

Seven Deadly Sins: Wrath

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[0 : 00] If you've been with us the last couple weeks, you may remember that we are in a sermon series called The Seven Deadly Sins. And today we'll be discussing Raph.

I was in the car with my family on the way here. And one of my sons asked me, Dad, are you preaching today? I said, yeah. He said, what are you preaching on? And I said, anger. And he said, oh, that'll be easy. Let me divert your attention a little bit from me to the bulletin.

If you look at the cover there, it's an odd choice for cover art for a church worship bulletin. It's called Prometheus Bound.

You can see it here on your bulletin and also on this screen here. The painting depicts the punishment inflicted on Prometheus by the god Zeus.

[1 : 05] Prometheus had stolen fire from the gods and gave it to humanity. That made Zeus angry. So in his wrath, he punishes Prometheus to eternal torment by having him chained to this rock there.

And every day, an eagle would feed on his liver with it growing back every night to be fed on again the next day, day after day into eternity.

I don't know if you can see Prometheus' left eye there. It's locked on the eagle. Prometheus is fully aware of what is going on. Look at his fist, his writhing legs, his tousled hair.

It shows the anger, the agony he's experiencing, being an object of anger. Now, the liver is a curious choice, isn't it?

Like, I might have chosen, if I was Zeus, like intestines, right? That was a good ending in Braveheart. Or even better, like the still beating heart of Prometheus, like in Indiana Jones in the Temple of Doom, right?

[2 : 14] But Zeus chooses the liver. And I think the Greeks provide us here with some really good insight into wrath.

The Greeks believed the liver to be the seat of a person's emotions. And when we experience the anger of another person, being the object of that anger, can really mangle our emotions, right? We know that when we experience someone else's anger, it fires up our limbic system. And we experience all those emotions associated with fight or flight.

We experience fear, anger, distress, anxiety. For those of us who have experienced extreme prolonged anger from someone, the emotional damage may feel permanent, as if we've been chained to a rock.

And we're powerless to escape. And we feel emotionally eviscerated. Anger deployed to those around us, it disrupts and destroys relationships, communities, families, nations.

[3 : 30] It feels like today we're just a nation of people walking around with our intestines and entrails, hanging out, being angry at one another, right? And this is why, because it's such a disruption to community, this is why anger was included in the list of deadly sins.

Now, the list was originally eight. There was eight thoughts, and they were compiled by a man named Evagrius. Evagrius was a monk that lived in the last half of the fourth century.

And he identified eight thoughts which he felt had the power, if they were left unchecked, can disrupt the life of a monastic community.

A couple centuries later, this list would be reduced from eight to seven by Pope Gregory the Great. And over time, the list would become known as the seven deadly sins.

And today we're on our third of these vices, having already looked at pride and gluttony. Tommy mentioned last week that the seven deadly sins are also known as capital vices.

[4 : 40] And that's probably a better description than deadly sins. Because capital means head. These sins are seen as like head, headwaters, from which flow all kinds of other sins.

The list was intended to be a diagnostic tool, to be used in a monastic community. And so this morning we're going to use it as such. This is a little different than what we normally do, but I'm going to ask you to close your eyes.

We're going to use this as a diagnostic tool. I'd like you to try and remember the last time you were really angry. And I'd like you to be clinical about it.

In other words, don't judge yourself. Be objective about it. Now, what were you feeling at the time? You were angry. Not just the anger. Was there anything else going on? How did you react?

[5 : 46] Was it an outburst? Did you hold it in? Were you afraid? Father, we ask that you would use this sermon, this word from Jonah, that you would use our previous experiences to heal us.

Lord, we ask you would help us to shed our anger. We ask that you'd help us to see it clearly and to be able to name it. We ask this not just for our own good, but for the good of our church, for the good of our families, for the good of our city.

Most of all, for your glory. We would desire that people would see your love in us. We would desire that our families, our housemates, our neighbors can see your love.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. All right, this morning we're going to look at three things.

We're going to look at anger as antecedent, anger as anatomy, and anger as antidote. I say antecedent, obviously, because it begins with the letter A.

[7 : 23] We're going to look at anger as source. Anger as source, anger as anatomy, and anger as antidote. But before we do that, it helps us to acknowledge the complexity of this issue.

Anger is an emotion that is common to every person. And because it's a complex emotion, and because people have very different temperaments, anger looks very different from person to person.

It's not always slamming doors and shouting. It can be withdrawing from people. Or it can be stewing in critical thoughts towards someone or something.

