

Addicted to Anger

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[0 : 00] Hi friends, for those who don't know me, my name is Matt, and tonight's topic, as you've heard, is anger.

Now a lot of this material is actually from a guy named Andrew Olson. He's an Aussie Christian psychologist, and he spent thousands of hours counseling people, thinking on this topic. In particular, he's been thinking about how anger affects relationships. So if anyone's interested in reading more, I've left the link to the website there, which is www.msi.org. And I actually met Andrew at Ridley, so that's my little plug for Ridley for today. So, now the danger, of course, in giving a sermon on anger, is that people might not like what they hear. The irony, of course, is that you might get angry at a sermon on anger, and possibly with me as well. Now, so if you are hurt by anything that I'm saying, or if this does bring up issues for you, please, firstly, I want to say two things.

[1 : 10] One is that we have an awesome pastoral team. So Andrew, our senior pastor, general pastor of this congregation, Chris, you've met, he's the youth pastor, your community group leaders.

There are plenty of people to be able to talk to. Now, I'm happy, of course, to answer any questions and clarify anything. But if you're angry at me for whatever reason, please do talk to them. I'm not handballing, really, it's not. Now, the second thing I want to be really, really clear on, crystal clear, is where I'm coming from, which I put at the very top of that sermon outline there. It's Romans 8.1. And it reminds us that we have no condemnation in Christ. No condemnation. And after looking at all this tonight, I think the temptation might be that we feel condemned. So the reminder is that for those of us who do believe that Jesus is the boss, we know that we can stand with a clear conscience. Because he's already died for us.

[2 : 18] Now, the main purpose tonight, of course, is that if we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds, that second verse there, if we can, instead of feeling condemned, know that we are being changed for Jesus.

That's the purpose for tonight. So let's pray about that. Lord, I pray that you would be with us tonight. Help us to be able to understand what you see anger as.

Help us to be able to understand your grace. But Lord, also, please help us to see the truth and see if there are any areas which we need to change. So, Lord, we put all of these things in your hands. Amen. Now, we all get angry, don't we? It might be over little things. It might be over big things. We have all sorts of reasons for it as well.

It might be stress at work or exams coming up or just things at home that aren't quite going all that well. We might get angry at our enemies. We even get angry at our friends sometimes.

[3 : 30] We get angry at ourselves as well. Sometimes we might not even remember what we got angry about. But all we remember is that we did get angry. Now, last week, I asked you if you would be able to keep track of the number of times that you got angry during the week.

Don't worry, I'm not going to ask you about it. But I wonder if you thought it was fairly often or not that often at all. Now, the interesting thing would be to take the same survey with married couples in the whole room or maybe parents in the whole room and ask them to rate how many times they thought that you got angry.

I'm pretty sure it would be a little bit higher. You know this is true, of course, if you've rated yourself a little bit lower on that anger scale. If you find yourself saying regularly, and unfortunately I find this, I find myself saying, I'm not angry.

I'm just, you know, if you find yourself saying that, you've probably got a few things to watch. Now, statistically, especially females, if they're assessing their spouse or their child, they would rate them

as being more angry than what their spouse or child would think they are.

So, basically, females are more sensitive to anger levels. Now, we've seen this in a study that I was reading on the social structure for chimpanzees. Now, they're 99% like us, so don't laugh, but one thing that they noted was that it was the lead female's role to defuse potentially dangerous situations between males.

[5 : 09] So, what they were observing was there were two chimps there, and one of them might become upset. So, before the situation would escalate, though, the female would take the male aside, you know, give him a banana, groom him a little bit, you know, just to make sure that he wasn't getting angry.

So, basically, the things that happen is that males do get angry. There's no surprise there. And usually, it's actually advantageous for males to get angry, especially in that pack order, because if they get angry, they might be able to move themselves up in that pack order.

Again, the upper hand. Now, but the problem is, men, sorry, I mean chimps, if they are getting angry too often, it's not very good for the group's stability, is it?

So, that's where females developed that sort of anger radar to make sure they could calm down minor quarrels and making sure that the group would stay together. And we can see that in humans as well, of course.

Women are generally a little bit more sensitive to social situations. Now, modern psychology. The definition that modern psychology gives for us, for anger, is that anger is a natural, emotional, and or physical response to a real or perceived threat.

[6 : 32] Now, a lot of modern psychology is talking about anger management. There's a movie about it, even. And basically, it involves acknowledging these emotions and finding constructive ways of expressing that anger, but recognizing it as a legitimate feeling.

Now, a common way that modern psychology sees anger is, as you can see on your outline there again, is an analog scale going from 1 to 10.

