

Angry Hearts #1: Leave Room (Various Passages)

PRAY

Do you have a favourite or most memorable chapter of a book that you've read?

Maybe like Deep Magic from the Dawn of Time in *Narnia*, telling of Aslan's sacrifice

Or A Journey in the Dark in *Lord of the Rings*, when the fellowship moves through Moria

Or perhaps there's a chapter in a non-fiction book that made a most powerful impact on your life

Let me share one of my all-time favourites with you this morning

It's so good, that I literally highlighted the entire chapter when I read it the first time

And it's so insightful, that I'm actually going to read the whole chapter for you, right now

It's chapter 2 from David Powlison's book *Good & Angry*

The chapter is entitled, "Do *You* Have a Serious Problem with Anger?"

And the text of the chapter reads: "Yes."... End of chapter

Now, he goes on to explain how and why we all have serious problems with anger

But his point has been made... It's indisputable, if we're honest with ourselves:

Anger is a real problem in all of our hearts and lives, to varying degrees

A problem which has done real damage in and around each one of us

For the rest of this summer, we want to tackle this problem together, as a church

I've entitled our new sermon series *Angry Hearts*, as this is very much a heart issue

All our thoughts, emotions, and words flow from this inner core of who we are

And dealing with our hearts is something the Holy Spirit specializes in, through the Word

The Bible actually has a ton to say about anger, so we'll be jumping around a lot

But let's start out in *Romans 1*... Please **TURN** there now [page #939]... Speaking of chapters...

This is likely a *least* favourite chapter in the book for some... Yet it's so crucial

But before we look there, we should perhaps first define what anger is

At its core, anger is a heart-felt, emotional reaction to a perceived wrong

We sense that something is wrong with something that matters to us,

and that upsets our hearts—then we react, in a huge spectrum of ways:

With irritation, annoyance, grumbling, or frustration... With temper tantrums or outbursts of rage

With spewing out harsh speech: yelling, blame-shifting, name-calling, swearing, cursing

With seething, icy bitterness... Or with aggression or violence against people, animals, or objects

Anger is often an indictment of others: 'You are *wrong*'—usually 'You've wronged *me*'¹

We've got all kinds of colourful imagery or idioms we use to describe anger's effects:

Volcanic eruptions, meltdowns, blowing tops, blowing fuses or gaskets, flipping lids,

pushing buttons, hitting the roof, flying off the handle, boiling, simmering, steaming,

burning, seeing red, losing our cool, going ballistic, getting hot under collar, crashing out

Many of these capture the idea that anger can build like pressure or heat,

until it explodes in harmful or destructive reactions

And we know what that feels like, don't we?

Even if some struggle more than others, our problem is one of degree, not kind

We live in a broken world, with all kinds of things going wrong around us all the time

So how do we move from reaction to redemption? From sin to sanctification?

Well, we have to begin in a surprising place: The anger of God
Did you know that God is angry? He is! The Bible is inescapably clear on this
God is actually the best-known angry person in all of history and literature!
Which implies that anger itself cannot be inherently wrong
Because God is holy, and he has absolutely no wrong or evil in him
So if he is angry, there is such a thing as holy, good anger
We might not *like* the idea of an angry God... This concept even turns some away from faith
And even we who believe in God's wrath treat it like its an embarrassment to us
As if it were the dark side to God's nature... But God has no dark side!²
Thus, right alongside the Bible's accounts of nasty effects of human hostility, conflict, or rage,
We see an entirely different picture of anger in action, both admirable and appropriate³
I contend that when we put aside our assumptions and truly understand God's anger or wrath
It doesn't turn us away from him in horror... It turns us toward him in worship

[tr] I believe we actually *need* a God of perfect justice, true holiness, and righteous anger,
Or else our world would be doomed forever—and we with it... So let's reckon with him today
I've got 4 points to share with you, which Scripture consistently teaches us... First:

God is righteously angry because of evil (Romans 1:18-2:8, Psalm 7)

