

The WAY Forward: Good Anger

Big Idea: A world without anger is a world without love.

Purpose: To challenge people towards good anger.

Passage: Mark 3:1-6

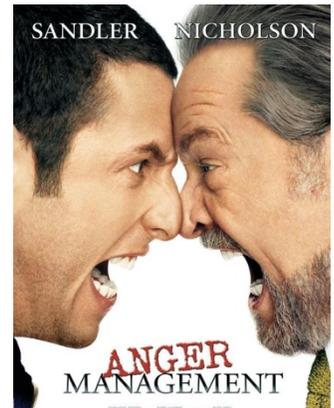
Verse: Eph. 4:26

Opening

-When you think of anger what pops into your mind? My conception of anger is often shaped by how anger is portrayed in pop culture. When I think of anger I think of *Angry Birds* Or I think of how the emotion of anger is depicted in *Inside Out*.



Or I think of the *Incredible Hulk*. That is an instance where anger turns someone into an out-of-control monster. Or I think of the movie *Anger Management* where Adam Sandler is trying to get his anger under control. Or I think of an angry God throwing down lightning bolts from the heavens



-All these depictions of anger spring from our experience with anger. Most often when we are on the giving or receiving end of anger, it is an emotion that is toxic, destructive and out of control. But while anger can certainly be toxic, destructive and out of control, it doesn't have to be. Anger can be the exact opposite of each of those things. And that is what we are going to explore today.

Review

-We are in the 5th week of a series called *The WAY Forward: Following Jesus in a Chaotic World*. The purpose of this series is to provide us with **practices that will help us survive and thrive in our chaotic world**. In week 1, we discussed the importance of **unplugging**. We are not made to go, go, go. Most things work better after you unplug them, even you. Our practice was to **take a break** every day to be in the uninterrupted presence of God. How are you doing with that?

In week 2, we looked at **simplicity**. We only have so much space in our hearts. We need to simplify so that the most important things can fit in our hearts. Our practice that week was to **give something away**. Give away a possession, a time commitment, some emotional baggage.

In week 3, we explored the idea of **seeking beauty**. Beauty reminds us that God is good. Our practice was to **notice beauty**. Are you taking time to notice the beauty all around you? Stop and say, "That's beautiful." Tell God "thank you" because beauty is a gift.

Last week, we talked about **gentleness**. Gentleness is quiet strength that provides space for grace. Our practice was to respond gently. When people come at us with energy, we should **respond gently**, because gentleness turns away wrath.

Our hope is that each of us adopts **2-3 of these practices** that will help us survive and thrive during this season. Last week some of you may have been thinking – gentleness is great, but isn't there a time and place to get angry? Yes, there is a time and place to get angry. Today we are going to explore good anger. Samer will read our Scripture today.

Public Reading

-Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

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 and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, 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 3:1-6)

Two Types of Anger

Mark 3:1-6

-The setting for our second snapshot is the synagogue in Capernaum. The synagogue was the center of religious and communal life in the town. It was the Sabbath. It was a packed house and Jesus was teaching. The religious and government leaders were in attendance, watching Jesus closely. They wanted to catch him doing something illegal like healing on the Sabbath. Mark tells us that there was also a man with a shriveled hand in attendance. This man likely snuck in the back. Someone with a shriveled hand, like the paralytic in our passage last week, would have been deemed ceremonially unclean. This man would not have been allowed to enter the temple and quite likely would have been prohibited from religious communal life.

-Jesus sets the stage by asking the man with the shriveled hand to stand up. The man slides down in his chair. He probably thought Jesus was going to toss him out on his ear. Quite the opposite.

While the man is standing Jesus asks them a question: *Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath? Is it lawful to save a life on the Sabbath?* Mark tells us that no one answered. People were already learning not to tangle with Jesus. Plus, the question answered itself. Doing good and saving lives is not limited to certain days. There is [hyperlink here to Deuteronomy 30](#):

Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Would the Jewish religious leaders choose life?