So, 5 might be a raising of the voice in a conversation that might show anger. And, of course, you can see 10 out of 10 there is physical violence. So, most guys will probably pick something up somewhere between 5 and 10.

If somebody starts raising their voice or somebody starts making threats, then they might think, oh, that person might be angry. Now, for females, though, they'll actually pick it up if it's 5 or below, generally speaking.

So, changes in demeanor, audible size, changes in facial expressions, frowning of your eyebrows. Apparently, I have a vein that sort of pops out a little bit as that happens, but I've never seen it.

[7 : 41] I'm not in denial, don't worry. Now, those are all signs of anger, though. So, what I have are two clips, and I'd like you to see where you think these people rate on the scale of 1 to 10.

Have a look. Just for good measure.

And we have a second clip as well, so remember, we're trying to rate 1 out of 10. The main thing to notice is the guy throwing things, of course.

Okay. So, from our definition of modern psychology, this is the way that we should talk to these two people.

What you've done is perfectly natural and normal. You're just physically responding to a real or perceived threat. What you must do is acknowledge the reality of this legitimate, normal emotion.

[9 : 27] And you have to engage, of course, in anger management and find less destructive ways of expressing your emotions. You should recognize that it is a legitimate feeling, but just be careful.

So, it sounds fairly reasonable, doesn't it? Get in touch with your feelings. Express them nicely. But just a little bit. Tone it down a little bit. Now, there is, basically, that definition of anger helps us to look at anger as sort of a healthy emotion.

And that we need to express it if we are going to be healthy. There is a problem, though. And that is that anger isn't healthy.

Two of the biggest causes of death, from unnatural causes, that is, are heart attacks and strokes. Now, stroke victims, 40% of stroke victims, had an anger attack within 24 hours before having their stroke.

The correlation between heart attacks and anger is as high as cholesterol and smoking combined. And not only that, it's unhealthy for our relationships as well.

[10 : 43] In counseling, domestic violence, statistics again show that legitimizing these natural feelings only increase the number of incidents. For children, the level of hostility between parents predicts their future psychological success.

And for divorces, this one's a big one. For divorces, the expression of anger has a 94% correlation rate. 94% correlation rate with separation.

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pride, greed, lust, and anger. Now the Bible, again, looking at your handouts there, in the beginning, anger isn't natural.

[12 : 27] It's the result of being separated from God, and it leads to sin. So the fall, Genesis 3, Adam and Eve disobey God. They're separated from God.

And I think the thing we can forget sometimes is how traumatic it is for a child to be separated from their father. For us to be separated from God. Now the result of being separated from God, with the fall and the curse, is emotional trauma.

Adam and Eve experienced emotional trauma. You can see it there. Guilt, they tried to cover themselves with fig leaves. They experienced fear. Verse 10, in chapter 3, they were afraid of God. And of course there was sadness and loss. They were thrown out of the garden. And for us, as sons of Adam and as daughters of Eve, it's not just a story.

At the root of all of our sins and addictions and anger, these three emotions are there. Guilt, fear, and sadness.

[13 : 36] Test that when you go home. Look at your life. Look underneath all of the baggage that's there. One of those three emotions is bound to be there. Now those three emotions, they actually have something in common as well.

And that is that we feel vulnerable when we're sad, guilty, or in fear. And we don't like to feel vulnerable. So what happens in the very next chapter, chapter 4?

Anger. Cain gets angry with his brother. He expresses his anger. It's a 10 out of 10. He kills his brother. He takes that person that's making him feel bad and he takes him out of the picture. But why did he get angry, though? So here's a psychological profile for Abel. Having been separated from God, he feels sad.

On top of that, he feels guilty as well. Because he didn't give what God wanted. Abel did. His brother. And he's afraid. He's afraid that he might get separated even further from God.

[14 : 45] Maybe even afraid that Abel will take an upper hand on him. He might even be able to rule over him because he's closer to God. So what does he do? Rather than feeling vulnerable with anger, he deals with it with anger.

And anger works really, really well as a coping strategy. I'll give you three reasons why. Number one. Anger gives you power. Because unless someone else in the room is a little bit more angry than you, you have the upper hand.

You have the power. You know what it looks like. You sort of, well, that person looks angry. We'd better not mess with him. Now in Cain's case, he gained the upper hand by literally taking out the competition.

And anger does that in subtle ways as well. But number two. In your anger, what happens is that rather than yourself feeling vulnerable, you transfer all of that fear, guilt, sadness, vulnerability onto the other person.

They feel vulnerable. Not you. Then they do. It's a quick fix. You get rid of it straight away. And of course, that's part of that power.