[r] God is justly and righteously angry because of all evil

Look with me at Romans 1, starting in v.18: **READ 1:18-25⁴**

What this tells us is that God has every right to be angry... It is just that he is so
There has been an unparalleled injustice—an ultimate wrong—in the universe:
Creatures rebelling against, and even trying to replace, their Creator
So his wrath is 'revealed,' in the present tense, against all our ungodliness and unrighteousness
Here, his wrath involves a 'giving us over' to our sins... Their devastation is our punishment
God's like, 'Have it your way... See where your wickedness leads you'
This passage describes a series of God giving humanity over to increasing depravity:
Inexcusable idolatry... Sexual perversions... Debased minds... Pervasive evil
v.29-31 contain one of the most epic and depressing lists of sins in the Bible
Which I'm sure all of us can find ourselves on... And then: **READ 1:32⁵**

Chapter 2 continues: **READ 2:1a, 2, 5-8⁶**... '*Wrath and fury*' – God is angry

v.2 said his judgment '*rightly falls*' on evil... It's right and good that it's coming
And in v.5, it says people are '*storing up*' wrath for themselves
Picture a farmer stuffing his silos with grain for a harvest one day
There is a harvest coming, but not the kind of harvest we'd want to reap
Through our past and present sins, God's wrath has been building and building
It's already being revealed in some ways
And in the future, it will be fully expressed on the day of God's wrath

This is no isolated passage, at odds with the rest of the Bible, either... Just for a small sampling:
In Exodus 22, God says his '*wrath will burn*' against sin and oppression
Psalm 90, which we sang through earlier, says how we are brought to an end by God's anger
And that we live and die in this broken world under his wrath
In the gospels, Jesus loses it, in a holy way—over unbelief, the dishonour of God, and death
And in Revelation, it describes the future terrifying and inescapable '*wrath of the Lamb*'

Yet we still wonder: How can God be angry? We don't have a category for anger being good
The short answer is: God is angry because evil is so evil

Remember that anger is a reaction against a perceived wrong

In God's case, it's not just perceived wrongs, it's objectively real wrongs

And when we really think about it, we want wrongs to be reacted to and righted for good

We want justice against injustice... We want good to triumph over evil

That's precisely why God is angry... Brokenness and sin have to go, if we want a happy ending

So Revelation 11 talks about God's wrath coming to *'destroy the destroyers of the earth'*

Or CHECK out **Psalm 7** with me, which is a prayer of David's **[page #450]**

David had been badly wronged in life... If we were him, we'd beg God for justice, too

But instead of lashing out himself, he prays: **READ 7:1, 6, 9-11, 17⁷**

Did you notice? Salvation, anger, judgment, and righteousness all go hand-in-hand

So take it to heart: We believe in a righteous God who *'feels indignation every day'*

And praise the Lord for that! Because that moves him to save us

We may feel embarrassed about God's wrath, but we really don't need to be

You're missing out on an adrenaline rush if you've never had a kid start singing New City Catechism's catchy song loudly in the middle of a grocery store: *"God is righteously angry with our sins, and will punish them both in this life and in the life to come!"*

Speaking from personal experience, you want to melt into the floor

And yes, out of context, not understanding it, hearing of God's wrath is rather unhelpful

But once we understand how critical it is to our salvation, our world's healing, and our eternal hope, we see how good it truly is... It's admirable and praiseworthy

Think of it this way... Do you ever get upset at betrayal or treason? Lies or character defamation?

Do you get angry about hypocrisy? Laziness or workaholicism? Disrespect or rebellion?

How about murder, hatred, or abuse? Adultery or sexual abuse? Cheating or stealing?

Do slander or gossip ever bother you? Do entitlement or greed ever trouble your heart?

I'd expect that some of those are the things that get you more upset than anything else in life

For me, personally: rebellion, lies, cheating, and abuse tend to especially push my buttons

Now, consider this: Everything I just listed off directly mirrors the 10 commandments!