It could be shutting people out and giving them the silent treatment. It could be an over-the-top, forced politeness. Did I use a southern accent there?

I'm so sorry. It can be the cool, sarcastic, cutting remark. It can be the slow-building resentment as one piles up grievances in one's mind.

[8 : 33] Sometimes someone is angry but doesn't even realize it. And there's other emotions that are going on, like tension, depression, melancholy, anxiety, defensiveness.

And from our scripture passages today, we learn how complex this issue is, right? Did you hear in Ephesians 4, Paul writes, rid yourselves of anger. But five verses before that, he says, be angry. So don't be angry and be angry. So I would say that qualifies as a complexity. We know that God is love. That's very clear.

The Bible is so explicit. God is love. And yet we see God to have anger or wrath. We know that Jesus, who is the perfect representation of the love of God, and he got angry too, didn't he?

I mean, you may remember him at one time having gone into the temple, a place of worship, and there's money changers there. He flips the tables, drives them out, accuses them of having turned the temple of God into a den of robbers.

[9 : 44] And even today, you know, we were supposed to read Psalm 37. And I guess I put a one in front of the 37.

So Psalm 137 is what we read today. And we just read, blessed is he who dashes your infants against the rocks. The anger is all over the Bible. The Psalms are full of anger.

And so it's definitely complex and something to discuss and sort through. You know, in the book of John, we see a kind of anger that we rarely experience.

One translation, this is in the book of John, chapter 11, verse 38. It reads that Jesus was deeply moved. Another translation says that anger welled up within Jesus.

You know the best translation? Maybe you've heard this. I don't know. It says Jesus snorted like a horse. That's how angry. Have you ever snorted like a horse? Like you were so angry?

[10 : 49] So even Jesus experienced extreme indignation. All right. So there seems to be a bad anger and a good anger.

We can agree on that. Or righteous anger and sinful anger. So let's reduce anger to its simplest definition. Cornelius Plantinga wrote, Anger is a strong feeling of displeasure combined with a posture of antagonism.

Plantinga then elaborates, The angry person emotionally opposes someone or something. Anger rarely floats free. It flares against this person or that.

Against these states of affairs or those. Or if anger settles into chronic irritability, It sets up against anything and everything. Whether it burns hot or just simmers and stinks, Anger always sets itself against what causes its displeasure.

Anger is passionate against this. That's great, isn't it? Anger is passionate against this. So it begs the question, Why do we become passionately against something or someone?

[12 : 14] And it's because we are loving creatures. We are desiring creatures. We love lots of things and stuff.

Pastor Tim Keller said, Anger is the result of love. See, it's the source of anger. It's love. The antecedent is love.

It is energy for defense of something you love when it is threatened. So if you love something, sort of, Then you sort of get angry when that thing is threatened. Now if you love something not at all, Then you don't mind it being threatened.

You don't get angry. All right? This is why, like, in marriage counseling, Counselors get alarmed when couples don't fight at all. Because it communicates to the counselor, There's not a love there. There's not a passion. They're not, like, deeply invested. On the other hand, if you love something a lot, You will get very angry, right? When that thing is threatened.

[13 : 16] And if you place all your love and identity and self-worth In a thing or a person, And that is threatened, Then you flip the lid.

You get very, very angry. Well, we call that idolatry. So now let's think back to that thing I asked you to think about, right? When you got angry, perhaps you need to close your eyes again.

Now, when you got angry, What was being threatened at that moment? What was being threatened That caused your passionate againstness?

And you know if it's a wrong anger. It most likely was. What were you trying to protect that you love?

That you perhaps put too much love into? This is idolatry, right? And that's the kind of anger we're trying to identify this morning. So let's dissect anger's anatomy. We've looked at its source, Which is, ironically, love.

[14 : 25] Now let's look at the anatomy. Of anger. We're going to see four features of anger By looking at the two principal actors in this book of Jonah. God and Jonah. Both of whom are angry.

They're both angry. And the four features we're going to see of anger Are pace, pleasure, perspective, and pride.

Okay? So the first feature we'll look at is pace. Good anger, I will suggest, Moves slowly. Almost glacially. Godly anger Attempts to change the conditions that give rise To anger.

Now anger towards the Assyrian Empire Would certainly be justified. Both by God And by Jonah. The Assyrians Wrote the first chapter On the world history of cruelty.