-The Sabbath was the Jewish holy day; the day set aside to rest and remember Yahweh. But the religious leaders had compiled 613 laws, many of which dictated what one could

and could not do on the Sabbath. Yet, even with all these extra laws, even they had made an exception for healing a person with a life-threatening ailment.

-Jesus knew all this and had asked a man who didn't have a life-threatening ailment to stand. How about this man? *Is it o.k. for me to make him whole on the Sabbath?* According to their added laws, it was not o.k. for Jesus to do that. Again, Jesus knew that and was one step ahead of them. Jesus was trying to bring to light the true attitude of their hearts.

-Jesus was not asking a hypothetical question. There was a real dude standing there with a withered hand. Imagine we were meeting in-person today. Imagine what it would be like if I stopped the service and asked someone with a physical disability to stand up. This disability prevents this person from having a job and properly caring for himself and his family. This disability also prevents them from feeling welcomed at church or at any community functions.

Jesus has this man stand in their church service and asks, *is it o.k. if I restore him to life?* Not life, like the man will die if Jesus doesn't heal him—Kingdom life, abundant life, the life we are all meant to enjoy, the life only Jesus can provide.

-Mark tells us that Jesus gets emotional when His question was confronted with their stubborn or hard hearts. Mark tells us the emotion Jesus was feeling. **Jesus was angry.** The Greek word used here anger is **orge** (or-GAY). It means *angry*. As we discussed last week, Jesus was fully God, but he was also fully human. He had real human emotions but He did not sin.

-Why was Jesus angry? Jesus was angry because the religious leaders were following the *letter of the law* and had forgotten the *heart of the law*. The religious leaders had added to the law. It had become burdensome. They had lost the forest for the trees. Jesus simplified the law to 2 commands: **love God and love others**. That is the heart of the law—love. Jesus was angry because their attempts to obey the law had caused them to miss the whole point of the law— to love the man standing before them.

-**Jesus shows them what embodying the law looks like and He heals the man.** He does so with His words. **Jesus never lifts a finger. Not even the most observant Jew could accuse Him of working on the Sabbath.** Unless someone was opposed to Jesus talking on the Sabbath—which the religious leaders undoubtedly were. They just wanted Jesus to shut up.

-This passage reveals two things. One: not all anger is bad. Jesus was not angry like *Angry Birds* or the *Incredible Hulk*. Smoke was not coming out of His ears. There is such a thing as good anger. And that good anger is vitally linked to love. We must clarify the difference between good anger and bad anger.

Bad Anger

-Bad anger is toxic and destructive. **Bad anger is toxic first and foremost to the person expressing the anger.** Frederick Buechner say it well:

Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back - in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you. (Frederick Buechner)

Anne Lamott once said that *to nurse a grudge against another person is like drinking rat poison and waiting for the rat to die*. That is essentially what bad anger is—holding something against another person. We perceive that someone has wronged us in some way and **we feel like they owe us something. That type of anger will eat us alive.**

-Some of our bad anger comes from deep wounds. But some of our bad anger emerges from normal everyday grievances like bad drivers. Comedian George Carlin once remarked *that we consider anybody driving slower than us is an idiot and anybody driving faster than us is a maniac*. The only good drivers include us and people who stay out of our way. I certainly experience road rage. Although road rage in a Prius is self-defeating. People just laugh at you. But road rage is a good example of bad anger. There is nothing that anger can do but eat at *us*.

-The Scriptures are clear that **the only antidote to bad anger is to forgive**. Only when we forgive and let it go can we heal and be set free from the toxic and destructive force of bad anger. But some of you watching today are in the grip of bad anger. That bad anger is eating you alive. It is destroying you and those around you. That's what bad or toxic anger does—it destroys. When we are in the grip of bad anger, it is often impossible to forgive, break free, and heal on our own. We will likely need help.

I highly recommend seeking the professional help of **counselor**. If you are locked in a relationship with someone who is in the grip of bad anger, please seek help, especially if that anger has gotten abusive. That is never o.k. **Call 911** if you are in trouble. **Call New Hope** if we can help you in any way. Our **pastor care line (503.659.5683)** is **open 24/7**. I also highly recommend Gary Chapman's book entitled *Anger*.

