

# CHAPTER 4, SESSION 15: LEARNING TO LIVE WITHOUT ANGER

## CHAPTER CHALLENGE

With this chapter, and the chapters that follow, the great challenge is not in the command itself—in this case, “every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.” The challenge is to keep our focus on the condition of the heart. Over and over, it will be tempting to turn to the external evidence of what is happening in the heart. What the group must strive to do is acknowledge the external results (getting angry) but more importantly recognize the narratives that lead to that external result. This focus is more abstract and less measurable, but if we are to follow Jesus, this must be our goal.

As the leader, be mindful of any connections to the first book in the series, *The Good and Beautiful God*, because our narratives have been under construction since then, and hopefully there is evidence of the fruit of the new narratives we learned about God during that book. For example, as we grow in seeing God as a loving Father rather than an angry judge, we will become more loving and less angry.

## SUPPLIES

- ☞ Photocopies of the handout “Exploring Anger” for each person in the group

## WELCOME

## RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

## 5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

## PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

*Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.  
O, Divine Master,  
grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love;  
for it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

—The Prayer of St. Francis

## SOUL-TRAINING [10 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Use the questions below to help you process your experience of the soul-shaping exercise of Sabbath keeping.

1. Were you able to observe a Sabbath this week? If so, describe what you did and how you felt about it. Remember it is acceptable to start small!
2. Were you able to experience a connection between Sabbath and anger? If so, how are they related for you?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from your Sabbath rest?

## ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [25 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER is that anger is caused by unmet expectations mixed with fear.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. This chapter opens with the author's honest account of getting angry during a trip. What aspects of the author's story can you relate to?
2. The author gives us multiple "false imperative narratives" (FINs) (p. 73). Which FIN is most common in your life? How does it lead you to anger?
3. "Jesus' narrative is that God permits nothing to happen to us that he cannot redeem and use for good. In the kingdom of heaven God is always near. We are never alone and never need to be afraid. When I live with this reality deep in my mind and heart, anger cannot get a grip on me" (p. 77). Do you have any evidence in your own life of anger diminishing as you come to know that God is near to us and working for our good? If so and you are comfortable doing so, describe your experience to the group.
4. In the chapter we read this definition for righteous anger: "Righteous anger consists in getting angry at the things that anger God, and then seeking a proper remedy to correct the wrong" (p. 78). Give examples of righteous anger in today's world.

## BREAK [5 minutes]

Due to time constraints, this week does not include an "Engaging the Word" segment.

## EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION [40 minutes]

The goal of this week's "Experiencing Transformation" segment is to help everyone in the class take ownership of their anger, where it comes from, and what can be done about it. To simplify this process we have created the handout "Exploring Anger." As the leader, monitor the time, allowing 15 minutes for journaling and 15 minutes for discussion in groups of three or four, followed by 10 minutes of reflection in the overall group.

Distribute a photocopy of the handout to each person, explaining to the group that they have 15 minutes to work through the four steps.

After 15 minutes of silent reflection, invite everyone into groups of three or four. Ask everyone to share what they learned from this process. They do not have to share what caused their anger unless they want to. Encourage each group to end their time with prayer for one another as they work through this difficult emotion.

End this experience by having the groups come together as one group and discuss any highlights from the exercise and the conversation that followed.

Conclude the activity by reminding the group that earlier in this study they looked closely at the nature of God and used specific spiritual practices to help see God the way Jesus saw God. From *The Good and Beautiful God*, the author's understanding of The Lord's Prayer in chapter 2, "God is Good," as well as "living and breathing" Psalm 23 from chapter 3, "God is Generous," are two excellent practices that help change our narratives.

## GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude by having one person in your group read the serenity prayer aloud.

### SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.  
Living one day at a time;  
Enjoying one moment at a time;  
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;  
Taking, as He did, this sinful world  
as it is, not as I would have it;  
Trusting that He will make all things right  
if I surrender to His Will;  
That I may be reasonably happy in this life  
and supremely happy with Him  
Forever in the next.  
Amen.

—Reinhold Niebuhr and William Spence

### FOR THE COMING WEEK

- ☞ Read chapter 5, “Learning to Live Without Lust.”
- ☞ The soul-training practice is a 48-hour media fast. For this exercise, like Sabbath, participants will need to adjust their schedules early in the week.

## EXPLORING ANGER

The author gives multiple insights into the cause of anger and how to deal with it. To help apply this teaching to your life, work through the steps below.

1. List three or four times when you were angry during the last few weeks. (This list is for your eyes only.)
2. Identify the unmet expectations and fears that were at work for each item on your list.
3. What false imperative narratives (p. 73 in *The Good and Beautiful Life*) were at work within you?

Examples of false imperative narratives are:

- ☞ “I am alone.”
- ☞ “Things always have to go as I want them.”
- ☞ “Something terrible will happen if I make a mistake.”
- ☞ “I must be in control all of the time.”
- ☞ “Life must always be fair and just.”
- ☞ “I need to anticipate everything that will happen to me today.”
- ☞ “I need to be perfect all of the time.”

4. Use the series of questions below to discern a proper response for the items on your list when you were angry. Invite God to give you new insight into handling those situations.

1. Is this matter really worth my attention?  
If no, then give it to God and walk away.  
If yes, explore question 2.
2. Is my anger justified?  
If no, then give it to God and walk away.  
If yes, explore question 3.
3. Do I have the right or ability to control the situation?  
If no, then give it to God and walk away.  
If yes, then explore step 4.
4. Take appropriate action, led by the Spirit.