

## I. Introduction

- A. You can't control what happens to you, but you can control what you do with what happens to you.
- B. Welcome to message two in a series called Can You Feel it? God's Wisdom on Human Emotion. God made us emotional people. You can blame Him for it.
- C. The Bible says,
  - 1. *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:"* Philippians 2:5, NIV.
- D. The next few verses say that Jesus started in heaven as God, and came to earth as the God-man. He humbled Himself to the point of death, even the death on a cross. And He never complained, He never wilted, He never panicked, He never sought revenge.
- E. Jesus had the most amazing attitude—if you knew Him, you would do anything to hang around Him.
- F. So the Bible says your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Have the same attitude. Have the same mind as Jesus.
- G. When I read that, a big voice inside me says, "You've got to be kidding! If you knew my mind and all the crud in there—if you really knew my Inner Mess—you would never tell me to have the same attitude as Jesus. It's impossible. You're setting the bar way too high; so high that I could never reach it."
- H. That's what one voice inside me says.
- I. But there's another voice in me too. Hopefully, usually, it's a bigger voice. It's the voice that has been instructed by the Bible—the voice that has been shaped by my worship of God, the voice that listens to the Holy Spirit.
- J. And that voice tells me, "God would never tell you to do something without giving the power to do it."
- K. God would never tell you to do something impossible. He loves you too much to ever send you on a wild goose chase. If He tells you to do something, He goes to work IN and THROUGH you to make it possible.
- L. So the Bible also says:
  - 1. *"For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey Him and the power to do what pleases Him."* Philippians 2:13, NLT
- M. Did you get that? When God gives you a command, He also gives you the desire, and when GOD gives you the desire, He'll give you the power.
- N. So, when God says, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus," He will also give you the power to do it.
- O. So, when we talk about EMOTIONS, which is our topic and especially today, when we talk about ANGER and BITTERNESS—if you are saved, if you have Jesus living in you, if you have come to terms with His sacrifice on the Cross for you, and put your faith in Him, then I want you to know something, and I want you to believe something:
  - 1. Know: your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.
  - 2. Believe: your attitude CAN be the same as that of Christ Jesus.
- P. Now let's get into our key Bible verse for today:
  - 1. *"Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil."* Ephesians 4:26-27, NKJV
- Q. Let's talk about anger and its toxic offspring, bitterness.

## II. Anger and Bitterness

- A. This Bible verse has four command words, four imperatives:
  - 1. Be angry—that's a positive command.
  - 2. Do not sin—that's a negative command, a prohibition.
  - 3. Do not let the sun go down—another prohibition.
  - 4. Neither gives place to the devil—another prohibition.
- B. The first lesson that jumps off the page at me is that God, in His word, actually tells me to be angry. There is a time for anger—healthy, holy, righteous anger.
- C. At its fundamental level, anger is a good thing. Many of us were trained that anger is a bad thing. We were never given permission to feel or express anger. We were never given instruction on how to speak and act when we are angry. You might have even been punished or ridiculed for your anger, so you learned to keep it all inside.
- D. And some Christians make anger even more complicated. Maybe you were taught that God does not like angry little boys or little girls. So in your mind, anger is not only wrong from mom and dad's perspective, it's also wrong from God's perspective.
- E. But the Bible says, be angry. That means that there is a way to be angry without sinning. That is what we are after today. So let's lay out some basic truths about anger.
- F. Moms and dads, you need to create a very safe space for your kids to express their anger, and not get punished for it. Yes, proper expressions, appropriate expressions, but if you don't let them show their anger now, they're going to bottle it up, and then what? One day—BOOM!
- G. So what's so good about anger?

## III. Positive Anger

- A. Anger is your inner energy that responds to woundedness, unfairness, and abuse.
- B. God gave you anger as an early warning system that someone is invading your boundaries or the boundaries of someone who needs your protection.
- C. The English word integrity comes from the Latin word integer. The Latin word integer means untouched, untainted, unpenetrated, having intact walls, intact boundaries, being whole.
- D. It's like your life is a city. A lot of stuff goes on inside the city. To protect the city, you have a wall. Nothing gets in or out of your life without passing through the wall. God designed you to be lord of the manor—to rule your own heart, your own life, under His Lordship. So you are like a city, with walls. And whenever the walls are attacked, the first thing you'll feel is ANGER.