-But our topic today is not bad anger. Our topic today is **good anger**. We often grow up in homes or in churches that teach all anger is bad anger. That is not true or Biblical. There is such a thing as good anger. Let's explore it.

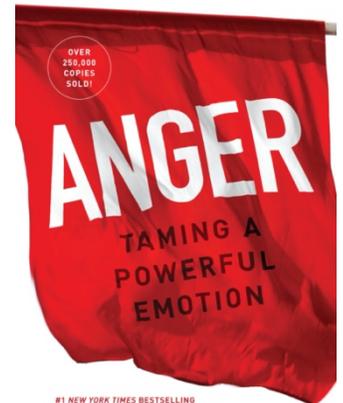
Good Anger

-If you want to start a conversation with someone on good anger, start by asking them - *Did you know the Bible commands us to be angry?* Indeed, it does. Paul writes, *In your anger, do not sin...* (Ephesians 4:26a) Paul is clearly suggesting that we can be angry and not sin. Paul is directly quoting from Psalm 4:4. Paul is telling us there is such a thing as good anger.

-This makes total sense because Scripture reveals God as expressing anger. Here is one prime example:

*They forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshiped various gods of the peoples around them. They aroused **the Lord's anger** because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths. **In his anger** against Israel the Lord gave them into the hands of raiders who plundered them. (Judges 2:12-14)*

We are told several times in Exodus and Deuteronomy that God's anger burned against Moses and his people for how they were choosing to live. God is particularly angered by the unjust treatment of people who are vulnerable and helpless. There is such a thing as good anger.



Gary Chapman

-As we discovered in our passage earlier, **Jesus, God incarnate, got angry.** Jesus was angry because religious legalism was taking precedence over restoring the hand of a man who was an outcast. This is not the only instance of Jesus getting angry. Jesus cleared out the temple courts because His Father's house of prayer had become a house of merchandise. Jesus called the religious leaders *hypocrites, tombs, and children of the devil* because they were using the law to bully people. Jesus called His disciple and good friend, Peter, *Satan* because Peter was seeking to use power for position instead of power for sacrifice.

A world without anger is a world without love

-I often hear people say they don't want an angry God or an angry world. Then those people must not want a loving God or a loving world either. ***A world without anger is a world without love.*** Love and anger are bound together. They are necessarily linked together. When something unjust and unloving occurs in our world it is entirely appropriate to express good anger. **The opposite of love is not anger. *The opposite of love is indifference.*** To live in a world where things are not always right and show indifference is unloving. To respond to injustice with good anger is loving. The same is true of God. *We want an angry God. We don't want a God who is indifferent to our plight and to the cries of the oppressed.* God expresses good anger because God is love. Sometimes anger is the only appropriate response. *A world without anger is a world without love.*

-It is very important that we learn to differentiate between good anger and bad anger. One is toxic and destructive, and one is loving and redemptive. **I define good anger as *zealous love that seeks restoration.*** How can we learn to discern whether we are experiencing and expressing good anger or bad anger? I want to give you a simple four-part checklist. When we begin to experience anger, we can run it through this checklist and it will reveal which type of anger we are dealing with.

Good Anger Checklist

Slow

-First, ***good anger is slow.*** Here is God's introduction to Moses, *The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...*(Exodus 34:6b) **One of God's most definitive qualities is being slow to anger.** Slow anger is a good indication our anger is good anger. This descriptor of God is found all over the Old Testament. It is found in historic contexts in Exodus, Numbers and Nehemiah. It is found in prophetic contexts in Joel, Jonah and Nahum. It is found in poetic contexts in the Psalms and Proverbs. James the brother of Jesus commands the churches to be slow to anger.

-This phrase in Hebrew literally means ***long-nosed.*** Anger was depicted with flaring nostrils and snorting. God is long-nosed. *It takes God longer to get his nostrils flared.* Good anger is a crock pot instead of a rapid boil.

