

LESSON 14

Good Anger

Summary

Since much of our anger is wrong, it is refreshing to see Jesus model good anger for us when the Pharisees refuse to bless his healing of a crippled man. Good anger is a subset of good honesty, as we will see in this lesson.

Chapter in *Love Walked Among Us*—8a: **Honest Anger.**

Outline

1. Introduction: What's Wrong with Our Anger? 5 min
2. The Shape of Jesus' Anger 25 min
3. Reflections on Jesus' Anger 20 min Total 50 min

Goals

Love: To recognize that good, controlled anger is a natural response to evil, a form of love.

Faith: Jesus offers forgiveness for wrong anger. His anger at sin drove him to the cross.

Jesus: To see the beauty of Jesus' anger, how natural and fearless he is.

1. Introduction: What's Wrong with Our Anger? 5 min.

Q. What can make anger wrong?



[Write their answers. Use these three categories to help you draw out additional answers since people tend to be initially aware only of #1. List the three categories at the end of this brief discussion.]

1. Overreaction:
 - a. We don't let the anger go. We nurse our hurt and keep the anger alive.
 - b. We attack the other person (verbal abuse).
 - c. We get angrier than the situation warrants. We vent. We don't control our anger.
 - d. Our anger is too quick.
 - e. Our anger is always directed at the same person.
2. Selfish motivation: We get angry because we don't get our way. Our goals are blocked.
3. Denial:
 - a. We're angry and don't even realize it; we act out our anger in subtle ways.
 - b. We get angry at the wrong person for the wrong reason.

2. The Shape of Jesus' Anger 25 min.



Teach: Let us look at good anger in Jesus' life. This story is made richer by combining Matthew, Luke, and Mark's account. [Give each person a copy.]



Read: The Man With a Crippled Hand

On another Sabbath [Jesus] went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled (Luke 6:6). Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus [the Pharisees] watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. They asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" (Matthew 12:10b)

Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone" (Mark 3:3).

Then Jesus said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:11-12). Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

He looked around at them in anger. Deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, Jesus said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus (Mark 3:4-6).

Q. Luke was a physician. Does his account mention any details that a doctor would particularly notice?

He notices that the man's right hand is crippled, making his disability that much worse.

Q. Mark probably developed his gospel from Peter's sermons. We know Peter was an emotional person. Is there anything in Mark's account that an emotional person might notice?

Mark mentions Jesus' anger.

Q. Matthew was a tax collector. Tax collectors were usually well educated and fluent in several languages. Is this at all evident in Matthew's account?

Matthew notices Jesus' teaching, his logical arguments.

Q. What's the overall effect of different views or accounts of Jesus?

It gives a richer, more complete picture of Jesus.



Historical Background

Capernaum Synagogue¹

- Archaeologists have uncovered a synagogue in Capernaum that could be the site of this scene. Found under the remains of another synagogue, its walls are four feet thick and made of basalt. (Capernaum was a center for the manufacture of olive presses made from highly durable black basalt rock.)
- Imagine a low ceiling with columns supporting the roof. Benches along the outside wall, facing the people, would be for the elders or visiting dignitaries. One more prominent seat, called "Moses' Seat," was reserved for the most important teacher.
- The books of the Law and the Prophets would be stored away in a box or ark. Several ancient synagogues have a hole in the wall cut out for the placement of the ark.
- In medieval synagogues men and women were divided, but we don't know if that was true in Jesus' day.
- The synagogue service would begin with the reading of the Law and the Prophets. Someone would paraphrase the passage into Aramaic (called a "targum"), the language of the people. Then someone—any Jewish male—would preach a sermon.
- It appears from the passage that Jesus is the speaker (implied by Jesus telling the man to rise and come forward). The speaker's podium would have been in front of the row of elders.

Q. What's the the Pharisees' attitude toward the disabled man from the very beginning of the story?

[*Teach what they do not say.*] They're using a disabled man to start an argument with Jesus in order to make themselves look good. Matthew 12:10 shows that they're treating this man as an object. They're trying to trap Jesus, using this man as bait.