They are the worst. A hundred years before Jonah Assyria had a king named Asher Nazarpal II. And he boasted, this has been recorded, Their men, young and old, I took prisoners.

[15 : 33] Of some I cut off their feet and hands. Of others I cut off the ears, noses, and lips. Of the young men's ears I made a heap. Of the old men's heads I made a minaret.

I exposed their heads as a trophy in front of their city. The male children and the female children I burned in flames. The city I destroyed and consumed with fire.

Worthy of anger. And yet God relents. God relents because he has moved slowly.

And he has slowly changed the conditions of his anger. Bringing about the repentance of a whole city. We see this kind of anger modeled in the life of Martin Luther King Jr.

Now it's been debated since the very beginning of this list of seven or eight deadly sins. Is anger something we should rid ourselves completely of? Or is it possible to have a righteous indignation?

[16 : 37] Thank God Martin Luther King Jr. got angry. It's surprising though, like the angriest he's ever been. Like his testimony. When he was 14, he won a speech competition in Dublin, Georgia.

After the event, he and his teacher boarded a late night bus back to Atlanta. And during a brief stop in a small town, a handful of white passengers boarded the bus.

And the white bus driver shot a look at King and Mrs. Bradley, his teacher, and told them to get up out of their seats. And King didn't want to do it. And Mrs. Bradley had to persuade him. But because they hesitated, the driver spewed profanities at them, calling them black sons of bitches.

And made it clear that he was in no mood for insubordinate Negrims. Mr. King, Dr. King, the young Dr. King, did not want at all to get out of his seat.

But he did. And they had to stand for the 90-minute drive back to Atlanta. Now, during his life, Dr. King would experience death threats, bomb blasts, a stabbing, incarceration.

[17 : 47] But it's this moment that he says it was the angriest he had ever been in his life. Columbia Business School professor Hitenjo Wadhwa wrote about Dr. King's leadership.

Great leaders often have a strong capacity to experience anger. It wakes them up. It makes them pay attention to what is wrong in their environment or in themselves.

Without anger, they would not have the awareness or the drive to fix what is wrong. Now, so it can exist. We've seen it exist. It's rare. I don't know how often I've really experienced it in its purest form. But there is a slow, godly anger that Dr. King modeled. And that God demonstrates in the book of Jonah. But Jonah's anger was completely different. He lashed out and he vented.

In chapter 2, he praised God for being merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in love. But here in chapter 4, he vents at God and criticizes him for those very things.

[18 : 50] And accuses them of those things of being a weakness of God's. He throws those things back in his face. That's the pace of godly and ungodly anger.

Slow versus venting. So let's look at Jonah's inability to relent. He has a hard time relenting because his anger, it brings him pleasure.

That's what I would suggest. His anger brings him pleasure. I don't know if that's an emotion that came to mind when you're looking back at this last experience of anger.

And I've never really thought of it too much in my own life. Until it was pointed out to me, rather painfully. There was a moment when one of my sons was not listening and I was trying to communicate with them and my wife.

And it was very frustrating. I just lashed out at him twice and then sent him to his room. You know, I felt justified, of course.

[19 : 53] So I went down and he was hiding under his blanket. And I convinced him to come out from under his blanket. And we talked about it.

And this particular son of mine gets very articulate when he's hurt and angry. And he said, Dad, it's as if you were enjoying it when you yelled at me.

No, son, I did not enjoy that. It hurts me to be angry. It hurts me to lash out at you to make you feel like this. And we talked through it and I apologized. I made no excuses for my anger.

But I did think about it for the next 24 and 48 hours. And I had to admit, even with the persons that I love most in this world, it gives me pleasure to get angry at them.

And unless we're aware, this is true of all of us, unless we're aware that pleasure can be addictive, to release that anger feels good, right? To make that sarcastic comment, to see it cut like a knife feels great.

[21 : 01] Anger becomes a thrill-seeking activity. Dopamine reward receptors in the brain. And we feel, you know, pleasure from the dopamine.

And we seek those same experiences as we would, like gambling, right? Or extreme sports, or even drugs like cocaine, methamphetamines. So we get addicted and can't let go of our anger.

And nor could Jonah. It pleased him so much to be angry that he would not relent. And so he went outside the city, sat up on a hill, and just waited. He waited for the off chance that God would change his mind again and blast the city.

All 120,000 people of him. The next feature to notice about anger is a warped perspective.

Jonah, while he's up there, he's hot. He has a bald head. And so God causes a plant to grow to shade his head.