- E. Why anger? Because emotions are motivators, and God wants to motivate you. Anger motivates you to protect legitimate boundaries in legitimate ways.
  - 1. *“Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.”* Proverbs 25:28, NKJV
- F. The purpose of anger is to motivate you to protect legitimate boundaries in legitimate ways.
- G. This is a great verse about boundaries. God wants you to rule over your own spirit, over the walls of your own city. And no one else should interfere. That’s why every time someone threatens your boundaries your soul will automatically feel anger.
  - 1. Whenever someone tries to control you.
  - 2. Whenever someone tries to manipulate you.
  - 3. Whenever someone tries to use you or abuse you or exploit you.
  - 4. Whenever someone tries to wound you.
  - 5. Whenever someone tries to smother you.
  - 6. Whenever someone doubts your abilities, character, or worth.
- H. SIN is an attack on the walls of your city. Or on the walls of someone you need to protect. Anger is the feeling you get when you’re violated.
- I. INTEGRITY is the ability to withstand the attack, so that when the smoke clears, your inner life remains noble, strong, untouched. Your boundaries remain intact.
- J. ANGER is the radar that warns you are being attacked, and motivates you to take appropriate actions. The purpose of anger is to motivate you to protect legitimate boundaries in legitimate ways.
- K. That’s why anger is a GOOD THING. It’s a gift from God. Without anger, there’d be no justice in the world and no justice in the universe. That’s its holy, righteous purpose.
- L. When you deny your anger, you are in essence standing by and letting someone else trample territory that is rightly yours.
  - 1. Anyone here ever deny their anger? I’m a master at it. If you don’t have enough anger in your life, work at a church. Somebody’s mad at you all the time and it’s a two way street, because you have somebody to be mad at all the time.
  - 2. BUT, and this is what makes church life weird, it’s seen as super un-Jesus-like to actually show your anger. You have to be Ned Flanders. You have to be sweet, and nice, and cheery or else you’re a bad Christian and a terrible pastor.
  - 3. And you want to know what makes this worse?
  - 4. I’m Italian.
- M. And when you enforce your own boundaries, people often take that personally.
- N. Let me ask you: are you angry today? What are you angry about? What makes your temper flare up? That anger is like a gigantic neon sign. It’s pointing to some perceived attack against your sacred, God-given self.
- O. And sooner or later you have to deal with it because if you DON’T deal with it, you cross over from healthy anger into unhealthy bitterness—you have Inner Mess anger.

#### IV. Bitterness

- A. Listen to these two Bible verses:
  - 1. *“Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go,”* Proverbs 22:24, NKJV
  - 2. *“Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman.”* Proverbs 21:19, NKJV
- B. But wait a minute, the Bible says it’s okay to be angry, but here it says to stay away from angry people. What’s that about?
- C. Simple. Some people are angry all the time. This is sick. This is dangerous. This is sin.
- D. This is confusing, because they don’t SEEM angry all the time. They can hang out, have fun, laugh, be nice people, but then something happens, and their anger boils over super-fast. Why?
- E. Because they did not obey the second command in Ephesians 4:26, and that resulted in the danger of Ephesians 5:27.
- F. Let me explain.
- G. When you have a wound, an attack on your walls, you feel anger. That anger should motivate you to protect your integrity. Defend your walls. I’m going to talk about how to do that next, but your anger should motivate you to defend your walls.
- H. But sometimes that doesn’t happen, for a lot of reasons.
  - 1. Maybe the person who hurt you is really strong, or powerful, or persuasive.
  - 2. Maybe there was danger of physical or emotional harm.
  - 3. Maybe you didn’t understand how you were being used or exploited.
  - 4. Maybe you weren’t even consciously aware of how you were being hurt over and over again—you didn’t get it.
- I. In other words, MAYBE YOUR ANGER WAS NEVER RESOLVED. There is a word for this—a word for unresolved anger: BITTERNESS.
- J. A bitter person is an always-angry person.
- K. You never flipped the off-switch on your anger. Instead of having anger as an occasional emotion, you have anger as a settled way of life. That’s the problem.
- L. So our key verse says, *be angry, and do not sin*. And it specifies how not to let your holy anger cross over into unholy anger: **DO NOT LET THE SUN GO DOWN ON (literally) THE CAUSE OF YOUR ANGER.**
- M. Don’t let the sun go down. In other words, resolve your anger. Resolve the relationship. Resolve the situation. Do something. Let your anger motivate action because if it doesn’t, you’re going to become a bitter person.
- N. Do you get this? There’s a huge difference between an angry person and a person who gets angry.
- O. When you are an angry person, who stores up anger, and you don’t deal with the situation, and you don’t flip the off switch—then what happens? Look at Eph 5:27:
  - 1. *“And do not give place [turf] to the devil.”*
- P. What does that mean?