Q. What is Jesus' first response to the Pharisees' question?

Jesus has the man stand up in front of everyone.

Q. Why does Jesus have the man come forward?

Possibly, Jesus wants the Pharisees to look at the man.

Q. Why might Jesus want them to look at the man?

He wants to ignite compassion in their lives.



Teach: Jesus is on the offensive. Instead of being afraid of the Pharisees' opinion, he deals directly with them, saying, in effect, "You want to talk about this man? Then let's talk. Stand up." Jesus fearlessly walks into their trap by moving toward the man. What they're treating as an object, Jesus treats as a prize, something to be honored.

Q. After the man stands, how does Jesus try to ignite the Pharisees' compassion?

- He reasons with them, appealing to their common sense, giving them an example from their own lives. He points out that if a sheep fell into a pit on the Sabbath, they'd help it. Now, if they'd help a sheep (which has much less value than a man), then why wouldn't they help this man?
- He questions them, letting them decide on their own instead of telling them.



Historical Background Rabbinical Argument

Jesus is using standard rabbinical argument. He argues from the lesser (a sheep) to the greater (a man).

Pits

Jesus' reference to a pit seems odd to us, since pits aren't common today. But they were all over the Ancient Near East. They're frequently found in archaeological sites.

Q. How does Jesus' question fit what we've learned about incarnating, entering into another's world?

Jesus is trying to get the Pharisees to understand, to walk in this man's shoes. He makes his argument ridiculously obvious by saying, "What if it's not a person in peril, but your sheep?"

Q. How does Jesus teach them to follow the Golden Rule?

He shows them how to think first about how they treat a sheep, and then applies that thinking about sheep to help them relate to this man.

Q. Jesus repeats the Pharisees' original question, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" How does Jesus change the meaning of their question?

He changes the meaning of their question from a judgmental attack to a plea for mercy.



Teach: This scene is a mirror of Jesus' self-description, "I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world." The Pharisees are focused on judgment, and Jesus on mercy.

Q. How do they respond to Jesus' plea for mercy on the man with the crippled hand?

Silence. They refuse to answer their own question when it's put back to them. They refuse to give Jesus permission to heal.

Q. The Pharisees had begun by trying to trap Jesus. But what's happened now?

Jesus has them trapped. If they answer "to kill," then they'll violate the Law of Moses. If they say "to heal," then they'll be agreeing with Jesus.

Q. What are their hearts like?

Focused on themselves. Proud. Unmerciful.

Q. What is Jesus' response to their silence?

Jesus is furious at their coldness and hard-heartedness.

Q. What two emotions does Jesus feel?

Mark mentions two emotions: Grief and anger. Jesus looks at them with anger.

Q. How might Jesus' emotions have been physically displayed on him?

Eyes on fire. Tight muscles in his face.

Q. Which emotion comes first in Jesus?

Grief (though this isn't clear in many translations).



Teach: The Greek text shows that Jesus' anger results from being grieved at the hardness of the Pharisees' hearts. The grieving causes the anger.

Q. At the most basic level, why do people grieve?

They're in pain. They're hurt.

Q. What has hurt Jesus?

The Pharisees' hardness of heart toward the crippled man has hurt Jesus. He's in pain.



Teach: Implications of Jesus' Anger

- Jesus' response illustrates the process of good anger. Anger can be a good reaction to pain.²
- It would be sinful for Jesus not to be angry! There are times when we sin if we're not angry!
- To be a compassionate person means, by definition, that we have to open the door of our heart to anger.



Read: B. B. Warfield on Good Anger

"It would be impossible...for a moral being to stand in the presence of...wrong, indifferent and unmoved. Precisely what we mean by a moral being is a being perceptive of the difference between right and wrong, and reacting appropriately to right and wrong.... The emotions of indignation and anger belong, therefore, to the very self-expression of a moral being...and cannot be lacking ... in the presence of wrong."³



Gospel Connection: Jesus' anger at sin drove him to the cross. Jesus' anger always produces something good.