-One of the things we can do to cultivate a *slowness to anger* is to **take time-outs.** We often think of time-outs for children and they are excellent for children. But adults need time-outs as well. My wife does a great job with this. Me, not so much. I want to just go at it, which can confuse good anger with bad anger. My wife will often say - *I need to take a break or I am going to say something I regret.* That is a commitment to being slow to anger. Time allows us to better distill what is good anger and what is bad anger. **Good anger is slow. It takes a long time to heat up.**

Under control

-Second, **good anger is under control**. Psalm 78:38 says, *Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; often he restrained his anger, and did not stir up all his wrath.* (Psalm 78:38) God often restrains His anger and does not stir up all His wrath. God's anger is under control.

-We see this same wisdom from the sages of Scripture. *A fool gives full vent to anger but the wise quietly holds it back.* (Proverbs 29:11) Also, *People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.* (Proverbs 14:29, NLT) **Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit**. If our anger is out of control, it is most likely bad anger. There are times in my life where I got so angry, I felt like I wasn't in control. That was bad anger. Good anger is like having our anger on a remote control. It does what we want it to do. Most often our love is dialed down and restrained so that it can be most effective. Is our anger under control? Or is it controlling us?

Loving

-Third, **good anger is loving**. **Good anger loves God and loves others**. Back to God's revelation in Exodus. *God is slow to anger and abounding in love.* The two descriptors are side-by-side to complement one another. Good anger is a necessary part of love. *A world without anger is a world without love.*

-An Elementary school once gave their students a handout that included advice on dealing with bullying. It included 9 rules. Here are a few of the rules.

#1 Refuse to get mad.

#2 Treat the person who is being mean as if they are trying to help you.

#6 If someone hurts you...do not get angry

#8 Don't be a sore loser

#9 Learn to laugh at yourself

-**This is the worst bullying advice ever given. No joke.** Anybody that says there is no place for anger in our world has never been bullied, abused, oppressed or assaulted. When we experience deep injustice, we yearn for someone to respond with love. ***A world without anger is a world without love.***

-Paul tells the Roman churches, *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.* (Romans 12:9) Hatred toward evil, a good anger directed towards injustice, is a byproduct of love. It is a holy or righteous anger that mirrors God's heart and seeks the very best for everyone. Three times in the book of Amos, the prophet depicts God as a **roaring lion**. God 'roared' for the oppression, violence and injustice among the people of Israel. Things were not as they were meant to be. It was a roar of anger, but also a roar of love. *A world without anger is a world without love.*

-Another way to think about it is that good anger in a relationship is deepest assurance we are loved. I have met with countless couples over the years who are experiencing relationship challenges. Whenever anger is expressed by one or both of the parties, I know there is hope. Remember—the opposite of love is not anger but indifference. It's when both people are checked out that I get really concerned. **Good anger evidences love**. It is the parent angrily telling their child not to play with matches or chase a ball into the road. It is anger that lovingly declares *that is not what is best for you. That will harm you*. Good anger is loving. It is not self-seeking. It seeks the good of others. We desperately need that kind of loving anger in our world. *A world without anger is a world without love.*

Restores

-Finally, **good anger restores**. Let's return to our passage. Mark tells us that Jesus said to the man – *stretch out your hand*. When the man did so, we are told *his hand was completely restored*. Jesus' anger restored. **Jesus' anger always led to restoration.**

-This is a vital point. **Good anger is not just getting fired up that things aren't right in the world.** That is only part of good anger. **Good anger also seeks to restore what is not right with the world.** Good anger rolls up its shirtsleeves and get actively involved in bringing restoration. **Anger that does not bring restoration is not good anger.** Bad anger or toxic anger is always destructive. It tears down. **Bad anger doesn't leave things better.** It makes things worse. **Good anger always seeks to restore people and things to what they were intended to be.** It builds up. It always makes things better.

