

Home Remodeling: Anger

Genesis 4:1-16

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There stood Cain. Sweating, heart racing, nostrils flaring and eyes wide with rage. He stood over the lifeless body of his brother Abel. The blood of Abel dripping from Cain's hands. The moment seemed frozen in time. Cain's mind spinning like a powerful tornado. As he rose to his feet, Abel's blood runs out and fills the ground around him. What have I done thought Cain? What happened to me? How did such anger and rage fill me? How could I take the life of my brother? What happened? As these thoughts fill his mind he becomes light headed and stumbles away from Abel's body. He falls to the ground again and wept bitterly. All of his senses overloaded. There he sits.

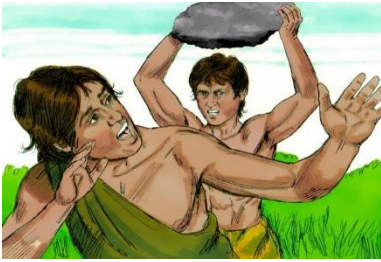
Cain and Abel were the sons of Adam and Eve. Cain the older brother and Abel the younger. They are the first generation born under the curse of sin they have a unique challenge that they must face. They

needed to contend with the influence of sin. They must resist the power of sin, they must master it. But as anyone with siblings knows, sibling rivalry is very intense. Here in this story in Genesis 4 we see it to be the cause of the first murder ever recorded.

CAIN & ABEL
the story of
TWO BROTHERS

Their rivalry began when Cain and Abel brought their offerings to God. The Bible says Cain brought *some* fruit from his field. Fruits

of no special value. He had sold or eaten the best stuff. Abel brought the prime cuts from the *firstborn* of his flock. Meat that could have been sold or eaten. But instead he chooses to give to God first. Each made a choice about what he would bring to God. Abel from the firstborn and Cain just some fruit he had lying around. God saw their offerings and was pleased that Abel cared enough about his relationship with Him that he would give his best to God. Cain on the other hand did not show that same love and respect for God. Therefore, God was not pleased with Cain.



As a result, Cain became very angry the Bible says. He burned with anger, like the smoldering ambers of a fire, he grew hotter and hotter. The anger inside of him was building and eventually lead to a murderous rage. Cain did not deal with his anger, even after God warned him that he must master his anger.

This idea of anger is where I want to spend some time with you this morning. Some, if not many of us can relate to the way that Cain was feeling. We have experienced things that we thought were unfair or wrong in some way and so we became angry about them. Some of us have seen it in our kids. Anger is a major issue in our world and especially in our families.

So, let's unpack this story a little...

Cain and Abel were brothers raised together and both wanting to be loved and accepted. One of the foundational needs for all people is to feel loved and accepted. We all desire this for ourselves and others that we love. This is very healthy. But in this

case Cain became jealous of his brother because it seemed that God cared more about Abel than Cain. But this is not true. Cain made some bad choices and God was displeased with the choices Cain made not with Cain himself. So instead of doing the hard work of making better choices Cain harbored anger in his heart. This anger grew until Cain could no longer control it. This is why *it is incredibly important to acknowledge things that make you angry.* Because anger can be a ticking time bomb and when it finally goes off it can be as big of a surprise to us as anyone else.



I also want you to know that *it is not wrong to feel anger.* Our feelings are what they are, and while they *DO need to be controlled* there is nothing wrong about feeling them. For every believer, we hope to mature in our faith and as we do what we feel will also change. But *Jesus makes it clear to us that anger is not a sin* in and of itself. We know this because Jesus never sinned and yet he got angry at times. In John 2:13-22 we see the story of Jesus clearing the temple. He yelled, he used a whip, and he overturned tables. I think he was pretty angry. In Matthew 12:34 Jesus said “You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” I don’t think Jesus said this with a soft and kind demeanor. I think he was angry. Anger is not the sin—what we do with it is. Why else would Paul say in Ephesians 4:26 “In your anger do not sin”? All of this to say nothing of all the times God is angry in the Old Testament. (Psalms 7:11)

Returning to Cain, the anger he felt was not wrong. But human anger is a tricky thing and will often lead to sin. Therefore, anger must be controlled. You must make a choice what you will do with your anger. Will you allow it to grow and fester? Or will you do something positive with it? Imagine for a moment that Cain instead of holding back his anger prayed to God and sought to make better choices that pleased God, how different this story could have been? With our anger, we usually respond in one or more ways.