Q. Why do you think Jesus asks this man to stretch out his hand?

We don't know for sure, but doing so would call everyone's attention to the man's hand. It's the only time that Jesus asks a person to stretch out a body part to be healed.

stop here if dividing lesson into two sessions

3. Reflections on Jesus' Anger

20 min.

Q. Remember when we listed the dangers of anger? How does Jesus avoid each of the three dangers?

[Refer back to the first brainstorming question where we listed the three ways that our anger is wrong.]

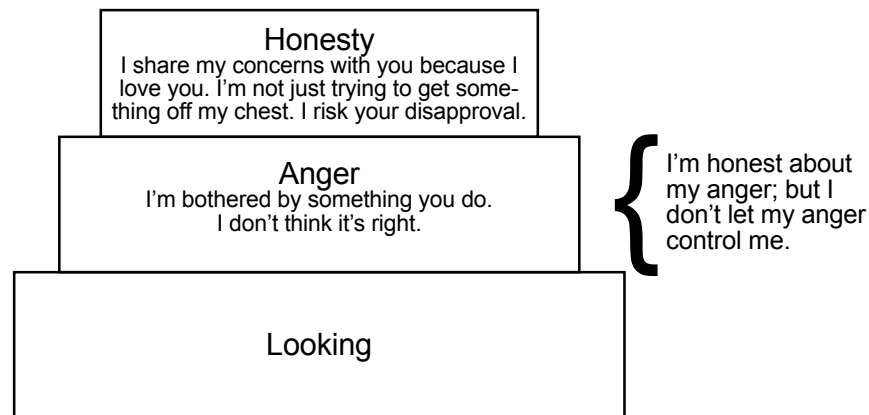
1. He's restrained (vs. overreaction). His anger shows only in his looking.
2. He's focused on the needs of the crippled man (vs. selfish motivation).
3. He's honest (vs. denial). He's clearly angry.



Draw: Primary Movement of Love [Review]



Draw: Secondary Movement of Love



Read: Robertson & Muriel McQuilkin

Robertson McQuilkin resigned his job as a university president to care for his wife Muriel, who has Alzheimer's.

He writes: "Once, I completely lost it. In the days when Muriel could still stand and walk and we had not resorted to diapers, sometimes there were 'accidents.' I was on my knees beside her, trying to clean up the mess as she stood, confused by the toilet. It would have been easier if she weren't so insistent on helping. I got more and more frustrated. Suddenly, to make her stand still, I slapped her calf—as if that would do any good. It wasn't a hard slap, but she was startled. I was, too. Never in our 44 years of marriage had I ever so much as touched her in anger or in rebuke of any kind.... Sobbing, I pled with her to forgive me—no matter that she didn't understand words any better than she could speak them.... It took me days to get over it. Maybe God bottled those tears to quench the fires that might ignite again some day."⁴

Q. Was Robertson's anger wrong?

Yes.



Teach: It's hard to acknowledge that he was wrong, because we're sympathetic to his plight; in the same situation we might have done the same thing. If we judge him, then we're judging ourselves. But Robertson believes he did something wrong. He was shamed by his anger.

Q. What was wrong with his anger?



[Write their answers.]

1. It was focused on his own convenience. Like many Americans, Robertson loves efficiency. That was his idol. When his wife blocked his idol, he lashed out.
2. It was an over-reaction. It's always wrong to strike someone in anger.
3. She didn't know what she was doing.

Q. What do we do when we have angrily over-reacted?

- We usually compensate by trying to be good.
- We excuse ourselves by looking at our circumstances.

Illustration: Speech Computer Camp (Paul Miller)

At a speech computer camp that Kim and I once attended, the conditions were often difficult. The dormitories were cramped, the food was awful, and the caregivers were stuck taking care of disabled kids without a break. A dad lost his temper at his son in front of our entire cabin. He spent the rest of the weekend programming his son's speech computer. Guilt drove him to try to pay for his sins.



