

“It’s All the Rage”

Matthew 21:12-17 and Ephesians 4:25-32

Series: New Year, New You, Part 2 – Live Fearless, Week 3. Anger

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Forget the restaurant, the flowers, the gifts, the movie. For your next date night or anniversary book some time in a “Rage Room.” It’s the latest fad sweeping across the country. There’s a Rage Room right here in Philadelphia...the city of brotherly love. You suit up with goggles, gloves, hard hat, protective body suit and sturdy boots. Next you select the implement of your choice: golf club, sledgehammer, shovel, baseball bat. Once you enter the Rage Room it’s hammer time. You smash VCR tapes, keyboards, plasma screens, playsets and pasta strainers. For some reason a lot of people like to break printers. The owners of the rage room rev you up with loud music and shouts like, “Crush it into crumbs! Smash it to smithereens!” Choose from three options: Fast n Furious (5 minutes), Raging Bull (15 minutes) or Savage Beast Mode (25 minutes).

One Philly company booked their holiday party in the rage room. They didn’t take their work stress and office politics out on each other. They did share these helpful tips.

- BYOJ (bring your own junk) to smash
- Expect to sweat – after it’s over you’ll feel good but you won’t smell good.
- Keep an eye on your partner – you don’t want to have a three stooges moment
- This is not an alternative to therapy – The owner of the rage room says,

I want people to take care of themselves and to not think that breaking stuff, outside of this type of environment, is fine. This is just a way to channel pent-up negative energy and release it.¹

Channeling and releasing pent-up negative energy. That’s a fancy way of saying: blow your stack, flip out, run amok, go berserk. Anger. We all feel it. It’s one of the most powerful forces on earth. It’s also the most dangerous. Anger can divide marriages, break up families, inflame riots and send nations to war. All of us experience anger though we may express it differently. Some explode with rage. Others simmer and seethe. Still others bury it deep like a landmine silently waiting for a trigger to set it off.

Christians get angry. I would even go so far to say God is the Creator of anger. He added it to our emotional spectrum for a spiritual purpose. Used constructively, anger moves us to confront evil, to correct injustice, to change course.

¹ <https://billypenn.com/2018/12/19/10-things-to-know-before-visiting-phillys-only-rage-room/>

Yet like most God-given emotions, the way we use anger is often the problem. Yelling, screaming, slamming, smashing, hitting: that's aggressive anger. Last week furious winds whipped through our neighborhoods knocking down trees and power lines. I came home Monday night to see siding ripped off my house. Thankfully one of my neighbors ran down the street to capture my whirlwind-driven vinyl kite. Like those savage winds, the fury of anger wreaks havoc in our homes and communities. A woman told old time preacher Billy Sunday that her angry outbursts were okay. "There's nothing wrong with losing my temper," she said. "I blow up, and then it's all over." Billy Sunday replied, "So does a shotgun and look at the damage it leaves behind!" The other type, passive anger, is when you stuff, hide or hold it in until you implode with depression or passive aggression.

We are in the third week of our Living Fearless series. Along with Anxiety and Depression, I hear many say Anger is the emotion they find hardest to handle. Those with anger issues sometimes admit when they are raging they feel powerful, even euphoric. It's like a drug or an out-of-body experience. Yet when it is over and they survey the wreckage they become overwhelmed with shame, guilt and regret. Aggressive or passive, explosive or implusive, misused anger only causes misery. The rage got out of the room.

Scripture does not tell us to never be angry. Instead, Paul, quoting the Old Testament, says, "In your anger do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26 from Psalm 4:4). In other words, there is a healthy way to express anger. But how do we know when we cross the line of sin? One common definition of sin is anything that causes a breakdown in our relationship with God or neighbor. The goal is to release the pressure of anger and yet restore the relationship. There is no better model for how to handle anger than Jesus.

Wait a moment! Jesus got mad? Tender, compassionate, meek, mild: those are the descriptions of Jesus we hear most often. It's easier to think about the sweet Child lying in the manger, the gentle Shepherd shouldering a lamb, the Great Physician healing the sick. Doesn't Jesus passively go to the Cross like a Lamb to the slaughter?

Yes, Jesus does get mad. And what makes Him angry is anything which separates us from God and neighbor. In short, sin makes Him mad. But He expresses anger in a variety of ways which are appropriate for the situation. When the Pharisees stubbornly love their rules more than their suffering neighbors,

Jesus 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." (Mark 3:5)

When the well-meaning disciples push away parents with their children, Jesus is indignant. He demands they let the little ones come to Him (Mark 10:13-16).

Jesus is most zealous when He does some housecleaning in the Temple. Just before Passover, the busy courtyard around the Temple is jammed with Jewish pilgrims. The continuous drone of worshipers is abruptly interrupted by shouts. At once the crowds retreat to watch a man upend several tables. Coins shimmer and scatter across the stone

pavement. Their owners curse the man with one hand and scoop up their assets with the other. A flock of newly freed doves soars over everyone's heads, while the sheep and cattle are driven in a stampede from the sanctuary. As the uproar swirls about the lone figure in the eye of the storm He cries, "It is written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers'" (Matthew 21:13). What enflames Jesus' anger? God's House is not a marketplace for dirty dealing. It's a place for prayer. Anything which comes between us and God is sin and sin makes Jesus mad.