1. We hold back. When we hold back we withdrawal instead of addressing the problem. We do this by removing ourselves from the situation. We leave the room, take a vacation, drop out of our church, stop talking to people we are angry with. Sometimes we hold back in the form of drinking, drugs, food or by plunging ourselves into television, video games, work and the alike. Hold back brings immediate relief but fails to address the real issue and leaves you to smolder and become bitter.
2. We deny that we are angry. Denial creates a very dangerous situation. When we turn inward and deny that we are angry this does not prevent us from the psychological and physiological effects of anger. This creates a pressure cooker in your life. It is only a matter of time before you explode and hurt yourself and others.
3. We also become passive aggressive. This means that instead of dealing with the issue that has made us angry we get angry about other things. For example, if my wife made me angry by not doing the laundry I don't say

anything but instead I don't take the garbage out to get even with her. Passive aggressive behavior comes in many forms this is just one example.

These issues have been negative but we can also address the anger in a positive way.

1. We can face the source of our anger. We can respectfully express how we are feeling and work to find a solution.
2. We can use the anger to make improvements in the situation that angered us. If your anger is about the state of the park in your community maybe you use your anger to motivate you to help to keep it clean or to work with others on developing a plan to pay someone to clean the park.

The real issue here is not whether you will or should feel anger, the question is what to do WHEN you get angry. God told Cain it is not about anger it is about the sin that is caused by your anger. So, we must master our anger. How do we master our anger?

Do What Is Right

In Genesis 4:6-7 God tells Cain to do what is right. If he does what is right then he would be accepted and his anger would not be an issue. Of course, Cain did not follow God's advice and allowed his anger to grow

do it right.

until it became the issue that destroyed him. It is likely that a considerable amount of time passed during the events of this story. We do not know how long Cain stewed but we know sometime passed and that he was over taken by his anger.

The real trouble here for Cain was that the real relief of his anger could only be found in himself. His poor choice to not honor God is what brought him to this place. *Cain's guilt* however only made him grow angrier. As his anger grew he began to see the situation differently. He rewrote the series of events to make himself the innocent victim. *Anger can cause our vision or memory of an event to change over time.* Each time we remember the event, our perspective changes a little more. Each time we grow a little more bitter.



Sometimes our anger is caused by guilt. Take Cain for example, he knew that offering God some fruit he had lying around was not a good offering. He knew that

God wanted his best. When Cain failed to do that he felt guilty and that added to his anger. *Guilt often leads to fear.* Fear of what will happen because of what I did wrong. As a result, we end up feeling guilt, fear, shame and anger. This world wind of emotions often can intensify our rage. *Overtime it causes our hearts to be hardened and will dull our relationship with God.* On the other hand, when we do the right thing and our conscience is clear it changes how we feel and react to anger.

One of the antidotes for anger is God-centeredness. We put God and his priorities at the center of our lives. God-centeredness is a lifestyle, not something we turn on and off as needed. When anger comes, especially for those who struggle with anger, your response to that anger will be different if God's priorities are first in your life. For two reasons: (1) because you will be angry about

the things that God is angry about and (2) because anger will not be so personal. If I am at the center of my own universe and someone cuts me off in traffic then it is a great personal offense. If God is at the center of my universe then I remember it not about me.

Parents this idea is very important to teach your kids. We have to teach them not to take everything personally, to remember it is about honoring God and not about us. They need to see you responding to your anger in this same way.

When we do the right things, it will change our outlook on the world and change what makes us angry. But at times we will still get angry and so we need to know how to manage anger. James and Paul give some great advice on the subject. James says...

Make Anger A Last Resort

In chapter 1 of his letter to the church James writes about trials that we face as believers. He tells us to “consider it as pure joy,...whenever you face trials of

many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.” (Jas. 1:2-3) James is making the point that life can be hard but it has a purpose. Therefore, “...be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry...” For some of us anger is a knee jerk reaction and we become angry very easily. Proverbs 15:18 tells us, “A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel.” We can be a person that is driven by our anger and therefore creates conflict and heartache for those in our lives or we can be slow to anger, patiently listening and seeking to understand. We need to “seek

THE LAST RESORT

first to understand then to be understood¹.” This will help us to make anger a last resort. It will help us to “...live at peace with everyone.” (Ro. 12:18)

Only “fools give full vent to their rage...” says King Solomon in Proverbs 29:11. It takes effort, to be sure, but we must make that effort. We must keep ourselves in check. But someone might say, “I can’t control my anger, it just happens.” Anger is controllable. God would not have commanded us in His Word to rid ourselves of anger if it were not possible². We should see that the Christian life calls us to live differently than the world. We must be people who are pushing back against the worldly ways of anger, hatred and bitterness and embrace love, patience and peace. This only happens when we are being actively transformed by God through our time in prayer, Bible study, love and servitude.