[15 : 58] You transfer that guilt onto them. Now number three. Anger is addictive. Physiologically, it's addictive. Anger gets the adrenaline pumping. It goes to those feel-good parts of our brain.

And it feels good to have power. It feels good not to be vulnerable. It feels good to have the upper hand. And so that behavior is reinforced. So I hope you're starting to see that it is not a natural emotion.

I mean, right now, Samuel, he expresses fear and sadness. He cries. And if we're not careful, he could learn that getting angry or hurting others can get him what he wants.

And it can get it a lot quicker than being nice. Now, it's our job as a parent, obviously, to make sure that he doesn't cave in. Now, for us, though, we've learned through watching others, experimenting as kids with tantrums, we've learned how to use anger to get what we want.

So here's a new definition for you. The new definition for anger is that it's a learned, calculated, self-serving, and addictive human response to get what we want.

[17:19] Now, that definition of anger doesn't quite make us feel so good about it. Now, if you're not quite convinced that anger is learned, here's, this is the Olsen slap test.

Are you ready? So the Olsen slap test. Now, imagine if I came up to you, slapped you in the face. Now, you probably feel angry at first, right? Because, well, it's just involuntary.

We sort of feel angry when someone hits us. But I'd actually say that your anger isn't because of the slap itself. If I were acting in a play and it was in the script and I did slap you, you wouldn't feel angry at me.

So it's not the slap in itself that makes you angry. It's the story behind the slap. Why am I slapping you? And there's a fear behind that as well.

There's fear that, from that pain that you felt from being slapped and sadness. I've broken your trust by hitting you. And in that split second, just a tiny second, you've calculated, just like chimps do, just like any mammal does, given the size, or my size, given all of the people around us, you can probably afford to express your anger to get what you want.

[18:33] And usually that'd probably be to make me look bad because I've hit you. And that will avenge your hurt. So you might maybe raise your voice or just let people know that you have been injured.

But by drawing attention to it, the main thing is that you have gained the upper hand on me. So pain was the sensation. Fear was the emotion. But anger was a calculated response.

If you still don't think that's right, replay that scene in your head. Except I'm seven foot tall, I weigh 150 kilos, and I'm a bodybuilder, and I've got a gun.

And you're alone in a dark alley. Replay that scene again. He hits you. You'll feel sadness. You'll feel fear. I don't think you'll get angry at him, though. So our expression of anger is learned, it's addictive, and it's powerful.

Now, by definition, that is a sin. Colossians 3.8. Now you must rid yourselves of all such things, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language.

[19:47] Now what I'm hoping is that we haven't become so blinded by our addiction. It hasn't become so much of a second nature to us, a sinful nature, that we'll believe all the reasons that we can come up with in our heads to try to justify ourselves.

Now, in order to rid ourselves of all anger, we need to be able to identify it. Like any other thing that is addictive, as Andrew said last week, the first step in dealing with it is admitting that we actually have a problem.

To be able to name it. Now sometimes that is the hardest thing. Now what I've got again on the handout there, you'll see the next points, there's four points there.

Four titles for anger. I think you'll also notice that it spells pain. I think one of the lies that we believe when it comes to anger is that if we get just a little bit angry, it's not going to hurt anyone.

But every single cause of anger, every single way that we express our anger, every single one causes pain. Perhaps to ourselves or others and always with God.

[21:09] So let's look at the first one. Remember our purpose here, it's not to be condemned but to be changed for Jesus. So let's have a look there. The first one there is passive anger. Passive expression of anger.

Now that's different from just that angry thought that passes through your head and you don't do anything about it. It's different from passive aggressive behavior. Those are sort of separate things altogether.

What I'm talking about is when you're acting on your anger. But you're acting on it in every way except directly dealing with the person or the issue.

Now it's a little bit more than the whole talk to the hand, I'm not talking to you routine. Although that is part of it. So what you might end up doing is you drop hints here and there. You make them just know that they might have done something wrong but you never quite tell them what it is.

Well that's cunning, isn't it? This might be when you go out of your way to avoid that person week after week. Or maybe you just ignore them. Turn your back on them.

[22:15] Frown at them. Give them the evil eye. This is where instead of expressing our feelings of sadness and fear, we make up reasons why we should hate this person.

Why what they did is wrong and why we're the victim. But we tell that to everyone else except the person that we're angry at.

Now if we said that to their face that'd be rude. Can't do that. Now we love passively expressing our anger because the person doesn't even have a chance to defend themselves.

That's why we love emails and SMSs these days. That's why when we're sitting in our little metal box surrounded by other people in their little metal box that can't hear us we'll just let fly.