- Q. It means that unresolved anger lets the devil and his evil mess with you. I said last week that emotional problems are spiritual problems and spiritual problems are emotional problems. They go together. (Exception: medical conditions, emotional and mental illness—you can get help thru medication and therapy, and you should).
- R. Anger isn't just emotional, it's spiritual. It gives a foothold to the devil to mess with your mind, your emotions, your relationships, your marriage, your family, your money, your sexuality, and your everything.
- S. Going back to the city wall analogy—BITTERNESS opens the city to harmful forces, even as it shuts you down to real love. People can't get close to you, because you're bitter and won't let them.
- T. No wonder the Bible says,
  1. *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior."* Ephesians 4:31, NLT
- U. Before I talk about how to deal with anger, I want to give you ten qualities of unresolved anger, bitterness, and hatred:
- V. Unresolved Anger—Top Ten Qualities
- A. It is crooked. This means the other person isn't really sure what's happening. The Bible warns against people *"Whose ways are crooked, and who are devious in their paths;"* Proverbs 2:15, NKJV
  - B. It is toxic. This means your anger tends to wreck relationships rather than heal relationships. You're injecting a poison into the room, the team, the family, the workplace, the classroom, the dorm, the church, the small group. Some people are just nasty. *"A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends."* Proverbs 16:28, NKJV
  - C. It is abusive. Bitterness violates boundaries: emotional boundaries, physical boundaries. *"The violence of the wicked will destroy them, because they refuse to do justice."* Proverbs 21:7, NKJV—Every life is sacred, but you don't believe it. You exploit life. You use life.
  - D. It is simmering. Unresolved anger stews in your soul. It comes out in little jabs, little criticisms, little sarcasms, and little facial expressions. But it never comes out cleanly, directly, and lovingly. Hebrews 12:15 warns that a root of bitterness in just one person will mess up many people.
  - E. It is disproportionate. This means that when your child spills his milk, you explode with ALL of your anger for ALL of your hurts for ALL of your life.
  - F. It is misplaced. You're angry at your dad, and you take it out on your kids.
  - G. It is depressing. Like a leak in your gas tank, unresolved shadow anger is a leak in your energy and life. The longer you take to resolve your anger, the more that unresolved anger, which you have shoved into your shadow, will eat away at your happiness.
  - H. It is victimy. This means that you constantly blame others for the mess in your life. *"The lazy man says, 'There is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets!'"* Proverbs 22:13, NKJV
  - I. It is explosive. This is what makes you so scary. Your family and friends can never tell when you'll blow. You can call it rage, or a short temper, or outrage, or venting—it's all the same. It's unresolved anger, and it messes you up with God.
  - J. So here are some pointers on resolving your anger.
- VI. How to Resolve Your Anger
- A. **STEP ONE: CLARIFY WHO HURT YOU.**
    1. Are you really mad because your kid spilled your milk, or because you never measured up to your mother's expectations. Who really messed with you? Get clear on that.
  - B. **STEP TWO: DECIDE IF THE RELATIONSHIP IS WORTH PRESERVING.**
    1. If someone is always hurting you, **DISTANCE YOURSELF.**
    2. Now this is tricky in a marriage. If there's a genuine threat or danger, you need to get yourself and your kids out of there really fast. You need to protect yourself and get legal help. But if it's just that you married someone who's prickly, then you have to salvage the relationship. Decide if the relationship is worth preserving.
    3. And listen; if you are married, there is a very high threshold here. Meaning you need to do everything you can to make your marriage work, **ESPECIALLY IF YOU HAVE KIDS.** Make it work. Forgive, forbear, forget—let stuff go. Even if you're mad, preserve the relationship.
    4. But sometimes, it isn't worth preserving a relationship—then create the distance you need to feel safe. You don't need to confront the person, necessarily. Move on with your life. Change jobs if you can. Sometimes you have to get tough, like Jesus when He chased the religious fakes out of the Temple. It was more important to preserve His relationship with God, than His relationship with them. Get counseling if the wound is deep, but don't give that person one more inch of territory within the walls of your heart.
      - a) Move on—I'll give you a really cool tip in a minute.
    5. But if the relationship is worth preserving and if a person keeps hurting you in the same way over and over...
  - C. **STEP THREE: TALK IT OVER.**
    1. Maybe the person doesn't get it. Help them get it. Don't just stuff your anger. Talk it over.
    2. This doesn't mean that you have to set up a meeting over every nit-picking little offense. Nope, you have to learn to let stuff go. Sometimes, time is a great healer.
    3. But where there is a pattern, an ongoing pattern, repeated—over and over—and someone is setting off your anger radar, and genuinely disrespecting your boundaries, talk it over.
      - a) Proverbs 19:25 *"Rebuke one who has understanding, and he will discern knowledge."*
      - b) Proverbs 27:5 *"Open rebuke is better than secret love."*
      - c) Proverbs 27:6 *"Faithful are the wounds of a friend."*
    4. Don't let the sun go down on your wrath.
    5. And when you talk it over, do it in a way that preserves your relationship as much as possible. If you're going to be in a long term relationship, you have to learn how to talk about stuff.