-Bad anger is the house sitter who leaves your house in disarray. When you return, it is worse than when you left. Dirty dishes are piled up in the sink. Your plants are dead. The dog has lost 10 pounds because it wasn't fed. You don't even want to look in the bathroom. **Bad anger leaves destruction in its wake.**

Good anger is the house sitter that leaves things better. The dishes are not only clean but reorganized to better fit the cabinets. The frig and shelves aren't empty but stocked with all your favorite things. The sheets are clean on the bed. The carpets are vacuumed. The bathroom is sparkling. Those house projects that were half-done for the last six months are complete. **Good anger leaves things better.**

-Most of you are familiar with **MADD** which is an acronym that stands for **Mothers Against Drunk Drivers**. This is an organization born out of good anger. It was formed by a group of mothers who helplessly watched their sons and daughters killed in the streets by people who recklessly drank too much alcohol and then decided to drive. These mothers said – **that is not right.**

The founder of MADD is Candy Lightner. A drunken driver plowed into her 13-year old daughter Cari leaving her dead. Candy was shell shocked. Then she was enraged when the judge gave the repeat offender a light sentence.



Her good anger led her to seek restoration for a system that put other sons and daughters in harm's way. They began by taking turns sitting in the courtrooms where the cases of other drunk driving homicides were being considered. They wanted the judge and the attorneys to look them in the eye before setting the defendant free to drive again. Then they turned their attention to lobbying state legislators to write stricter laws against drunk drivers. They took to the airways and TV stations to tell their story. They established a national organization that grew to over 400 chapters and birthed **Students Against Drunk Driving**. Their good anger led to the restoration of a broken system; an action that has saved countless lives – lives of victims and lives of potential killers. **Good anger is zealous love that seeks to restore. It builds up instead of tearing down.**

Martin Luther King, JR.

-Our world has experienced a lot of anger over the last six months regarding racial injustice. As an update, New Hope has a team of people getting trained and equipped to figure out how to best be part of this important conversation and bring much-needed healing and change. I am in the process of listening and learning myself. We have a lengthy list of resources on our website. I encourage you to join me in this journey.

Some of that anger has been bad anger as it has led to violence and destruction. **That is not the way forward.** But much of the anger has been good anger that has built slowly, is rooted in love for the vulnerable, and is seeking restoration.

-Martin Luther King Jr. is a wonderful model of good anger at work. I am hopeful a new generation will follow his lead as it looks to carry on his legacy. Nearly 60 years ago, Dr. King wrote a now-famous letter entitled *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*. It was written April 16, 1963. It was intended for his white pastor friends who privately encouraged him they were on his side, but refused to publicly support him. This is only a small portion of that letter. It is readily available online. I encourage you to read it in its entirety. As a white pastor, I find these words are challenging to ponder in our present moment.

-Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six year old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five year old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross county drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are), and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"—then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.

There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

-Dr. King is undeniably angry. And rightly so. But it is good anger. It is slow, very slow. It is under control. He is thoughtful and reasonable. His anger seeks to restore a world that is broken.

Dr. King longed for that beautiful community that Jesus pointed towards. Dr. King is also loving. Listen to how he ends his letter. He concludes with these words,

If I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth and indicates an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil-rights leader but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother.

Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched

communities, and in some not-too-distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.

Yours for the cause of peace and brotherhood.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

-That is good anger. It is much needed anger. *For a world without anger is a world without love.*

Closing

Practice - check your anger

-Our practice this week is to ***check your anger***. Determine whether your anger is good anger or bad anger. It is dangerous when people think their bad anger is good anger. **Those people are in the grip of bad anger and are using it as a righteous club to emotionally and spiritually batter and bully those in their lives.** *Those are blind and dangerous people.* The reality is that much of the anger we experience is bad anger. It is so essential to check our anger to know if we are in the grip of bad anger, or are experiencing good anger. It is a matter of life and death.

-When you experience anger this week, run it through the checklist to determine if it is good anger or bad anger. Pull back the curtain on your anger to see what lies behind it.

Is my anger slow? Has it taken a long time to heat up?

Is it under control? Or is it controlling me?

Is it loving? Is it seeking the good of other or is it self-seeking?

Is it seeking to restore? Is it building up or tearing down?

If you can't check those 4 boxes, then you are likely dealing with bad anger. And bad anger will eat you alive. If it checks those four boxes then you can thank God for energizing you with good anger that will leave the world a better place. *For a world without anger is a world without love.*