Every wrong I mentioned falls under one of the core laws that God gave his people

So the things that most universally upset or outrage us are what the Bible calls 'sin'⁸

And God gets angry about the things we, deep down, feel you should get angry at

Made in his image, we're wired to know some things are *wrong* and need to be dealt with

Anger is about right and wrong... It's about fairness and justice... It's about truth and goodness

And therefore, God's anger isn't only an expression of his holiness, but also of his love

As **David Powlison** explains: *"It's the product of love betrayed (when he's the one being done dirty) and of compassion for the victims of injustice (when others are the ones being hurt)...*

God is rightly hostile to evils because true wrongs hurt people and kill joy... It's because God loves so intensely that he must get angry. He says "That matters... and it's wrong!""

God doesn't throw hissy fits or temper tantrums... He's not just in an irritable mood

God is not the bright red guy from Inside Out with flames blasting from his head

No, think of God's anger as chemo or radiation treatments

Jonathan Dodson says: *“God’s wrath isn’t a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer eating the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being.”*

It’s a steady, stern, consistent reaction to the evil destroying our lives and world
And it makes perfect, logical sense when we really stop and think about it

We committed treason against our Creator and brought a cosmic curse upon our world
The perfect Judge justly declares that we deserve judgment... And his wrath will come
Therefore, we desperately need divine intervention... We need a Saviour... So:
While God’s wrath isn’t the gospel... We can’t understand the good news of Jesus without it

[tr] **Romans 11:22** tells us to *“Note then the kindness and the severity of God...”*...

He is both... And we need both... It’s good news that God is righteously angry
But it’s better news that God is not *only* righteously angry... See:

God is slowly angry because of mercy (Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 30:5, 103:8-12)

[r] God is slow to anger, or slowly angry, because of his great mercy

Let’s FLIP over to **Exodus 34**, where God was speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai [page #74]

This is God’s most famous self-identification... It’s repeated often, throughout Scripture
Who is God? What is God like? Moses had just prayed, “Please show me your glory”

And God was like, “Ooh, you don’t know what you’re asking for... But fine”

He hides Moses in a rock crevice so that he’ll survive the encounter with his glory

But as God descends and reveals himself to Moses, part of his glory relates to *anger*

Look: **READ 34:6-7⁹**... The first attributes of God mentioned are merciful and gracious

Mercy is at the very core of God’s identity... It’s who he is... It’s what he does

And his mercy entails that he is *‘slow to anger’*

‘Slow to anger’ doesn’t mean ‘never angry’

After all, the very next lines say he won’t clear the unrepentantly guilty

That God is slowly angry means that God doesn’t ever lose his temper

Unlike us, his anger is steady, consistent, and unbelievably patient

When God’s anger does arise, we can trust it was totally deserved—and a long time coming

Ps. 30:5 says to thank God *“For his anger is but for a moment, and his favour is for a lifetime.”*

And Psalm 103 echoes Exodus 34, and then expands on it, saying: *“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”* (Psalm 103:8-12)

So: God is slow to anger... He is not always angry.... And he won’t be angry forever
If you ever doubt that God is slow to anger, go read the story of Jonah

And watch Jonah get super angry with God because God was too patient for his liking

God is slowly angry because of his mercy... And two especially key truths to note here:

In God’s mercy, there is an escape from his anger and there is an end to his anger

There is an escape... We know this because Jesus blazed the trail of escape for us

See, even though he lived a perfectly righteous life, he died in humanity’s place

On the cross, he bore the full brunt of God's anger and wrath,
Shielding us, and satisfying God's wrath against us, once and for all
If you feel God's displeasure against your sin today, I urge you to flee to Jesus
God is right to be angry at sinful people...

But that means he's right to be angry at me
So believe Jesus died and rose again, and throw yourself on his mercy today,
And you will receive his gracious favour for the rest of your life—and forever
As **John 3:36** both promises and warns: *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."*

So in his mercy, there is an escape... And there is also an end to God's anger
God's wrath on Jesus was agonizing... But it was finished there on the cross
And though judgment is still coming for this world, even that will be brutal but brief
Revelation 15 talks about a day that the wrath of God will be finished for good
Because anger is only needed when there are wrongs to react to
When there is evil, we find anger that is evil and anger that opposes evil
But one day, evil will be eradicated... Thus anger will be rendered obsolete

