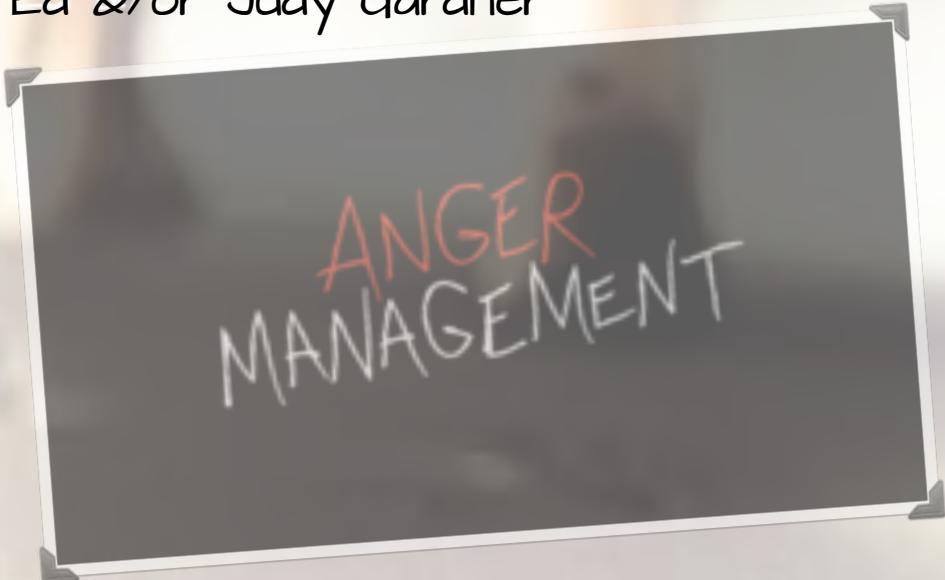


January 8-12, 2024 Edition

Following The Year^(s) Of ^Jesus Part 106

What's The Deal With Anger?

By: Ed &/or Judy Gardner



When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: (These reflections are from a lesson I did on anger a few years ago and since Aniela was going to talk about anger this weekend I thought I'd dust them off and use them again). Today we begin a week looking at a topic that will make some of us shake with trepidation- anger. Why? Because so many of us either have a real problem with anger ourselves or we know someone who does but won't deal with it. And so we are going to look at the wisdom of anger and look at what the Bible says about anger and how it tells us we should deal with our anger.

Spoiler alert- sometimes anger is good. So to keep from confusion I'm going to use the word "rage" when talking about negative, toxic, destructive and dysfunctional anger so I don't get too confused (and so I don't get too confusing). So to get started let's remind ourselves of our definition of wisdom (since this is after all the year of wisdom for us) and remind ourselves of our commitment that we made back in January:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)

What happens when the paths God shows us to take mean dealing with issues that we really don't want to tackle? What happens when trusting Him with all of my heart and seeking His will in all I do means I have to look at and work on parts of myself that I'd really rather not work on right now? Well, it depends on whether I want God's wisdom working its way into my life, doesn't it? I can't have one without the other. If I refuse to do my part it will cut me off from the wisdom I so crave. And yes, I know- it's not easy. Never has been.

When Jesus launched His ministry He gave a speech that detailed what a life dedicated to following Him would look like. We call it the Sermon On The Mount and it launched a movement that has changed this world more than any other movement in the history of this planet. We'll come back to something He said in that speech on Friday but let me just paraphrase His message that day to this ragtag band of misfits who were considering whether to follow Him or not. Basically He described the kind of life He would lead. A life that loved the unlovable, forgave the unforgivable and accepted the unacceptable. He told this band of misfits that He would have enemies that hated Him and when that happened He would love those enemies. These enemies would oppose Him, they would attack Him, they would hurt Him and ultimately kill Him and all along the way He would love and accept and forgive these enemies. And then He drops it on this group of people who are considering whether or not to throw their lot in with Jesus. He says that when all of this happens do you know what I expect you to do? When all this happens my little band of misfits, you will love the people who killed me. And then they will oppose you. They will persecute you and attack you and hurt you and they will even kill some of you and then, do you know what you will do? You will love them and pray for them and forgive them.

