

## **THE REDEMPTION OF ANGER**

### PROVERBS

Proverbs intro and recap....first (encourage to read Proverbs) What is Wisdom etc. John Wayne: Life is hard, it's even harder when you're stupid.

Eli and I were in the middle of our third year of marriage. We had been together long enough to have moved past those high-intensity, romantic honeymoon feelings, to have a pretty clear sense of the realities and challenges of marriage, but yet we hadn't been married so long that we felt like seasoned veterans.

Ava had just been born the previous summer and so we were in the midst of adjusting to a new season of life together. Like a lot of new young parents we were suffering under the effects of sleep deprivation, the spikes and dips of hormonal levels, and of course phantom baby syndrome (you know, that's were your ears ring with the sound of crying).

But honestly there wasn't anything especially out of the ordinary about this particular day. But stuff like this tends to sneak up on you. Like storm clouds forming on a mountain pass, a seemingly clear day can suddenly and disturbingly turn nasty.

I don't remember the specifics of the argument we got into, honestly my memory is still a bit foggy on this whole thing. I think I've subconsciously chosen to put it out of my mind. But it was probably Argument Script #3 of the 5 or so different scripts we follow. It didn't take long for the argument to escalate. Somewhere in the midst of it all, Eli said something that just pushed my buttons. I mean absolutely set me off. I could feel my adrenal glands, you know that fight or flight instinct start to kick in. Red-faced I stormed about, looking for some release for the sheer, unadulterated rage I felt.

What Eli had said to me was unfair. It was an injustice. It was just plain wrong, and the only way to truly set it right would be to demonstrate just how wrong what she said was. To do that I'd need to throw something. Hard. Against the wall.

Well, I quickly found a medium-sized object on the floor that fit my hand perfectly. The weight would be ideal for a full wind up pitch at the wall. With my retinal artery about to burst, the discovery of this object was all feel.

I wound up and threw an 80mph fast ball at the wall. Suddenly the sound of the object making contact with the wall snapped me out of my angry stupor. I looked up to see the yellow mark on the wall. My eyes moved downward to take in the carnage. Like shrapnel from a

grenade a mess of what seemed to be beads of gel was strewn across the floor. Suddenly realized what I'd done. And a quick scan of the floor only confirmed what I already knew, as there, ten feet away from me on the hardwood floor lay a size 3 exploded diaper.

I had to laugh. I mean, suddenly in that moment the sheer foolishness, the insanity of my rage was completely exposed.

Have you ever had one of those moments? Maybe you kick the ground in your frustration and stub your toe. Or you hit something and hurt your hand. Maybe you angrily accuse your child misplacing your keys, only to find them in your own pocket. There are times when we see the utter foolishness of our anger, when the insanity of our anger is exposed.

The problem is that more often than not anger is something much more subtle than that. Far more often anger is something hidden, something we don't always recognize in ourselves.

The book of Proverbs says a surprising amount about anger. It assumes that this issue of anger is going to be a struggle for us. It expects that folly is still lurking in our hearts. And what the book of Proverbs says is that if you are going to be a wise person, if you are going to embrace wisdom (remember our definition of wisdom) if you are going to discern good from evil in a way that the good is loved, cherished and embraced and evil is forsaken, avoided and hated, if you are going to be THAT kind of person, Proverbs says that you need to understand anger, and you need redemption from the way that anger presents itself in your life. ***A wise person, the way the Bible shows them, increasingly understands and experiences redemption from anger in their lives.***

But anger is a mess. It's a tangle. For something we have so much first hand experience in, we don't understand it well or know how to deal with it. Is anger something we should express, or is it something we should repress? Is it something to manage?

This morning I hope we can answer some of those questions as we look at three things about anger, both from these verses in Proverbs and from the testimony of the rest of Scripture. And we are going to see three things about anger. We're going to see what it does, what it is, and how to be redeemed from it.

#### 1. What It Does...

One of the problems with anger is that it often does what we want it to. We actually see results. People respond to it. That's what makes anger so seductive.

We see that in babies right? I mean this happens right from the womb. If you've ever seen a baby get red-faced screaming to be picked up, or for milk, or to not go to sleep you know this. And we aren't so different.

Just recently I came home from a long work day and I had to turn around and go out quickly again that evening. It was a normal dinner at our house, which means we didn't just have four little girls quietly and obediently eating their dinners. Eli and I were trying to talk and we kept getting interrupted, little ones were crying, older ones were complaining. And finally, after trying several times without success to get them to just eat, I tried intimidation. OK, that's it, no talking! Eat your dinner! And I got what I wanted!

