

Angry Hearts #7: Grace for Angry Hearts (Various Passages)

PRAY

Growing up, I always thought of myself as a calm and self-controlled person
I was even-keeled; I took things in stride; I never yelled at others or rarely even got upset
The angriest I'd get is if I felt cheated in a game I was playing... But even then
I recognized tendencies toward other common sins: greed, lust, apathy, pride, and so on
But anger? Nah... I was blessed that that wasn't a problem for me
I always thought of myself as a peaceful and patient person
That is, at least, until I got a driver's license...
And other dumb drivers started doing dumb things around me
Like cutting *me* off or tailgating *me*... How dare they!
OK, so I had a small issue with anger, but only when it was *really* justified on the roads
Meanwhile, the rest of my life seemed rather unaffected
I got married, and basically never fought with my wife... No anger problem at home!
I became a pastor, and hardly any of you annoying people were around yet to annoy me
I'm just kidding! But I also didn't see any anger problem at church
So I kept thinking of myself as a mostly patient and self-controlled person
That is, at least, until I had kids... One of God's best sanctifying tools, ever
There's something about little mirror versions of yourself looking back at you
Illuminating all your own sinful struggles and fears and insufficiencies
As well as knowing exactly which buttons to push
But my kids didn't make me an angry person... They exposed things already in me
I now see that pride was preventing me from recognizing my heart's shortcomings
And only once my pride was smashed did I know how much I needed what God was giving

Have you reached that point yet? Do you know how much you need what God is giving?
It is my prayer that we'd all reach that point today, or return to it
In humility, knowing your need... So you can receive the wonderful grace God offers
So that you can receive all the wonderful things God offers to you now

Today will be the formal end of our Angry Hearts series, though next week will connect to it
And I hope it's been helpful to many of you
as we've considered how God's Word speaks into all of our angry hearts
We began by looking at the holy, righteous anger of God, who is angry so we don't need to be
We then considered how our anger can be useful, if we separate the emotion from the expression
And how, on rare occasion, anger may even be considered righteous
However, unrighteous, sinful, harmful anger is, by far, our more common experience
And, as Pastor Kenny showed us, our human anger is usually useless—devastating, even
He then took us through Colossians 3, which describes how believers can change
We don't need to flip out like we used to; we can be free!
We can put anger, in all its forms, away... Because we have put off our old selves,
And have put on new selves, which are becoming increasingly like Christ
Finally, Pastor Troy helped us consider forgiveness,
a key response to hurts and wrongs that can provoke so much anger in our lives

I want to finish, today, with a word of really good news for all of us angry failures

To start out, please **OPEN** a Bible with me to James chapters 3-4 [page #1012]

Here's a question for you: What is the opposite of anger? Calm? Peace? Patience? Self-control?

Allow me to suggest that the opposite of anger is actually wisdom

Or more specifically, humble wisdom—the 'meekness of wisdom', as James puts it

True humility, true wisdom, will produce all the rest: peace, patience, and self-control

Likewise, when we're not wise or humble, we'll tend to breed

the foolishness, unreasonableness, and prideful blindness of anger

That appears to be what James teaches us in James 3-4... Look with me: **READ 3:13-18**¹

This tells us there is hope for us to live a different kind of life, not so shaped by our anger

A life that is pure, peaceable, gentle, reasonable, merciful, impartial, sincere, righteous

All brought about by a heaven-sent wisdom and humility

There is grace available to us to be wise... Grace to live peaceably and gently... It's true!

'But that doesn't describe my life!', you may worry

We all fall so short of that standard, don't we?

Our days are far too often clouded by selfish ambition, disorder, and strife

We want to live wise, humble, peaceable, merciful lives

But our angry hearts get in the way and ruin everything! ...And so our hearts sink

Hence, James launches right into the familiar words of James 4 we've read on repeat lately:

READ 4:1-5²... And our hearts sink some more... Our angry strife is spiritual adultery

Adultery being one of the most treacherous assaults on a relationship

God made us, saved us, and loves us... We belong to him

But when we act along the lines of all our own passions, we act as enemies of God!