Sounds like a great idea, right? But that's exactly what He's calling us to. No use sugar coating it- Jesus is calling His followers to a radical way of going about life. Once when His followers were looking at the world from the perspective that everyone sees the world from (the way that EVERYBODY knows is how the world works) he gathered them together and told them that while they were correct that the world was operating in the way they thought

and while they were operating correctly from within that particular world view Jesus had a message for His little band of ragtag misfits who had chosen to follow Him:

But among you it will be different. Matthew 20:26 (NLT)

Nobody's saying that Jesus' way of handling anger isn't counter cultural and counter intuitive. It is. Completely. No use sugar coating it. Jesus is calling you and me to a radically different way of looking at life and (in the case of this week's lesson) handling our anger. So before we embark on Jesus' (and the Proverbs) teaching on anger management each one of us has to decide whether we are really committed to the definition of wisdom we're living with in 2018:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)

Tuesday Reflection: You're still here? Whoa! You are indeed a radical. People talk about how Christianity is for wimps but have those people live through this week looking at how we are to handle anger and get back to me. This is not for the faint of heart. So- anger. Let's start today talking about the destructive form of anger and its impact on our lives. Because the Bible has a TON to say about it.

First off if you're just skimming through the book of Proverbs you'll find lots of consequences that go along with rage (the negative, destructive form of anger). First off you'll notice that rage doesn't just hurt the people we rage at- it hurts some else too:

Don't be quick to fly off the handle. Anger boomerangs. You can spot a fool by the lumps on his head. Ecclesiastes 7:9 (MES)

Don't you just love the Message paraphrase of the Bible? What's that verse really saying? That rage hurts the one who's raging. How does it do that? Several ways but first lets talk about rage's impact on the rager (not sure if that's actually a word but if you've been reading any of my reflections for much time at all you know that's not really a deal breaker for me which can cause some people to get a little hot under the collar- especially if grammar is important to them. But you know what they say, "people don't think grammar be like it is, but it do."). Some of you might be feeling something after reading that line. Be careful because rage (not just anger but rage) will impact your health:

A peaceful heart leads to a healthy body; jealousy is like cancer in the bones.
Proverbs 14:29-30 (NLT)

New studies are showing that rage impacts the human body more than just about any other negative emotion. Heart attacks, high blood pressure, strokes, liver and kidney issues, ulcers... I could go on and on. Rage impacts our very bodies negatively if we don't learn how to deal with it. Another way rage harms the rager and leaves metaphorical bumps on his/her head is through our relationships:

Be careful that none of you fails to respond to the grace which God gives, for if he does there can very easily spring up in him a bitter spirit which is not only bad in itself but can also poison the lives of many others. Hebrews 12:15 (Ph)

Our rage doesn't just impact us- it impacts our community. It infects our marriages, our families, our churches, our neighborhoods- it can infect our nations. It causes fights, division, dissension and even wars. Why? Not just because of the rage itself (although the impact of rage is bad enough)- it's actually much worse than we would have thought. Rage also impacts the ability of the rager to make wise decisions which is just going to make things even worse as time goes on and impact his/her health and relationships even more:

A fool gives full vent to anger, but a wise person quietly holds it back. Proverbs 29:11 (NLT)

Over and over we will see in the Proverbs that learning to manage my anger leads to wisdom but giving in to my anger leads to foolishness. Does that seem like enough reasons to want to learn to deal with and manage my anger? Does it seem pretty bad what rage does? But wait- there's more! Rage also hides itself:

A short-tempered man must bear his own penalty; you can't do much to help him. If you try once, you must try a dozen times! Proverbs 19:19 (TLB)

Rage becomes a self perpetuating emotion. It's an addiction every bit as real as alcohol or drug addictions. It hides itself within the mind of the rager (not to everyone else though, right? Everyone else sees it plainly) and causes a vicious cycle where our rage causes people to behave a certain way towards us and at that point we can either look at our own short comings or else we have to redirect that feeling of foolishness back onto the person we exploded on in the first place. Eventually it will blind us to our own rage and we'll just spend our lives wondering what's wrong with everybody else. Here's a pro tip from the book of Proverbs- if one person tells you you're a horse's patootie you can dismiss them. If two people tell you you're a horse's patootie consider it. If three people call you a horse's patootie- buy a saddle (ok- that's not from the Bible- it's actually a quote from Will Rogers but there's deep wisdom in there even if it's not straight out of the Bible the concept is there).