And it isn't just angry outbursts. Often an angry silence gets even better results. But like any sin, anger always promises more than it delivers. I got the silence I wanted, but in the end what did I really gain? I got submission, but without joy. I got obedience, but without love.

One biblical counselor put it this way: "Anger is never quite what it seems. It produces results I desire, but only for the short term. What feels so active and powerful at first leaves you feeling more powerless than ever before."

Anger cloaks itself as wisdom, but like all folly in Proverbs instead of the wholeness and peace that result from wisdom, it brings chaos and pain. Things become more broken. Because it is out of line with *God's* order, anger always causes disorder. It is a powerful destructive force. And first of all Proverbs tells us ***it destroys your community.***

Look at the Proverbs we read:

10:12 - "Hatred stirs up strife..."

15:1 - "... a harsh word stirs up anger."

15:18 - "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife..."

And then 17:14 tells us what the strife anger cause is like...

17:14 - "The beginning of strife is like the letting out of water..."

It's like opening a dam - everything down river is going to get destroyed. And usually what gets destroyed is relationships. You see, almost always anger is directed at other people. Sure I can get mad at my hammer for hitting my thumb, but that only lasts a minute. Real anger, the kind of anger we're talking about here, involves people.

So anger destroys relationships. In your family, your workplace, your church, your neighborhood. And when you act in anger toward others in your words and actions that destruction is very difficult to repair. In fact, when anger become your regular pattern often you can never get those broken relationships back.

But anger doesn't just destroy your community, **it destroys you.**

Look at these verses again:

14:29 - "Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly."

25:28 - "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls."

Anger, which is tied closely to a lack of self control, creates in you a repetitive cycle of folly. It breaks down your ability to act with wisdom at all. You get intoxicated with anger and it distorts how you see everything: how you see your situation, how you see yourself, how you see others... and in that state you make stupid and destructive choices. (Like throwing a diaper against the wall.)

And when you allow anger into your life it doesn't take long for it to become a pattern. It becomes your default mode of operation right?

Look at Pr. 19:19 - "A man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again." .... and again and again

Anger is like a drug. It's an addiction. And it is inherently self-deceptive. How many of us are sitting here already thinking, I wish so and so could hear this this morning? It's because you don't think you have an anger problem. That's what anger does. You can't admit you're angry. Do you know why? Because anger has to do with being right. And you're convince that you're right. So when you act in anger you truly feel like you're acting for justice. You feel you're setting the world back to the way it should be.

And here's what we do - we stretch this category of anger so that it doesn't have to fit us. If we complain and are critical of others, an angry person verbally berates other people. If our anger consists of sarcasm or just a "whatever" attitude, it's only those people that blow up who have an anger problem. Or if you are that person that blows up and makes violent threats, the person with an anger problem is the one who actually carries out that violence. Do you see how deluded you are? Every single one of us has a problem with anger. It's just how it shows itself.

Anger destroys your community and destroys yourself. That's just what anger does.

But that's not all we need to understand about anger in order to be wise. We also need to know **what anger is.**

And though we've made it clear that anger is destructive, the Bible surprisingly has a lot of good things to say about anger. In fact, at the most basic level anger is actually a good thing. Look at these verses in Proverbs. None of them tells us not to be angry at all, they tell us what

kind of anger we are supposed to have. And this is so amazing because other religions and philosophies say such different things about this - Buddhism and many other teachings would tell us to repress anger - as the Dalai Lama said, "anger poisons the mind and embitters the heart," other psychologists would say the answer isn't to repress anger, but to express it - let it out. But the Bible gives us wisdom that is wholly different. The answer is not repressed anger or expressed anger, but slow anger. That's the wise person, a patient person, a person slow to anger. Why is this the heart of wisdom when it comes to anger?

Because this is how God is. Being slow to anger is one of God's attributes. The Bible tells us over and over that God is slow to anger. Think about Exodus 34 - when Moses is on the mountain with God and Moses asks him to show him his glory - to display to him the heart of who God is. And what does God say to him? He says, "my name is Yahweh, the Lord, I am, and what am I? What is the essence of my being? I am slow to anger and abounding in love."

So what is God's anger, because it certainly must not be like our anger. Anger, in fact, and this is not my own by the way, I've gotten this from others... Right anger, God's anger is true love put into action. It's love in action. Anger as it is in God, untainted by sin and selfishness, is his right response to deal with a threat to someone or something he loves.

So why does the Bible talk about God being angry at sin and brokenness, why is God angry at injustice and poverty and selfishness - because these things are a threat to the goodness of the creation and creatures he loves. Do you see that? That's the heart of what anger is in God.