As we've seen, this passage can help us understand and expose why we get angry

When we want what we want too much,

When our desires rule us instead of us ruling over them (like God warned Cain about),

That's when we sin against the God who loves us like a perfect husband

David Powlison adds: *"When expectations dig in, we inevitably sin against each other too. We think, I've gotta have it! It's mine! I demand my rights. I need to meet my needs. You're getting in the way of my precious, cherished longings! You're messing with my program to control reality. You're not meeting my expectations. Take a moment and consider the desires at work when you get irritated or angry. How do you organize your life around what you want? Are you playing God? ...What exactly do you want right now that makes you warlike, when Christ's rule would make you peaceable? Answer honestly and you will have identified why you participate in sinful conflict. There are no deeper reasons for your sinful anger. Violation of the "first great commandment" is the deepest motive of all."*

[tr] You may think, 'I thought you said you had good news for us, Pastor Matt?' I do!

It's such good news precisely because it's in light of our depressing failures to live as we ought

In direct response to the dark realities of sinful, angry strife... See:

In the face of our sinful anger, God gives more grace (James 3:13-4:10, Psalm 103)

[r] In response to our foolish and prideful anger, God remarkably offers us grace

[r] In the face of our sinful anger, God gives more grace

Look at this beam of light in a dark passage... Right after saying we act as God's enemies:

READ 4:6a... Can I get an 'amen' from someone who needs this? **READ 4:6³**

This is the answer to how we get back to the heavenly wisdom and peace of chapter 3

We fall so short... But God gives more grace... We just need to humble ourselves

And what does this humility look like? James tells us: **READ 4:7-10⁴**

To run through this way too rapidly: If we want to access God's grace through humility,

Then we've got to submit ourselves to God... Submitting our opinions, our desires, our expectations, our goals, our justifications for our own anger, to him

We've got to start fighting harder against our true enemy, the devil

Resisting his efforts to destroy us through our own anger... He'll flee

We've got to draw near to God in faith and in love for him

If not loving God is at the heart of our anger, then we won't get to where we need to be without a restored love for him

We've got to confess our sins—all the ways we've failed—and turn from them

In order to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts

We've got to get serious about this—sober-minded... Anger is no joke

There is a time to laugh and a time to mourn... Guilt calls for godly grief

This all describes humbling ourselves before the Lord

And hear the promise again: **READ 4:10⁵...** Truly, God gives grace to the humble

This grace changes us, whenever anger begins arising in our hearts

Instead of railing against others' wrongs, we can begin to confess our own

Instead of insisting on our own rightness, we can humbly admit to our weaknesses

Instead of crashing out when we don't get our way, we can be grateful for what we have

Instead of getting angry at God over our situations, we can draw near and pray to him

Amazingly, all this doesn't make God less inclined to be kind to us... It inclines him to bless us!

It's right there that he especially shows us undeserved favour—that is, grace

Then, in a beautiful cycle, his grace humbles us even more: *Amazing love, how can it be?*

And as our humility makes us wise, wisdom makes us peaceable, gentle, and so on

Keep a finger in James, and **FLIP** over to **Psalms 103** for a couple minutes **[page #502]**

Our God is a God who has mercy on his enemies and forgives their sins

This means he has mercy on hot-tempered people and forgives anger and rage

Look with me: **READ v.2⁶...** You could rephrase that as 'Forget not all his grace'

READ v.2b-4⁷... Then jump to v.8: **READ v.8-9⁸...** As we saw, God is righteously angry

But there is an end to his anger... And there is an escape from his anger:

Get a load of this grace: **READ v.10-12⁹...** How far away is east from west? Infinitely

Picture it as though you were sent on a work trip by your boss (this analogy may get a bit silly)

But say you've done a poor job at work lately, and your boss wants to teach you a lesson

So he gives you a bunch of bags filled with bricks for you to deliver to Vancouver

So you show up at the airport with all this heavy baggage, that you're lugging around,

which is a constant reminder of how you don't measure up—how you're a failure

But right as you're about to board the plane, a guy runs up and grabs the bags from you

And says, 'Let me take these from you... Just get on the plane... Don't worry.'