Modern Culture: Guilt. Our media culture says that guilt isn't real. But then why do so many people act guilty? What they actually feel is guilt over breaking divine law. They might not recognize it as such, but that's the only explanation that makes sense.



Teach:

- Jesus offers forgiveness for our wrongful anger. We need to say with the tax collector, "God be merciful to me a sinner." We shouldn't try to balance out our failures by being good; we need to realize that we can't do it anyway.
- If we try to control bad anger by will-power, we'll most likely fail. Instead, we should begin by asking forgiveness. When we own our problems, then we can also own forgiveness because of Jesus' death, and we can disown our guilt.

Anger isn't intrinsically bad. It's emotionally volatile, however, and can easily get out of hand. Two factors determine whether anger is appropriate: its cause and its effect. We can ask ourselves these two questions: (1) Why am I angry? (2) How do I express my anger?

(1) Why am I angry?

- a. Good reasons: injustice, immorality, hypocrisy in others, etc. (e.g., Jesus' anger at the Pharisees refusing to help someone on the Sabbath).
- b. Bad reasons: I don't get what I want, something happens to me to make me look bad, or any other selfish/self-promoting motivation (e.g., the Pharisees becoming angry because Jesus thwarted their plan to trap him).

(2) How do I express my anger?

- a. Good expressions: doing something constructive to resolve the wrong that has caused my anger, either by rebuking those who are doing wrong (e.g. Jesus with the disciples who are preventing the children from coming to him), or fixing/removing the cause of anger (e.g., Jesus cleansing the temple of its robbers, Jesus healing the man's crippled hand).
- b. Bad expressions: lashing out uncontrollably, shouting, stomping around, cursing, making threats, belittling or demeaning others, resorting to any sinful activity, etc. (e.g. the Pharisees plotting to kill Jesus).

Appendix



Read: Mark 2:23-28 —Lord of the Sabbath

[This passage introduces the previous scene in the synagogue. It makes a good introduction to the lesson, but then the lesson becomes too long. If you want to include this material then split the lesson into two lessons, breaking after the second point above. It is not likely that this passage is sequential in terms of time since Mark has grouped these stories, plus all of Mark 2, into a classic chiastic pattern, meaning that each part of the sequence is mirrored by another part.]



Teach: Mark 2:23-24

- Jesus and his disciples fed themselves by plucking the heads of grain with their hands, something accepted by the Law of Moses. Deuteronomy 23:25 says, “If you enter your neighbor’s grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain.”
- The Pharisees made the law into an idol and missed its real meaning. They made the law stricter than it actually was so that even if they messed up they’d still be obeying the law. This practice of “fencing the law” added layer upon layer of rules to the Law of Moses.

Mark 2:25-28

- Jesus’ first answer is startling. In effect he says, “Like King David, I have royal authority to take food and give it to my companions.”
- Then Jesus states the principle: “The Sabbath is a gift, but you’ve made it into a burden with your legalism. You have the law backwards; it’s people who are important. What does the law tell us to do? What is the right thing to do? Take care of hungry people!” The Pharisees block compassion through their self-centered “law enforcement.”
- Finally, Jesus returns to the theme of his royal authority making the absolutely astounding claim that he is Lord of the Sabbath.
- At the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus’ looking at people fueled his compassion, which in turn caused him to bear their burden of hunger. Now, he’s asking the Pharisees to do exactly the same thing that he did. In other words, he’s telling them, “Look at my disciples, have compassion on them. They’re hungry.”

Notes:

1. E. Yamauchi, “Synagogue,” *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), pp. 781-784; Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1971), pp. 434-436.
2. “The fundamental psychology of anger is curiously illustrated by this account; for anger always has pain at its root, and is a reaction of the soul against what gives it discomfort. The hardness of their hearts, vividly realized, hurt Jesus; and his anger rose in repulsion of the cause of his pain.” B.B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: P&R Publishing, 1950), p. 108.
3. Warfield, p. 107.
4. Robertson McQuilkin, “Muriel’s Blessing,” *Christianity Today* (Feb 5, 1996), p. 33.