[22 : 08] And he feels great. He's pretty happy about it. And the next day, God summons a worm, attacks the root of the plant, and the plant dies. And he's angry again.

He feels so passionately for this thing that he loved, a plant, and yet wished the destruction of 120,000 people. And God points this out in the very last verse.

Can we have it up here? He said, yeah, right before that. Oh, that's in Matthew. That's all right. That's all right. He says, should I not have mercy on these 120,000 people and the cattle?

Right? I feel like God's being sarcastic to make a comment. Like, I've even spared the cattle, and yet you're like, you know, sad for this plant. Godly anger is to be directed at sin and injustice. And we're called to love our neighbor, which means our anger is to be directed at something abstract. It's kind of hard. Sin, injustice, but not people.

[23 : 17] Jesus makes it very clear in the passage that we read that when we direct our sin at somebody, it's the equivalent of murder, murdering them in our hearts. And that's breaking one of the Ten Commandments.

For God has made man in his own image. To hate a person is to hate God himself and to transgress against the image that God has set up.

Jonah's anger is targeted at a people because he didn't love God and honor his character and his person most of all. One last feature of anger to look at is pride.

Ultimately, Jonah wanted to be right. And Evagrius, when he set up this list of eight deadly thoughts, he noted how these thoughts can come in pairs.

They kind of team up to take us down. And I think pride and anger happen all the time together.

Right? Because we don't want to admit we're angry.

[24 : 25] We want to use other words to describe that we're angry. Right? Like, I'm not angry. I am just being, I'm feeling a little defensive. Okay? Or I'm not angry. I'm just a little irritated.

No, I'm just frustrated. I'm just annoyed. But I'm not angry. No, all of those things are anger. All of those things are to be rooted out.

All of those things are sin. And we sometimes try and cover up our anger with niceness. Right? It's really for our pride because we don't want to look like we're angry.

Right? We just want to get the things done that anger gets done without looking angry. Now, I have confessed this to you before. One of my besetting sins is anger towards referees.

I felt like it was getting better until I was asked to substitute coach one of my kids' soccer games.

And so I didn't realize what was going on until afterwards.

[25 : 30] But I don't know if you've seen European soccer. Most of the coaches wear really nice suits and scarves and stuff like that. And so I thought, I'm going to get what I want by dressing like a European soccer coach.

The ref is going to listen to me. And so before the game starts, I go out to the center circle. The two coaches come out. And I introduce myself very politely.

And she does too. My name is Angela. Like, well, good to meet you, Angela. And so all during the game, you know, it's like a little league game. So you don't hear much noise.

But what you do here is this, like, coach on the other side of the field saying, Angela! Angela, that was not the right call! You know, like, I've been angry before, but I've cleaned up my acts.

But really, I'm just being angry. I'm just covering it up with this obscene niceness, which is obvious.

And I have to admit, like, I do it because, like, some people have learned that I'm a pastor.

[26 : 37] So, so I don't want them to think the pastor's angry, but that pastor's being so kind he's referring to the referee by your first name. How polite. Another kid had a game right after that.

And I just couldn't take it anymore. Angela! Right? And that's when the anger comes out. And I, you know, I learned her name in order to get her attention. Refs don't turn their heads at the sound of, Ref!

Ref! Hey, Blue! They turned it at their names. And that's why I learned her name. It was all to cover my anger. It was all because I was ashamed of my anger. Right?

So because of my pride, I justify my anger with other terms. I covered up niceness. Yeah. By the way, I've learned the hard way to take off my collar on the way home from church.

Learned the hard way. Let's talk about... So we've looked at the anatomy, the source of anger, which is love.

[27 : 42] Right? We've... By the way, what was I defending there as coach? What do you think? What was I defending? I wanted to win. I wanted my sons to win because I idolatry...

I idolatry... I make idols out of my children. Right? I want their success to be my success. And so that's what I'm defending. It's the love of...

The misplaced love of the wrong thing. Right? Anyway, so we've looked at the source of anger.

We've looked at the anatomy of anger. We've looked at pleasure, pride, pace, perspective.

And the last thing I want to talk about is the antidote. The antidote to anger. Now, if you do get angry, you should know that your brain gets hotter than it normally gets.

And for that reason, my counselor told me, you know, put like something cold on your head when you get angry. This is a very simple suggestion. All right? It's not super deep, but it might, you know, save some like grief in your home.

[28 : 47] Right? My kids will walk through the kitchen and there's like ice sitting on my head. They just keep walking. They know what's going on. But it works.

