians 4:26-27

Sermon Summary - This study looks at the building block of self control as it relates specifically to anger and its impact upon relationships. Paul says in Ephesians 4:26-27, which is the main text, "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold." From this passage we will look at three ways in which God helps us find self control over anger. The first is by teaching us the truth about anger! The second is by giving us tools to control our anger, and the third is by warning us of Satan's desire to use anger to gain a foothold in our lives and destroy us! We're going to have a dream team of Biblical writers to help us understand the practical applications of what Paul is saying in our text. Besides Paul, we'll hear from the Psalmist, the writer of Proverbs, John, Peter, James the Brother of Jesus, and of course, Jesus Himself! Anger is a natural human emotion, but left unchecked it quickly turns into sin and causes great damage to relationships!

Full Sermon Notes -

"Who else commands all the hosts of heaven, who else could make every king bow down, who else can whisper and darkness trembles, only a Holy God!" And if God can do all of these things, can He not also help us with the storms of life we sometimes find ourselves in? If you've lived in South Louisiana for long you know we face natural storms all the time. Are we really back in hurricane season? We need to pray for those in the path of the hurricane headed towards Florida. And the news guys love to start the chatter when there's a wave anywhere and for us worry warts, we start worrying! But we all know when there is a storm for sure headed our way, what we do in response can either help us survive the storm or cause us to become its victim! And this is also true when it comes to storms in our personal lives and especially with relationships! We're going to talk about a topic this morning of extreme importance when it comes to the building blocks of healthy relationships. Self Control with a focus on anger. Let's pray and ask The Holy Spirit to open our hearts to the teachings of God's Word on this critical subject! Pray!

Some of you are like, "Pastor Larry, are you about to pick on those of us who have a bad temper, because if you are, I'm not gonna be very happy about that?" I'm not going to pick on you, but we are going to have some straight talk concerning the emotion of anger and the impact it can have on our relationships, not to mention our Spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical well being. And of course anger can cause your tongue to say things that fuel the flames of evil, but I will mention that in a sermon in a couple of weeks. Here's my question for you: Does God not have the power to help you overcome a bad temper? The answer is, yes He does and we'll discover how today. Paul tells us in our text:

Ephesians 4:26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, Ephesians 4:27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

It is important to note that Paul doesn't say you will never get angry! He very clearly says: "In your anger do not sin!" It is a part of being human to get angry at times. Paul is not advocating anger, but acknowledging that anger is a natural human emotion. However, Paul knows if anger is not controlled it becomes destructive and deadly! There are things in this life which should make us angry. Things like, child abuse and neglect, injustice, greed, deceit, lying, stealing, gossip, slander, human trafficking, slavery, murder, betrayal, bitterness, and the list could go on and on. Kids, I'm glad you're here this morning! Let me ask you a question: Did Jesus ever get angry? Yes He did and He had a good reason for being upset! Let me read you the story...

John 2:13 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

John 2:14 In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.

John 2:15 So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.

John 2:16 To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"

There were people using the temple of the Lord, a place that was supposed to be sacred, simply as a place to do business. And evidently some of those people were being dishonest and stealing from people. We know this because Jesus said in Matthew's Gospel...

Matthew 21:13 "It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'"

So these people weren't raising money for missions, like we do when we have our missions extravaganza. That's a very different thing. The point is, Jesus knew how to be angry without letting it turn into sin, although He did take some pretty serious action on that day.

But how do we learn the art of being angry about things without letting that anger turn into sin? How do we know how to take action all the while making sure our motives are pure? How do we find the ability to hate sin without hating the sinner? How do we find the ability to acknowledge wrongs done to us and the hurt those things have caused without allowing our anger to cause us to become the very thing we despise? How do we follow Paul's admonition to deal with anger appropriately before the sun goes down? In other words, not allowing ourselves to sleep until we have adequately dealt with our anger. I asked my grandad years ago what the secret was to his over 50 years of marriage to my grandmother. One of the things he told me was they never went to bed angry. In other words they did not let the sun go down on their anger. They dealt with any disagreement before it turned into something more. When James says don't let the sun go down on your anger he was saying, don't let the new day begin before you have dealt with your anger and gotten control over it! Jewish people start their new day at sundown!