Tomorrow we'll continue to look at what the Bible has to say about managing anger but for today spend some time thinking about how well you manage your anger and whether maybe you should be buying a saddle ;o)

Wednesday Reflection: So I'm assuming that if you're still here you are interested (and I'd probably say devoted) to the concept of following Jesus because yesterday was a bit brutal- especially if anger is something you struggle with. Well, let's spend a day coming down just a bit, ok? How will we do that you ask? By recognizing that the Bible says that not all anger is bad:

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. Proverbs 16:32 (NKJV)

The Bible doesn't suggest we live an anger free life. What it says is, be slow to anger. Being slow to anger is the key to getting good and angry (see what I did there? "Good" and angry? Like you can do both at the same time? Too much explanation for you? Don't need that much pointing it out, sorry about that but sometimes I really amuse myself ;o) That description of being slow-to-anger is used a bunch of times in the Bible:

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. James 1:9 (NLT)

In fact being slow-to-anger is a phrase that is used describing God many times in the Bible. In fact, once when Moses was on the mountain with God he asked to see God's glory and God agreed (sort of). He told Moses that he wouldn't survive seeing God's unfiltered glory and so He just gave Moses a glimpse. And just before He passed before Moses He described Himself:

"Yahweh! The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. Exodus 34:6 (NLT)

God is slow-to-anger. It's part of His character. Part of His nature. And if we're going to become like Him (which remember is what it takes if we expect God to share His wisdom/power/strength/knowledge/presence with us) then becoming slow-to-anger is going to have to become part of our nature too. But why does God get angry? Have you ever thought about that? It's not because He feels slighted. God isn't petty. God doesn't really need us. He created us for the same reason humans decide to start a family. Because He wanted someone to pour His love into. He wanted a relationship with us. What makes God angry is when we do something (or something is done to us) that threatens that relationship. Love in its purest form always reacts with anger when the person we love is threatened.

Sin is the infection that separates us from God. He hates it. He hates its effects in our lives and on the world. He decided to do something about it- He declared war. Not on us. Not on the sinners. He declared war on sin. Have you ever heard the phrase, "hate the sin, love the sinner?" That or something similar gets trumpeted all the time. It can start to sound trite but that's exactly what God does/did. He went to war against sin but He didn't do it by just destroying all of us who ever sinned- not even the folks who perished in the flood were casualties of God deciding to just start over (we don't have time to really delve very far into that statement but I'll give you the scripture reference):

Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit. So he went and preached to the spirits in prison- those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood. And that water is a picture of baptism, which now saves you, not by removing dirt from your body, but as a response to God from a clean conscience. It is effective because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 3:18-21 (NLT)

What exactly does that mean? I'm not exactly sure but it sure does appear that God has a plan for the people who died in the flood, doesn't it? And if that's true then that means that even the flood (which was a response to the ravages of sin on this world) wasn't a nuclear option- it was a surgical strike meant to deal with the sin without destroying the sinner. I know that sounds crazy considering those people did "die" in the flood but God sees things from a much bigger perspective than you and I do. I don't know that we will ever fully understand that verse but I can tell you this- it's an instance where God's attack on sin focuses not on the sinner but on the sin itself.

So now back to us. Good anger attacks the root of the problem- the sin. Destructive anger attacks the person. Good anger is a surgical strike hoping to restore relationship- destructive

anger is a nuclear blast intended to hurt. We'll have lots of opportunity in the coming months to address positive anger but for this week I just wanted to point it out more than anything. See you tomorrow.

Thursday Reflection: Ok- so let's say I'm on board with what the Bible has to say about destructive anger or rage and I want to pursue God's wisdom on the matter. What does the Bible say I should do about rage/destructive anger? Well, it says to strip it off:

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Ephesians 4:30-31 (NIV)

That phrase, "get rid of" is literally the word used to explain the removing of clothes. The Bible suggests we become "strippers" in a sense. Now I've got your attention, don't I? I know that word has a fairly charged meaning in our society but this is exactly what God suggests we do with our rage/destructive anger (along with many other destructive habits/tendencies we have but there will be plenty of time for those later in the year ;o)- strip them off.

Get rid of them like old rags. Over and over this language is used:

Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives. James 1:20-21 (NLT)

Get rid of it. Strip it off. And when should I do it?

Now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander... for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Colossians 3:8-9 (NLT)

Now. Right now. You can't afford to wait. Why not? Because rage/destructive behavior is toxic and is infecting all of us. It's killing all of us who aren't learning to manage it and it's destroying relationships:

Don't sin by letting anger gain control over you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a mighty foothold to the Devil. Ephesians 4:26-27 (NLT)

We've got to get rid of our rage/destructive anger. But we can't just get rid of one toxic emotion/behavior/attitude without filling that empty space up with something else. Otherwise we're just setting ourselves up for defeat. Jesus tells this story in Matthew chapter 12 about a demon that is cast out of a man:

When an evil spirit leaves a person, it goes into the desert, seeking rest but finding none. Then it says, 'I will return to the person I came from.' So it returns and finds its former home empty, swept, and in order. Then the spirit finds seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they all enter the person and live there. And so that person is worse off than before. Matthew 12:43-45 (NLT)

So don't think that all you have to do is "stop being angry" all the time. First of all you can't do that just on its own. Second of all even if you try eventually you'll snap and the words of Jesus from that story we just read will become hauntingly true- we are worse off than before. So what do we fill that empty spot up with? That's what tomorrow's reflection will focus on.