We can say anything we want because there's no consequences to what we're saying. Now I'll be the first to admit that I've done that on a number of occasions but it was so wrong.

[23 : 18] And it's one of the most damaging things that we can possibly do for ourselves and our community in particular. Because doing things like that it creates factions it causes dissent it makes people feel terrible when they're caught in between two people who are angry at each other.

It develops suspicion as well. because if someone's talking that way about that other person what might they be saying about me? So I better not share anything just in case.

It prevents forgiveness it prevents reconciliation and it stops our growth. And of course it's causing us pain. And there are some things in families in churches that have been harbored for years scolding 10 out of 10 anger.

Or maybe just a 1 out of 10 you didn't return my book that time so I'm not talking to you. But all of those things have one thing in common. It's a reflection on us.

It's not a reflection on anyone else except us. And all that time besides harming our relationships preventing us from working together as one body all that rottenness all that bitterness all that resentment just builds up.

[24 : 42] Now a good test would be for maybe if you're thinking about people in this room or people that are close to you see if you treat that person any differently from the way that you treat other people.

See if you don't have just that tiny little bit of hesitation in what you're doing. Now Ephesians 4.26 I'll actually I do want you guys to turn to that one if you can so if you get your Bibles Ephesians 4.26 it's on page 951 4.26 Now it says in your anger do not sin Now some of us would use that as an escape clause because anger is okay as long as you don't sin but there is one thing to remember for the Bible especially in verse if you look further down verse 31 have a look it says exactly the same paragraph there let us put off anger and it says again you don't have to look these ones up Colossians 3 put off anger Galatians 5.20 do not get angry anger is not okay anger is there but as soon as you have even that slightest little bit of an act on it a smirk a gesture a little comment we've sinned and in light of that the rest of the verse do not let the sun go down on your anger and if you harbored all of those things that tiny little bit of hate even just a little bit the devil has a foothold on your life and that's scary that's passive anger now active anger active anger

I'm barely even going to mention it here we have if you think about yelling outright hatred just think of Matthew 6 21 if you hate your brother it's the same as murder done dusted simple you murdered him now I'm sure a question might be though what about when we express our anger or frustration or irritation you know if something's gone wrong or when we've been cut off rudely interrupted maybe even actually been hurt and seriously hurt surely it's okay if we're angry then isn't it it's right to be angry then now I'll get you to turn to this is only the second verse that you need to turn to James 1 19 to 20 it's on page 980 it's not too far away page 980 James 1 19 now what that says is be slow to anger because your anger does not produce righteousness your anger any of your anger man's anger in another translation your anger does not produce righteousness now it's a harsh truth but being angry isn't going to change anything and rather than venting our anger speaking a little bit louder than everyone else in that meeting we need to be salt and light to the earth how about we actually express those feelings that we are feeling underneath all of that anger fear sadness guilt now we'll go through a bit more of that in the application section but we're almost there don't worry two more points really quickly on these ones internalized anger now this is when it's not aimed at anyone else except ourselves

I hate myself I just can't seem to get it right I'm an idiot now I think anger pointing at ourselves is actually possibly the most self-destructive thing that we can ever do I think there's all sorts of spiritual battles and I think that's a whole other sermon to go into there but to be brief often this anger will come out in situations when we think someone else might get angry with us so we get angry quickly so that no one else will blame us for anything we would put ourselves down no one else can do it we're still maintaining that control and often this comes at a time when for ourselves

we believe that we should be doing or we believe that others think we should be able to do that little bit better and it's actually fear and it's guilt that we haven't met those expectations now the sad thing is this can be often just as addictive and it can physically manifest itself into some potentially really dangerous things now so if this is you and you do find yourself constantly getting angry at yourself it is okay we do not have condemnation but please do talk to someone about that don't let the sun go down on your anger now neutral ones there is the last expression this is the
I don't really hate you but I don't really love you either now I'm still developing this one but very briefly one sentence you either love them or you hate them there's nothing in between all right now we can get to the big question that's looming over everything that we've been talking about we had it in our Bible readings now Jesus got angry Moses got angry God gets angry all the time now surely there must be a time when we can get angry a righteous anger now yes there is now as far as Jesus was concerned though actually sorry I told a lie Mark 11 15 to 17 maybe you can look it up a bit later but page 824 check it out whenever you want doesn't really matter but I can guarantee you the words anger and wrath aren't there it doesn't actually say that Jesus got angry we assume that he got angry because he was turning over tables now even even if he did get angry though [31 : 22] I hope you have noticed something up until this point every single time I've been talking about anger it's been about us either something that we've done or someone that's wronged us or someone that we've hurt or whatever it is it's about us but God's anger is always on behalf of someone else now in Jesus case here it's on behalf of his father in other cases usually it's actually on our behalf that he's getting angry but if you remember when anger is actually pointed at Jesus himself when he's being beaten when he's been mocked when he's been crucified going through pain what's his response forgive them forgive them now for what it's worth I think I may have experienced I'm not sure but