It cools down your head and you can get a fresh perspective. The second antidote is to name it, to admit it, to confess. Confess this to be anger.

Whatever it is, annoyance, frustration, name it. Your anger doesn't have to have the last word. God wants the last word. Don't view anger as a chance for self-improvement.

View it as a chance to need him. God is interested in decreasing your temperature, but he's more interested in increasing your dependence.

His ultimate goal for his people is to have them fully and utterly dependent on him. So name it and confess it to him and ask him for help.

[29 : 46] A third thing I'd recommend as an antidote for anger is keeping a journal. I did this a few years ago when I was in the throes of culture shock. I was probably the angriest I've ever been.

My counselor said, actually no, it was a friend, said, why don't you keep an anger journal? So I would write down the times I got angry and I would write down all the circumstances around that.

What was going on before? What was going on after?

How did I deal with it? Did I get a lot of sleep the night before? We can often undermine our efforts to stay not angry by just not taking care of ourselves.

What was I trying to defend? What was really hurting? Was I afraid of something? Anyway, if you chart that over time, you put it away, you come back to it a week later and you break it out again and you look at it and what's more helpful is to do that with somebody else and for this reason I would highly recommend being in a triad.

Our triads are designed to be places where we can hear God speak to us. What is God really trying to tell us? So if you're in a triad and you're dealing with anger, keep a journal, bring it to the triad and see what they say.

[30 : 54] See what they say. Maybe the Holy Spirit is going to speak through the journal and your friends and your triad to speak truth to you, to bring healing. So, an anger journal.

There's a fourth thing I'd recommend. There's a book called the Anger Workbook. It's a really thorough way to work through problems of anger that you may be having. You can find that online. The Anger Workbook.

And the last thing I would recommend is worship. Worship. Worship is the antonym, the antithesis of sinful anger.

Right? Loving God is the opposite of loving something else disorderly. If anger is a defense of that which we love and if we wish to be rid of our anger, then our task becomes to have our loves reordered.

Our loves are reordered when we are regularly, regularly coming to him in a posture of worship and prayer. Regularly keeping God's love in Jesus Christ at the center of our vision.

[32 : 03] So this requires a rhythm of prayer and worship. Morning. Evening. Weekly coming together with God's people. God's anger is motivated by his love for you.

God's love, God's anger is motivated by his love for you. So keep his love and his anger in view. And so he pours out his anger not on us.

You keep it in your vision that he pours out his anger on his two biggest enemies. Your two biggest enemies. The first, he hates our sin. It's damaged us.

It's damaged our relationship with him. It's damaged our relationships with another. Sin has damaged the earth. It's damaged it. And so God took care of it by his son Jesus taking on our sin and the punishment it deserved when he died on the cross.

If you belong to God, there's no wrath left for you. None. It was all taken care of. When I do membership interviews, I ask people, what does God think of you?

[33 : 19] How does he feel about you? Like, if you can imagine his face right now as he's looking at you, what would he be expressing? And I would say more than 50% of the time, people tell me, God's disappointed in me.

God's let down. He wishes I was trying harder. Those are all different ways of expressing anger. We talked about this, right?

Annoyance, frustration, disappointment, anger. God has no anger for you. It was all taken care of on the cross. Right? 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 21.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God.

So he looks on you and he, every time he looks on you, he sees the son and daughter that he completely delights in. Nothing but a big smile is on his face when he looks at you.

[34 : 23] All right? All that anger was taken care of on the cross. He hates the sin. It was poured out on the cross. That's how much God loves you. And because he loves us, he pours out his anger on our other enemy, and that's death.

Remember Jesus snorting like a horse? It's because his friend Lazarus had died. And even though he knew he would bring Lazarus back from the dead, Lazarus was just going to die again. He hated death.

And he hates it still. He knows us who have lost our fathers, who have lost our mothers, who have lost our siblings, who have lost our friends, who have lost our children to death.

He knows how we grieve. He sees our tears. that makes him furious. So God took care of it.

He took care of it. In dying, Jesus breaks the power of sin. In rising again, he conquers death. That we might have life. And that we, along with all of our loved ones who are in Christ, might rise again and live with him in perfect, harmonious fellowship, mutual love, free of anger, for the rest of our days.

[35 : 44] Let's have that be what we're thinking of when we come forward to the table. No wrath left. God's taking care of our enemies. He fights for us.

Both sin and death. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.