Commentator Ralph P. Martin says...

“Paul’s chief concern is to prevent anger from becoming an obsession. When that happens the devil finds a loophole, for the evil one uses all devices, even by exploiting our good intentions and social concerns, to bring the church into disrepute.”

In other words, the ends don’t always justify the means! Some have become so angry about sinful things in our world they’ve let it cause them to do sinful things in response, and the old saying applies, “two wrongs don’t make a right!” So today we’re going to look at what God’s Word has to say about anger, learning to control our anger and not letting the devil, the deceiver, the slanderer, have a foothold in our lives, our families or our church. We’re going to explore the extreme importance of self control as a building block for healthy relationships. We’re going to have a dream team of Biblical writers to help us understand the practical applications of what Paul is saying in our text. Besides Paul, we’ll hear from the Psalmist, the writer of Proverbs, James the Brother of Jesus, and of course, Jesus Himself!

Paul instructs us to not let our anger cause us to sin, not to remain angry, and not to let Satan use anger to gain a foothold in our lives. We must learn to use self control in order to accomplish these things but we all know we can’t do this on our own, right? But how does God help us have self control over anger?

1. The first way God helps us have self control over anger is by teaching us the truth about anger!

Our text says this...

Ephesians 4:26 “In your anger do not sin”

We’ve already talked about the fact that anger is a normal human emotion, but it is one that must be controlled or it will quickly turn into sin. You might wonder why anger can so quickly turn into sin? God’s Word has answers for that and it has to do with how anger can be so self serving and when we are self serving it always leads to evil! King David wrote in Psalm 37:8...

Psalm 37:8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.

Solomon, David’s son says in Proverbs...

Proverbs 14:29 Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.

Proverbs 29:22 An angry person stirs up conflict, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins.

You may not know this, but the New Testament book of James is an informal gathering of wisdom sayings. They are not in a precise order. I guess you could say the book of James is

like a New Testament book of Proverbs, and James has some great wisdom on the topic of anger. He says...

James 1:20 ...human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

So even though we know anger is a natural human emotion, unchecked and uncontrolled it absolutely does not produce the righteousness that God desires! Why? Because when we're angry we aren't thinking about God's will, we aren't seeking God's will, and we are less likely to pray and seek God's direction! When we are angry we are much more likely to take actions or say things that are self serving and extremely destructive. In fact Jesus said this...

Matthew 5:21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'

Matthew 5:22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister, will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Raca was a term of contempt, but fool was another level altogether! Jesus knew that unchecked, uncontrolled anger will lead people to do unthinkable horror from character assassination to actual murder because anger is a bad root that yeilds bad fruit! Say that with me...Anger is a bad root that yields bad fruit!

Easton's Bible Dictionary describes anger this way...

Anger - the emotion of instant displeasure on account of something evil that presents itself to our view. In itself it is an original susceptibility of our nature, just as love is, and is not necessarily sinful. It may, however, become sinful when causeless, or excessive, or protracted.

The writer of Proverbs again weighs in...

Proverbs 19:11 A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense.

So sometimes our initial anger is justified because of the nature of the offense, however, if we don't handle correctly what could be considered righteous indignation, then we can quickly allow that anger to become sinful and we get pulled into dark places. And we must realize that not all anger, in fact most anger, if we're honest about it, is not righteous anger, but has another source. In fact James weighs in on this...

James 4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?

I want to ask you a few questions.

How many of you make your best decisions when you're angry?

How many of you say just the right thing when you're angry?
How many of you find the situation to be much better after an anger episode?
Anybody in here find that your relationships improve after you've let your temper run the show?

I think all of us, if we're being honest, would say a big no to all of those questions. You might feel a little better after an outburst, but that feeling quickly passes as you realize the consequences of the hurt, and destruction your anger has caused. Most of us wish we had done a better job down through the years of exercising self control when it comes to anger. Paul wrote to Titus, his dear friend and someone he considered a son in the faith, these words about self control...