And we, as the pinnacle of God's creation, the *imago dei*, we are created in the image of God, and anger works this way in us too. We are made to experience anger, even outrage at genuine wrongs and injustices. But something is distorted in our anger.

But look at Proverbs 24:29. It tells us this. "Do not say, 'I will do to him as he has done to me; I will pay the man back for what he has done.'" What's this saying? This Proverb is telling you that though you have been wronged in some way, though in anger you feel a need to fight, to right this wrong, you are not to do so. Why? Shouldn't we have righteous anger like God against sin and injustice?

The reason is that there is something wrong with your anger. Your responses don't match up with the cause. Either you get far too angry too quickly, or you get angry at the wrong things. Why? ***What is the problem with your anger that it has gone so wrong? How has your anger become so skewed?***

The heart of the answer to that question is that your anger, instead of being God-centered like God's own anger is, is self-centered. God-centered anger is when you become angry because you perceive a threat to what God loves and values. Self-centered anger is when you become angry because you perceive a threat to what you love and value. God-centered anger gets angry because God has been dishonored and his name has been disgraced. Self-centered anger gets angry because you've been dishonored and your name has been disgraced.

At your core there is something fundamentally wrong with what you love and value. You see, do you remember the definition of anger? Anger perceives a threat to what you love and value and cherish, and you act to defend that love, to deal with that threat. What you get angry at and what the degree to which you get angry says something huge about you. It tells you exactly what matters to you. And the more something matters, the deeper you love something, the more important you feel it is, the more you will pour yourself out in anger to defend it, to guard it. Asking yourself why you are angry, what it is that you're defending, takes you deep into the inner workings of your heart. Your anger will actually show you your master.

Let me give you an example from my own life. There might be a time or two where I've gotten angry with everyone at my house for not getting out the door quickly enough for church on Sunday morning. OK? I bark at the girls to get their shoes on. I'm irritated at Eli for not getting up earlier. That's also anger, alright? You know what this is like. And the more that I start stewing about it, the more I start thinking about it the angrier I get. I start painting things with a broad brush. It's like this *every* Sunday! Why do they do this to me. But do you know what my anger is really about? It's all about me. These five girls are getting in the way of me. I'm feeling inconvenienced, I'm feeling embarrassed. You know why? Because if we're late for church, people will see that we're late for church, and people will think of us as the late people, and my identity and reputation will be tarnished. So what am I defending? I'm not defending what's right, I'm not defending what's justice, I'm not defending what God loves. I'm defending what I love and that's my reputation and identity.

You're angry because something threatens what you love, what you think is important, what you think you have to have, and that thing you love is out of whack, it's out of order. Your image, what you want to do that day, your expectations, your security, your finances. And the more you love that thing that is threatened the angrier you'll get. Your anger is fundamentally about you.

I was talking to Ava recently because she was complaining about something being unfair. And I asked her, "Why do you never complain to me about something being unfair for

someone else?" I never here, "Dad, Miren got a small bowl of ice cream and I got a big bowl... that's not fair!" Why are you only angry about what is unfair for you? I mean this is the heart of our anger problem right? If you are angry about something done to another person you are on safer ground, but if you are angry because of what somebody did to you, you are wrong 99% of the time. Why? Because our anger is always bent, it's always tainted by our sinful selfishness, and our disordered affections.

But Paul Ephesians tells us "to be angry and do not sin." You can forget about trying to master that one. Don't use that to authorize any anger in your life. Look deep at your heart. No matter how your anger shows itself you need to examine your heart. We're in an age where cynicism and sort of an aloof indifference is trendy. Where pessimism and ranting is acceptable and even encouraged. Are you resentful toward others? Some of you disguise what is really anger with humor so that you can always play the denial card if you're confronted. No matter how anger shows itself in your life you need to get to its roots. You need to stop and ask yourself, what is it I'm defending? What is being threatened?

James 1:20 tells us "the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." In other words, anger in all the ways we express it and experience it as sinners will never produce godly results. ***So how can we be redeemed from sinful anger?*** Are we hopelessly destined to spend life in this world stirring up strife, apologizing, and then doing it all over again? Well... yes... and no.

What's obvious is that what makes us wise isn't in strategies of anger management. Counting to ten before we speak or taking time to cool off aren't enough to bring change. We love our anger too much. To change we need something more. Redemption doesn't come from strategies or coping mechanism, redemption comes from a person.

Look at verse 25:21 - it gives this alternative to anger: "If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you."

Without dealing with the burning coals today, do you see what this is saying? It's saying that when you're angry, when you've been wronged, when you've been hurt, when you feel like getting even, when your name has been dragged through the mud, when you've given and given and not gotten anything in return, even when all that has happened, there is more required of you than just self-control. Redemption from anger is about more than just bringing things back to a zero sum. It's about more than just not being angry. This verse isn't just saying "Don't take revenge on your enemies," it's saying "Save your enemies." Love your enemies.