I may have experienced righteous anger possibly for the first time in my three decades on this earth now don't worry it's actually no one that any of us will know but I found out that my brother in Christ was sleeping with my sister in Christ and no they weren't married now was angry yes did I hate him no did I treat him differently no did I yell or lose my patience no I think in these sort of situations not to be angry not to say anything which is usually actually our default position isn't it we think that you know I better not say anything I don't want to get in the middle of it I wouldn't want to offend anyone maybe maybe I just heard it wrong I'll just let that one go that's the easy way out the only reason that I would do that and make up those sort of excuses is if

I was acting in fear that's fear of people though not fear of God but do I bring judgment on my brother no do I bear a grudge against him no otherwise I'm a hypocrite but do I just stand there and let it happen no should I do something yes I'd better do something I think far too often we get angry about things that we shouldn't get angry about and we don't get angry enough at the things that we should be angry at now for what it's worth again seven signs of godly anger now number one it's always on behalf of someone else not when you've been offended number two it's always been discerned from god's standards of righteousness number three it's always worked out patiently as in james one slow to speak slow to anger number four it's always acted on after forgiveness so we forgive as we've been forgiven number five it's always acted on through love not rudely not arrogantly selfishly number six shouldn't keep us awake at night as it says ephesians four god is sovereign we don't need to lose sleep over let your anger do not hold on to your anger when the sun goes down number seven though godly anger will cause suffering it'll cause tears just as christ suffered we will suffer over those things as well now the goal though don't worry about those things goal of godly anger is always reconciliation with god through jesus that is always the reason for godly anger now before just before as a little bit of a warning before we do actually think that we have godly anger let's remember mooses our second reading he got angry that looked pretty righteous he did a lot of other things as well but one of the things that is written is that only joshua and caleb entered the promised land because they were the only ones who followed the lord wholeheartedly now practically so let's say you've actually believed everything that i've said tonight all anger is sin we need to get rid of all of our anger what do we do practically though every day now there's been a whole bunch of things that i've i can give you a whole bunch of things that i've read you can lower your voice count to ten you can take three deep breaths before you speak if you're robert de nero there's the mafia boss version of that which is three shots to the back of the pillow now an interesting one though is to actually rant to yourself so not being angry at yourself but have a rant to yourself saying something like my anger is my own self serving addictive selfish response

to the fact that my world isn't working i've sinned and my anger has put christ on the cross now the idea is eventually you actually figure out what you're saying and you don't get addicted to that i've never actually tried that before myself do know for sure one thing's for sure there is an advantage in seeing anger as sin and that's because if anger is sin we know what to do with sin through jesus now i've written those four points there you can see them there repent seek jesus express your sadness guilt or fear seek reconciliation again each of those are entirely separate topics all together but if we do truly repent if we are truly seeking jesus once we do truly know that we will be free from that anger now i just want to concentrate a little bit on point number three which is instead of expressing our anger express it as sadness instead of somebody when someone hurts you instead of getting angry at them take a second express it no actually that hurt don't get angry at them tell them that you're hurt tell them that you're sad from that and that it makes you a little bit scared when they are if they are doing something like that to you be honest with each other as Christ is he's freed us from those sins and because we are free we can express those things openly now the very last point there seek reconciliation as it says in Matthew 6 we need to make sure that we are reconciled to one another and if you haven't seek out your brother and sister and take that lower position actually go to them and let go of your anger express to them your sadness and your fear now friends if you've gotten nothing else from this entire talk tonight please don't leave the room without trying to do each of those four things as we're about to pray now make sure that we repent of our anger make sure that we seek Jesus and seek reconciliation with those that we are angry at let's pray dear lord we thank you that true repentance it's a powerful thing lord it's powerful because we surrender ourselves completely to you and we know that through you we have no condemnation lord we thank you for dying for our sins and lord we thank you that you have given us that example to be able to be godly to be able to make sure that we don't need to feel guilty for the times that we wrong you and wrong each other lord please help us to understand that through your love help us to be able to heal these wounds and lord often it does take so much such a long time and it might be that it's only in heaven that we can fully experience being free from the guilt of anger and sin but lord help us to take those steps now help us to be able to express our sadness and our guilt and our fear to you so lord please just during this moment of silence help us to do that and then

[40 : 52] Doug or John will close so let's just spend a bit of time with with God