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

Titus 2:12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,

Titus 2:13 while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Titus 2:14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

But how in the world do we do this? That's a good question and I'm so glad you asked!! This leads us to this very important point...

2. The second way God helps us have self control over anger is by giving us tools to deal with anger!

Paul tells us in our text...

Ephesians 4:26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,

Do not let the sun go down on your anger implies that there are things we can do to process and control our anger before it gets out of hand. God would not tell us to do something and not give us the tools and resources to do it! We're going to look again to James for guidance here.

James 1:19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

James 1:20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

There are several applications of God's Word to consider in these two verses. The first is to...

Be Quick to Listen!

Listen to who? Well for starters, listen to the person who's talking to you and give them a chance to talk and share their thoughts before you cut them off. You might just learn something from their perspective if you really listen. How many times have you spoken out in anger only to

realize later you were mistaken about some of the facts and wish you had listened more before you spoke? One of the most helpful things for me in this area has been to immediately ask the Holy Spirit to help me be Christlike and to give me wisdom in how to handle my anger given the situation I'm facing. I've found The Holy Spirit to be very faithful in this. Self control is very difficult, if not impossible, without the help of The Holy Spirit's power and wisdom. And speaking of wisdom, the writer of Proverbs puts it well...

Proverbs 8:32 "Now then, my children, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways.

Proverbs 8:33 Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it.

Proverbs 8:34 Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway.

Proverbs 8:35 For those who find me find life and receive favor from the LORD.

Proverbs 8:36 But those who fail to find me harm themselves; all who hate me love death."

"Wait a minute Pastor Larry! Just because I don't always listen to the Holy Spirit and sometimes get really angry, doesn't mean I get hurt or love death!" Well, let me remind you of some modern day science that backs up this verse. Did you know various medical studies have shown that being a consistently angry person doubles your chance of a heart attack, increases stroke risk, weakens your immune system, causes anxiety, can lead to depression and may even lessen lung capacity? "Whoa, I didn't know that!" Well, now you do! But we're not just supposed to be quick to listen, we are also to be....

Be Slow to Speak!

You may listen to the other person and hear them out and still totally disagree with them. Just because you listen to someone doesn't mean you will agree with them. However, you should still be slow to speak! You need time to formulate what your response should be. You need time to allow God to lead you in your response! We're going to have a full sermon on the building block of wholesome words, week after next, but let me say this today because it's so important. When you are quick to listen, you may not hear what you wanted to hear. You may have been hurt and need time to deal with the disappointment so you don't speak out of your emotions! You may have a reason to be angry, and maybe even a right to be angry, but you don't have the right to let your anger turn to sin and cause you to hurt others in the process. As a follower of Christ we are given very specific instructions on how to handle these kinds of things! When we're hurt we don't retaliate! We can take steps to not be hurt again, and that's understandable, but we follow the example of Christ...1 Peter 2:21ff

1 Peter 2:21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

1 Peter 2:22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

1 Peter 2:23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

So James told us to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and to...

Be Slow to Become Angry!

So if we are quick to listen and slow to speak, then we can be slow to become angry because we've given God a chance to speak to our hear and help us have the building block of self control! Remember the verse we read earlier in Proverbs?

Proverbs 19:11 A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.

Maybe when we take the time to realize that we're not perfect either, we might just give others a little more room to be human and understand they need a little grace when they mess up! Maybe it's all about perspective! Maybe sometimes it's more about my attitude than it is the actions of others. I'm not saying that we just let anything go, or that we tolerate abuse in our life, or just let others run over us, we should not, but sometimes we do need to remember the very hard thing Jesus taught us...

Matthew 5:38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'

Matthew 5:39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.

That wisdom could actually save your life! How many times would a life have been saved if someone had been willing to turn the other cheek and walk away from a fight? Not an easy thing to do, but very Christlike and at times extremely wise. Of course I understand the need sometimes for self-defense. If you've turned the other cheek and they just keep attacking, that becomes something of a different story. But so many in our society today never take the time to even try turning the other cheek and that's sad!

Unless your anger is a righteous anger under the control of the Holy Spirit, that you know comes from God stirring your heart to be so moved by injustice and wrong doing that you take steps to change the circumstances for someone who is being mistreated, even if it cost you personally, unless your anger is that kind of righteous anger, then it has no place in your life.