[tr] Now, you might hear me say that God is angry, and suppose that I'm defending all anger
After all, we're made in God's image and we're supposed to be imitators of God
Therefore, if we have an angry God, then we should be angry people too... Eh, not so fast
Because we are not God, our anger so often goes so wrong... So we have to remember:

God is perfectly angry, unlike us (Hebrews 12:28-29, Revelation 11:17-18)

[r] God is righteously angry, slowly angry, and *perfectly* angry... We are not... He is unlike us

Moses says in **Deuteronomy 32:4**: *"The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice."*

All his work and ways—including his anger
And the Bible displays God's anger as an admirable thing—even a beautiful thing

TURN to **Hebrews 12**, for example [page #1009]

Right after quoting from Haggai in v.27, about God once more shaking the earth with judgment,
It says this: **READ 12:28-29¹⁰**... So do you see?

Why should we worship God in reverence and awe? Because he is a consuming fire

In other words, his perfect anger is a reason to be grateful and worship

In the end, his anger is one of his most admirable characteristics, as it secures our eternal hope
Because God is righteously angry, we can rest assured that all will be made right one day
In Revelation, we see heaven singing and rejoicing when God's anger completes its perfect work
For instance, in chapter 11: *"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."* (Revelation 11:17-18)

This is no forced applause... The wrath of God inspires endless, passionate praise

In chapter 15, in light of God's judgment, heaven sings that

God's deeds and ways are great, amazing, just, true, and righteous

In short, God's wrath is clearly seen as good news for the world—and for us... Evil will be gone!

One of the main problems we have, when we hear that God is angry,
Is that we imagine that means God is a lot like us, when we are at our worst
After all, our anger is so often ugly, harmful, and destructive... And that's all we know
So we picture God as ill-tempered, irrational, exacting, or vindictive—just like us
But, in fact, it's the exact opposite... His is a pure and perfect anger, unlike ours
His anger is *not* simply a larger, scarier version of our own anger... Not at all
His anger is what our anger should be, yet most often looks hardly anything like

In Christopher Ash's book on anger, he spends several chapters in a row defining God's anger
To rapidly summarize, he shows how God's anger is inseparable from his goodness
His anger is uncomplicatedly good... Ours is not—ours gets very complicated!
His anger is based on perfect knowledge... Ours is based on inadequate and
imperfect knowledge... We so often don't know the whole story
His anger is aroused purely by evil... Ours is aroused by all kinds of things
His anger is utterly fair and just... Ours is, more often than not, utterly selfish
His anger is clearly forewarned... Ours often flares up in an instant
And his anger has good as its consistent goal... Ours? Don't we wish!

Most convicting—and perhaps most helpful—is when we consider our anger in light of his
And we realize that we get angry when we are subconsciously wanting to be like God
Christopher Ash defines the heart of our anger, its most common source and root cause, this way:

"I have some belief about the way things should be—the way people should treat me, the things I should possess, the control I ought to exert—and it simply infuriates me when something happens to reveal to me that that isn't the case... This is the sin underlying all sins, the first and most fundamental failing of the human heart. It is the desire to be god."
[He continues] *"Of course, in the cold light of day, the notion that we are actually an all-powerful deity is frankly ludicrous. On a morning when I have cut myself shaving, put my foot in a puddle, and left my phone on the bus, it is hard to see how I could continue to live under the misapprehension that I am, in fact, divine. Yet that is just the thing. Sin is a delusion, a kind of madness. And in that madness, I am more than capable of operating as if the world should bend to my will."*

It's under this delusion that we shout at our loved ones, because we demand some peace
We crash out on a spouse or a parent, because we crave love or respect from them
We get super frustrated at our kids, because we need control
When they mess up, we fear for their future, which matters greatly to us
So we angrily force submission, because it all depends on us, and we know best!
We may even punch a wall, because the world is just not operating how we want it to!
We've got the whole world in ourraghh!