Temples are made for prayer. The temple of your life is also made for prayer. As we've seen in this series your body is a Temple of the Holy Spirit. If anything blocks your prayer connection with God, if any obstacle, including anger, stands between you and God or you and someone else, then Jesus needs to remove it.

The crucial step with anger is not to explode or implode but to implore God in prayer. After Jesus cleans out God's House, the blind and lame are healed, the children shout joyful praises and the critics are silenced. The Lord wants to do the same in the temple of your body. Offering your anger to God in prayer allows the healing to begin, releases the child-like quality of joy and quiets the inner voices of criticism. How do you give your anger to God in prayer? Let me first say that if you feel or if someone has said you have trouble expressing or managing your anger, I recommend you talk with a counselor and/or find an anger management support group. Anger is a very powerful force and you need others to help you diffuse this bomb. Releasing anger in a healthy way will improve your life and the lives of those around you. For the everyday anger and irritation we all face here are some directions from Scripture:

1. **Get Rid of ME Attitudes.** Paul writes,

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Let's think for a minute: why do I get angry? Usually it's because what I want doesn't happen or what I don't want does happen. I want to be successful at work. I want people to agree with my political opinions. I want this slow car to get out of my way. I want my kids to behave, go to sleep, stop fighting in the backseat. I want my spouse to listen to me, to help with the house. At the same time there is a lot I don't want. I don't want to get sick. I don't want you to interrupt me. I don't want you to hang out with that crowd. I don't want to hear your political views. I don't want to be loaded down with extra work. I don't want you to leave me.

ME – it's all about ME. Anger and resentment are ignited when something I want doesn't happen or something I don't want does happen. Life should go according to my plans and desires and when it doesn't I fume or fuss, I smolder or shout, I rant or rage. Is it wrong to have desires, to want circumstances to go according to our plans? No. God made us with the ability to plan, dream and desire.

The problem arises when we demand things go our way. These are what Paul calls “deceitful desires” or desires which lie to us. There are a lot of these but the most basic lies are: I am in charge, I am in control, It’s all about me. These are lies. Despite what we think, none of us is really in charge, none of us has complete control and it’s not about me. Not only is it a lie, it’s a terrible way to live. The ME attitude puts you on a collision course with others who think it’s all about them. The inevitable crash causes anger.

What do we do with the ME attitude? Get rid of it. Like an old dirty shirt, Paul tells us to take it off and throw it away. Then he says to renew our minds with a new attitude – the attitude that God is in charge and God has control. Put on the new self that looks like Jesus. When you believe God is in charge you don’t ask, “What do I want?” but “What does God want in this situation?” Say to the Holy Spirit, “Help me do God’s will.”

2. Clean Out the Anger Closet: Paul says,

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” (Ephesians 4:31).

Stuffed away in our emotional closet are a variety of angry feelings. Whenever you feel disturbed, open that closet door and see what’s stashed in there. Paul gives us a check list

- a. Bitterness – spiteful, longstanding resentment
- b. Rage – immediate flare-up
- c. Anger – long-term, sullen hostility
- d. Brawling – quarrelsome shouting; screaming arguments
- e. Slander – insulting someone else behind his or her back
- f. Malice – wishing or actually plotting against another

If you have any of these cluttering up your emotional closet right now ask yourself this question: Without denying the other person’s responsibility or fault, what is my part in the conflict? What did I do to contribute to the situation? What can I change to make it better on my side of the street?

3. Settle Up before Sundown: Paul advises us, “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:26-27). Try to deal with the anger as close to the fire that sparked it. Go and talk to the person as soon as possible. The longer you nurse it, the more Satan can use it to his advantage. I just finished a book which reveals the untold story of how the world came to the very brink of nuclear war in November 1983 all because of huge misunderstandings by Soviet and American leaders. The devil was having a field day. Make peace today and close the door on the devil.

4. Listen Before You Leap: As you to make peace on your side it’s important to listen to their side. James writes, “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be

quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19). Most of us are quick to speak and slow to listen. The reverse works much better.

5. Forgive Your Opponent: Paul concludes, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). The antidote for Anger is Compassion. Compassion means to “feel another’s feelings,” to see and feel the situation from their point of view. The best way to release the pressure-cooker is to pray for your opponent and, eventually, to forgive them, just as Christ forgave you. And then to let go of the anger.

Christian Psychologist Larry Crabb tells about a friend who grew up in an angry family. Mealtimes were either silent or sarcastic. Down the street was an old-fashioned house with a big porch where a happy family lived. When Larry’s friend was ten, he excused himself from the dinner table as soon as he could without being yelled at, and walked to the old-fashioned house. If he arrived during dinnertime, he would crawl under the porch and just sit there, listening to the sounds of laughter. Larry says,

When he told me this story, I asked him to imagine what it would have been like if the father in the house somehow knew he was huddled beneath the porch and sent his son to invite him in. I asked him to envision what it would mean to him to accept the invitation, to sit at the table, to accidentally spill his glass of water, and hear the father roar with delight, "Get him more water! And a dry shirt! I want him to enjoy the meal!"²

If you grew up with anger, if you are in the grip of anger, the change begins when you hear God’s Son say to you, “You don’t have to hide under there. Come on out. My Father set a place at the table for you.” Ready to leave the Rage Room?

² Larry Crabb, *Connecting* (Word, 1997)