James 1:20 For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires!

Man's anger cannot bring about the righteous life God desires for you! It cannot. It is unspiritual! How do I know this? How can I be so sure? We discover this in our final point for today.

3. The third way God helps us have self control over anger is by warning us of Satan's desire to use anger to gain a foothold in our lives and destroy us!

Paul tells us in our text this very important spiritual truth...

Ephesians 4:26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, Ephesians 4:27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

Unresolved anger gives the devil a foothold, a loophole, an opportunity, a place in which he can work his evil plans against us and against God! Why? Because anger can cause us to become bitter, James said...

James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

James 3:14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

James 3:15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

James 3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

There are those here today who are in the midst of storms in life and for some of you it has nothing to do with anything you've done, but just circumstances you find yourself a part of or things that have happened to you which you have no control over. And then there are times when we've done or said things that we know played a part in creating a difficult time because of consequences. Either way, like I said at the beginning of our message, what you do in response will either help you survive the storm or cause you to become its victim! And this is especially true when it comes to the emotion of anger and the impact it can have on your spiritual, mental, emotional, and even physical well being. I don't think there's anyone here who would consciously choose to allow Satan to get a foothold in your life or your relationships. But without the building block of self control, that's exactly what can happen. Right after James paints the bleak picture of what happens when we allow Satan to sway us with his evil, worldly wisdom, James gives us this insight...

James 3:17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

James 3:18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

But you say, "Pastor Larry, you just don't know my circumstances. That's an impossible life for me. You just don't know my pain!" You are right, I don't know your pain, but I know God wouldn't direct us to do something and not give us the wisdom and power to do it! I want to share a powerful true story with you that is found in Max Lucado's book "Facing Your Giants!" Listen...

"Earnest Gordon groans in the Death House of Chungkai, Burma. He listens to the moans of the dying and smells the stench of the dead. Pitiless jungle heat bakes his skin and parches his throat. Had he the strength, he could wrap one hand around his bony thigh. But he has neither the energy nor the interest. Diphtheria has drained both; he can't walk; he can't even feel his body. He shares a cot with flies and bedbugs and awaits a lonely death in a prisoner-of-war camp. How harsh the war has been on him. He entered World War II in his early twenties, a robust Highlander in Scotland's Argyle and Sutherland Brigade. but then came the capture by the enemy, months of backbreaking labor in the jungle, daily beatings, and slow starvation.

Scotland seems forever away. Civility, even farther. The allied soldiers behave like barbarians, stealing from each other, robbing dying colleagues, fighting for food scraps. Servers shortchange rations so they can have extra for themselves. The law of the jungle has become the law of the camp. Gordon is happy to bid it adieu. Death by disease trumps life in Chungkai. But then something wonderful happens. Two new prisoners, in whom hope still stirs, are transferred to the camp. Though also sick and frail, they heed a higher code. They share their meager meals and volunteer for extra work. They cleanse Gordon's ulcerated sores and massage his atrophied legs. They give him his first bath in six weeks. His strength slowly returns and, with it, his dignity.

Their goodness proves contagious, and Gordon contracts a case. He begins to treat the sick and share his rations. He even gives away his few belongings. Other soldiers do likewise. Over time, the tone of the camp softens and brightens. Sacrifice replaces selfishness. Soldiers hold worship services and Bible studies. Twenty years later, when Gordon served as chaplain of Princeton University, he described the transformation with these words: 'Death was still with us--no doubt about that. But we were slowly being freed from its destructive grip. Selfishness, hatred...and pride were all anti-life. Love...self-sacrifice...and faith, on the other hand, were the essence of life...gifts of God to men...Death no longer had the last word at Chungkai.'

Earnest Gordon

Those guys could have let anger and hatred destroy them, but they didn't! And at least one of them, Earnest Gordon, went on to live a life of ministry to others. In the worst of circumstances he had learned the importance of the building block of self control! He had allowed The Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ to give him strength and peace in the midst of a horrible storm in life! Will you do the same? Let's pray.