Friday Reflection: So here we are- ready to discover what the Bible says we should do to overcome rage/destructive anger in your life? Well we saw the first step yesterday which was to “strip off” that rage. The second step then is to “put on” something else and in this case that something else we’re being invited to clothe ourselves with is Jesus Himself. In Colossians chapter 3 right after Paul tells us to “strip off” our old nature (which included rage) he says this:

...Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. Colossians 3:8-10 (NLT)

Mind. Blown. What is he talking about? What’s this new nature we’re being invited to wear? It’s the nature of Jesus Himself:

For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus. And all who have been united with Christ in baptism have put on Christ, like putting on new clothes. Galatians 3:26-27 (NLT)

Clothes with Christ. The word for “clothed” was a theatre word. In the ancient world you didn’t really have character actors like we do today. Today if someone is going to play Helen of Troy or Ajax or Odysseus from Homer’s Odyssey they dress up like the person but you can still see their face. In the movie Troy Brad Pitt played Achilles. He did his best to make you think you were watching Achilles and not Brad Pitt but you never lost sight of the fact that the person you were watching was indeed Brad Pitt. That’s character acting. But in the ancient world actors “clothed” themselves with whatever character they were portraying. If someone was going to play Achilles then they wore a costume complete with mask that everybody in the ancient world knew was Achilles. You had no idea what actor was under the mask because you really couldn’t see them- all you could see when you looked at them was Achilles- the character they had closed themselves with.

That’s what Paul is saying in Galatians 3 about clothing ourselves with Christ. When we were baptized we were clothed with Christ. Now when God looks at me He doesn’t see weak, flawed, messed up Ed Gardner- He sees Jesus. I mean, He still knows it’s me but from a spiritual/legal/justified point of view all He sees is Christ. That means I can be a child of God in spite of my ongoing struggles with sin. Why? Because of what Jesus did for me. On the cross Jesus took the wrath of God (not wrath directed at me but directed at sin itself) and satisfied the penalty for sin- death, darkness, separation and un-creation. Because of that now I can live in harmony with God and I have hope of overcoming this other nature that I struggle with everyday that included rage.

But what does that look like? It looks like Jesus. Remember on Monday when I told you that Jesus was inviting us to a radical new way of living this life. That it was not a life for wimps and that it would require massive amounts of courage and strength? Now’s when you need to remember that. Here’s what living a life covered in Jesus’ nature looks like in regards to rage/destructive anger:

You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemies.’ But I say to you, love your enemies. Pray for those who hurt you. If you do this, you will be true children of your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:43-45 (NCV)

Say what? But that would never work... people will just take advantage of you. Then what? Then you love them and pray for them and forgive them. This isn't an invitation to being a doormat and that will take time to recognize but if you want to know what this has looked like in the past look to the civil rights movement of the 1960s particularly as seen in the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I read a speech of his the other day that struck me to my core. I can't really copy it all out here for you but here's a couple of things that really struck me:

"The great military leaders of the past have gone, and their empires have crumbled and burned to ashes. But the empire of Jesus, built solidly and majestically on the foundation of love, is still growing. It started with a small group of dedicated men, who, through the inspiration of their Lord, were able to shake the hinges from the gates of the Roman Empire and carry the gospel into all the world."

"Jesus is eternally right. History is replete with the bleached bones of nations that refused to listen to him. May we in the twentieth century hear and follow his words-before it is too late. May we solemnly realize that we shall never be true sons and daughters of our heavenly Father until we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us."

History has taught us that Martin Luther King jr had his issues. But whatever you think of the man I don't think you can doubt his grasp of the power of forgiveness and grace. And until you and I understand that same power we will never truly overcome our rage and the devastation it will bring to our health, our relationships, our wisdom and our self control. How can I ever forgive those who hurt me? By remembering how much I've been forgiven. By remembering how much Jesus did for me- how much He's forgiven me. I'll never forget another quote I read from Martin Luther King when asked why he was so quick to forgive those who hurt him:

"I find myself too often in need of the grace of God to ever refuse it to another."

Man I feel that deeply. Me too, MLK, me too. Whatever else might be said about the man- we could all learn this from him. You and I will never be true sons and daughters of our heavenly Father until we learn to love those who hate us and do our best to do good to them. This is Jesus' way. It's the only way that has survived 2,000 years. Every other way has crumbled and given way to another way and another but Jesus' church is still here filled with those who would hear the words of their Master:

But among you it will be different. Matthew 20:26 (NLT)