See? We tend to get godlike (though not godly) when we get angry
Our pride has been affronted... Our desires become demands... Our will becomes the law
Our rivals must be raged against... Our passions must be satiated, or else
And anyone or anything that challenges us or gets in our way ought to be squashed
We go, 'I want what I want when I want it! My kingdom come, my will be done!'
Therefore, when our anger goes wrong, we don't just need anger management or therapy

We don't just need to count to 10 or imagine ourselves on a sunny beach
Neither do we just need our circumstances or other people to change to align with us
Our hearts have to change... The false god (me) on the throne of my heart has to be dethroned
It's only when we put the right God back on the throne that we regain our sanity
God's Spirit, and his justice and mercy, humbles us and transforms our anger

[tr] God is perfectly angry, unlike us... This is key to remember throughout our series
As so much of our anger can be addressed when we remember we aren't God
No, instead of trying to *be* the Lord, the Bible tells us over and over to *wait* on the Lord
And actually, I believe this is the main application for us as we ponder the anger of God
Christopher Ash claims: "*If there were no angry God, then there could be no cure for human anger.*" ...But God *is* angry... Therefore, our final point for today is:

God is surely angry, so we don't need to be (Romans 12:17-19, Colossians 3:5-8)

[r] God is angry so we don't need to be—and usually ought not to be
[r] God is slowly but *surely* angry, so we don't need to be

TURN to **Romans 12** with me [page #948]

After the beginning of Romans established how our sin calls for God's wrath,
Paul goes on to explain good news—how sinners can be made righteous in God's sight
And then, in the middle of a passage about what genuine Christian love looks like, we read this:

READ 12:17-18¹¹... And how can we do that when people insist on being jerks?

v.19: **READ 12:19¹²**... Another version says "*Leave room for the wrath of God*"

When we blow a fuse and take our anger out on someone else,
Not only are we usurping God's role in their life, which he plays perfectly and we don't,

But it's like we're crowding out the work that he wants to do

We're pre-empting the justice of God and undermining the love of God

So instead of angrily trying to get even with our words or actions, we're supposed to stop,

Think about God's anger, and take a major step back from our own

Leave it to him... He'll deal with it... We don't need to be angry, for he is

READ 12:19a¹³... We're intentionally called 'Beloved' of God before receiving this command

Because if God loves us, all will be well... We can trust that he'll make things right

In Colossians 3, Paul tells us to put our sins to death, warning us that "*On account of these the wrath of God is coming...*" And right after, he says: "*Now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.*" (Colossians 3:6, 8)

So... God's wrath is coming, and that's incentive to put away all our own wrath

How might all this change your attitude when you're looking at a loved one and only seeing red?

Could it start to fill you with compassion? You don't want them to face God's anger

Instead of harshly berating them, maybe you'd start tearfully pleading with them

Instead of trying to control them to your will, maybe you'd lovingly point them to Jesus

Maybe instead of trying to give 'em hell, you'd be moved to give 'em mercy?

And even when we can't muster up compassion for people who madden us,

We should still leave room for God's anger, instead of lashing out ourselves

God says vengeance belongs to him... And he promises to vindicate his people... Count on it

Proverbs 20:22 says *“Do not say, ‘I will repay evil’; wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.”*

CONCLUSION

So let's put our anger in the context of God's anger... For his anger is our best hope
There are real and evil things to be upset about in our world... But God is upset for us
If the things that have happened to you are genuinely wrong,
then God is also angry about what happened to you
Let him carry that... It's too heavy for your heart to carry, anyway
We can't handle the fire well... We're like toddlers with flamethrowers, burning forests down
But our God can't merely handle fire... Our God *is* a consuming fire
So let's be grateful and worship him with reverence and awe

PRAY (your kingdom come)

Benediction: prayer, 5min,

¹ HT Ed Welch

² HT Paul Tripp

³ HT Powlison

⁴ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

⁵ Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

⁶ Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges... [and] We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things... But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

⁷ O Lord my God, in you do I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers and deliver me,... Arise, O Lord, in your anger; lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies; awake for me; you have appointed a judgment.... Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end, and may you establish the righteous—you who test the minds and hearts, O righteous God! My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart. God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day... I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High.

⁸ HT Powlison whole paragraph

⁹ The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

¹⁰ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.

¹¹ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

¹² Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

¹³ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God