This is important in our homes. I found myself deeply challenged this week by this question. When you discipline your kids are you quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry? Children can

often be the perceived source of and receive the brunt of our anger. There can be a variety of reasons for this:

1. Sometimes we get angry with our kids because their misbehavior makes us look bad. This is especially true when their misbehavior happens in public. We feel threatened. We feel like others are looking at us and questioning our parenting ability.

¹ Bob Lowery, a New Testament professor at Lincoln Christian Seminary

² Ephesians 4:31, Colossians 3:8

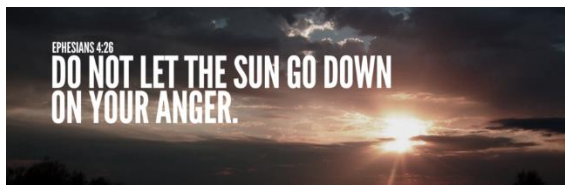
2. Kids require a lot of attention and sometimes it is exhausting. We become overwhelmed by their neediness and the result is anger.
3. I have read several articles lately on the effects of technology on parenting. Because we all have a consistent flow of information in the palm of our hands. We are constantly being pulled into a cyber world. We are spending less time with our kids and the quality of time is diminishing as well. When we are deeply invested in our phones or tablets or whatever, we see each attempt by our kids to interact with us as a disruption. They on the other hand are just wanting to know that they are loved and accepted. But because we see it as an interruption it causes us to be angry.
4. Many of us are very busy. We do not get to spend the time with our families that we desire. This creates a sense of guilt in our lives. This guilt can cause us to be angry.

In these cases we just need to slow down, listen and I mean really listen, don't be thinking about what you are going to say next, just listen. Then no matter what they say make anger your last resort.

But as we have already said, anger is an emotion and it is not wrong to experience this or any other emotion. But we must manage it, which means we must...

Deal With Anger Quickly

Paul writes to the church and addresses with them, in a practical way, what it looks like to live for Christ. Among his instructions he says, "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.” Paul is quoting Psalms 4:4 which says, “In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.” Here we see an added dimension of what Paul is trying to say. We are not to sin in our anger and that is possible because *we search our hearts*. More to the point *we allow God to search our hearts*. When we do, we won’t be able to stay angry. You should try it sometime. Pray for someone you are angry with and see if you can stay angry with them. I don’t believe you will be able.

Avoiding sin while we are angry means that *we need to stop, take a deep breath, pray* and then deal with our anger. When you do this, there is a good chance you won’t be angry anymore. That is the problem for some of us. We want to be angry. We want others to see our indignation, we want them to think that our anger is justified enough that being angry is the only option. We come to believe that the more angry we are the more people will think we are justified in our anger. But Paul also says that you should “not let the sun go down while you are still angry.” Then the devil will not be able to get a foothold in your life. You do not want the devil to have a foothold in your life. That foot hold gives Satan a place from which he can cause all kinds of hurt and pain in your life. Paul says this is why you deal with your anger quickly, because otherwise the devil will exploit you and your anger to cause sin and hurt in your life.

ANGRY?

Take a deep breath
before you speak,
because your mouth acts
quicker than your brain.



Our children are bombarded with music, television, media and friends that present *anger as a normal part of life*. They see bitterness and revenge as the normal response to anger in their

lives. With all of this going on outside the home, it is unmistakably important that we are showing our kids a better to deal with anger. Your example is where this begins. How do you deal with anger? What are you teaching your kids with your actions? How do you intend to do better in showing your kids a God honor response to anger?

Parents are you weary of the anger, bitterness, resentment, hatred, lying and all the alike in the world around you? You have an opportunity to change it by teaching your kids a better way!

Conclusion

I want you to see why all of this matter. James 1:20 tells us “for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” If our lives are filled with anger we are not moving toward God and in fact we are moving away from Him. As disciples, we always need to be growing toward God and so we must rid ourselves of anger!

But I know for some of you there is a road block to making this change in your life. *You wonder if forgiveness is possible*. Can I forgive? Can others forgive me? Can God forgive me for the way I have acted? Yes, He can and He will, He tells us so in Romans 5:8 “...God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God provided salvation through his son Jesus not because we all sat up and paid attention, but

rather while we were still sinning Jesus came to the rescue.
Therefore, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will
forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1
John 1:9)