6. This is hard, especially if you're a guy, and especially if you're a guy who doesn't talk a lot. The cool thing is that you can talk stuff thru in a "guy way." It sounds like this:
    - a) YOU: "Hey, when you said I was an idiot, you were joking right, because if you weren't joking we're going to have some problems."
    - b) HIM: "Yeah, I was joking."
    - c) YOU: "Thought so. When are we going fishing?"
  7. Talk stuff over. I suspect this might be a much longer conversation among women.
- D. STEP FOUR: VENT TO GOD
1. Use this step when it doesn't make sense to talk to the other person, or when you know that they just won't get it.
  2. This may sound weird, but it's biblical.
    - a) Psalm 56:7 *"Are you gonna let them get away with it, God? In your anger cast them down, O God."*
    - b) Psalm 59:5 *"Awake to punish all the nations; Do not be merciful to any wicked people who violate boundaries... scatter them by Your power and bring them down... consume them in wrath, consume them..."*
    - c) Psalm 64, 70, 74...
  3. These are called Imprecatory Psalms—Cursing Psalms. I believe God gave us these Psalms to teach us how to deal with anger. Dear God, he prays, please blast these people to hell, in Christian love.
  4. The psalmist says who he's mad at; he states what they did; he says how he feels; he affirms how he feels; he asks God to even the score.
  5. THIS IS ALL THE REVENGE GOD ALLOWS—turns the people who hurt you over to God.
  6. Vent to God. He can handle it. You won't wreck His day. And, hey, there's really good news:
    - a) *"For it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord."* Romans 12:19, NKJV
  7. God will take care of the person who hurt you.
  8. You take care of your life before him.
- E. STEP FIVE: PRAY, MEDITATE, AND GROW.
1. Grow in grace, and grace will grow in you. Grow in Christ, and Christ's power will grow in you. Most of our unhealthy anger is just us being immature. Grow up.

## VII. Conclusion

- A. When I do church, I get into a zone. I see stuff. I want every church service to be excellent, and really well done. Not perfect, I'm not that perfectionistic, but really well done. So I get into this zone. Every weekend is huge to me. I know what's at stake—peoples' lives, peoples' eternities, and families. We come to church to encounter God and submit to His Word. It's huge to me.
- B. And early in my ministry, I caught myself getting mad over mistakes that people in my church were making. I expect people who get paid to do their job to do it well. And, this goes way back, I have high standards, and can't stand to work w/people that can't get stuff done.
- C. One Sunday, in a different church, in Chicago, I pulled aside a guy who had responsibilities at church, and was failing, and I let him have it. Factually, I was right. But my timing was wrong and my attitude was wrong. I did NOT display the attitude of Christ Jesus. Yes, he needed to be told off, but not in that time, that place, or that way.
- D. And God smacked me upside the head with a Bible verse. Immediately, even while I was chewing out this guy, this verse came to mind, and I use it all the time:
  1. *"For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."* James 1:20, NASB
- E. Here I was in church, trying to achieve the righteousness of God. But God told me I couldn't do that by my unhealthy anger. I needed holy anger, Godly anger, Righteous anger. You do also.
- F. The Bible says,
  1. *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:"* Philippians 2:5, NIV
- G. Yeah. Be angry. And do not sin. God will help you. But you have to make the choice, and you have to trust Him.