This was the heart of Jesus wasn't it. You see we like to describe Jesus anger as righteous anger. And then we take all our situations of anger and we say, that was righteous anger. Yes, Jesus anger was righteous anger, but more than that it was redemptive anger. Righteous anger fights for what is right! Redemptive anger is willing to be wronged. Righteous anger enforces justice. Redemptive anger grants mercy.

You see, this is how God's anger operates. For us to become wise, understanding our own anger isn't enough. We need to understand God's anger. God's anger is a redeeming anger. His anger doesn't destroy but repairs. God destroys the problem and rescues the relationship. We tend to think that by destroying the relationship we'll destroy the problem. And God's anger is patient. Remember what God says about himself. What is at the very core of who God is. "I am slow to anger and abounding in love." God is patient.

Patience is this interesting opposite to anger. Real patience isn't passive or indifferent or tolerant of evil. It doesn't just affirm everything. Patience actually hates what is going on, but patience rolls up its sleeves to dig into the dirt of reality and deals with what's wrong. Patience sees what's wrong but is slow to anger. God isn't eager to react in anger, to give us the wrath we deserve, but his is eager to demonstrate to us his love. God's anger is slow, but his love is quick.

And ultimately God's anger is sacrificial. Whenever we're angry at someone else there is a cost involved. We're offended, hurt, someone has gotten in our way, we've been inconvenienced, or our reputation has been damaged. There's a cost. And you want to pay that person back for what they did to you.

But here's the thing, ultimately all of our anger is not really towards others, or towards situations and circumstances in our lives, it's toward God. Look at your relationships. Do you have great relationships with everyone? You're this gregarious person that seems to get along with everyone, but there is this one person that you can't stand. That you avoid like the plague. If you're only angry at one other person, you're actually angry at God. And you won't admit it because you're in denial, but you are.

And so if anyone has a right to be truly angry and redress wrongs it is God. All of our sin is ultimately against him. We've trampled his name and his glory, we've cast him aside to worship other things. We've hurt and offended and inconvenienced him. But here's what God's anger does. His anger is sacrificial. Instead of paying back, God absorbs the cost of that betrayal. God bears the cost of the offense himself.

But look what God did. You were his enemy. But at the cross, instead of God spending his anger on you, he spent it on himself. Jesus went to the cross and bore the full cup of God's



wrath against the sin and brokenness that threatened to destroy the creation God loves. God didn't fly off the handle in rage, he didn't ignore sin and pretend it wasn't there, he called sin what it was and justly punished it - not in us, the ones who deserved it but by taking the cost on himself.

Now when we see that. When we really comprehend that. And when we are captivated the beauty of what God has done for us. That's when anger begins to be redeemed in that same way in our own lives. That when we begin to walk in wisdom.

So how are you going to respond? The first thing you need to do is repent. Repentance is turning around. It's a change of mind and heart. You see when you encounter this staggering loving and redemptive anger of God that wasn't spent on you, but was poured out on Jesus, you can't help but look at your own anger and see it's folly. And when you see, you have to own it. You have to be willing to face up to it. You have to come to end of yourself and admit to God that only can change and transform you. This is fear of the Lord right? What is it in Proverbs that leads to wisdom? It's the fear of the Lord. It's facing God, recognizing you lack and his perfection, coming to the end of yourself and depending on him.

Once you do that, and only once you do that - and trust me, repentance will be a daily reality in your life, but when that becomes a part of your life you can start to be angry like God. What do I mean by that? Well I mean exactly what's being said here. Instead of extracting payment from others for the ways they've wronged us, instead of in anger blowing up or turning inward in order to punish the offender, we'll absorb the cost ourselves. Look at Proverbs 10:12. What is the heart of love here? It covers over offenses. It absorbs the cost. It's willing to cover the cost of the wrong.

Next, instead of looking for revenge on your enemies, those people you're angry at, instead of hoping they fail, hoping things don't go well for them, instead of avoiding them, you'll save them. I don't mean in the ultimate sense, but I mean in the daily sense. You'll serve them instead of trying to harm them. You'll give instead of just looking to get. Do you know the place of freedom in your heart this kind of living has to come from? You have to be so secure to do this, and that security can only come from knowing what Jesus has done for you.

Lastly, this requires community. Some of you have been so hurt by others that you don't want to put yourself out there. You don't want anything to do with relationship at all because you know you're going to get angry. But how to we practice redemptive anger? How do we walk out all we're talking about here? It's in community together.