And as you take off, you see him boarding a plane to Halifax
So as you head west, your burden heads east... You will never see that luggage again
Listen: If you bring your sins of anger to the Lord in confession and repentance,
That's what he does with those burdens: Our sinful anger is *gone*, for good
You don't need to carry around the guilt and shame anymore
Even if you do keep messing up... Just keep bringing it back to him
There is far more grace in Christ than there is sin in us

I know this because of the way Jesus secured this mercy and grace for us on the cross
When Jesus gave up his life, he showed how far he'd go to free us from our sin
And when he conquered death, he left our sins in the grave where they belong
His death and resurrection assure his people of forgiveness and freedom
And I hope that you've personally taken hold of this for yourself... It's right there for the taking
Humble yourself before God, submit your life to him as Lord, and receive his new life

When it comes to anger specifically, Ed Welch asks the question: *"What difference does it make for your anger that Jesus died on the cross, rose from the dead, sent his Spirit, is the living God, and prepares a home to be with his people?"* ...You could come up with a long list of answers

But the short answer to 'What difference does it make?' is it makes *all* the difference

Nothing but the blood of Jesus can actually wash us clean

Welch concludes that: *"Apart from the death and resurrection of Jesus, anger makes sense. Without him, we would be alone and condemned. Life would be a struggle for survival of the fittest, and then we would sink into the dark gloom of death. Only anger, fear, and depression would make sense. But the truth is that we were created by God, we are his offspring, we belong to him, and, though we have turned our backs on him, he has, in love, brought us back to himself to both love him and live with him. Anger is part of the old life that is ebbing away as we embrace the new. In light of the real story, we say, 'Jesus, I need you,' and 'Thank you.'"*

[tr] "I need you" and "Thank you" are really the sound of humility

So do you recognize your need? Because that is critical to you actually seeing your need met

See, in the face of our sinful, angry hearts, God gives more grace... And:

God gives more grace when we recognize our need for it (James 4:6-10)

[r] God gives more grace when we recognize our need for it

You know how after Jonah got spit up by the great fish, and went and preached to Nineveh,

He got super angry that God would be so merciful to his enemies

God twice asked Jonah a probing question: "Are you right to be angry?"

I think we should hear God ask the same question to us, daily: "Are you right to be angry?"

Even though we usually *feel* that we are, almost always the answer should be, "No."

We have selfishly centered our existence on ourselves, desiring to be little gods

We have anxiously raged against the world's brokenness instead of trusting God

We have irritatingly lashed out with grumbling, cursing, screaming, or violence

So are we right to be so angry? If we're honest with ourselves, definitely not

Yet God gives more grace... Skim through James 4:6-10 and notice all the facets of grace here:

He gives us grace to submit ourselves to him... He doesn't need to do that, but he does

He gives us grace to have victory over the devil and his wiles... Impossible on our own
He gives the grace of God's presence... Draw near to him, he will draw near to you
He gives us grace to repent... Providing the blood for us to cleanse ourselves with
Even the mourning and weeping is a good thing... As 2 Corinthians 7 tells us:

"Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret"... Grace!
And he gives us grace upon grace... When we should only be punished for all eternity,
He holds out eternal exaltation to us—

As a child of God, a citizen of heaven, and an heir of glory

In all this, David Powlison urges us to *"Notice how present God is. Notice how relational the solution is. We seek and find Someone moves toward us. Someone who will be gracious. Someone whose power freely helps us. To really solve the heart of conflict you must seek God's mercy. Our conflicts are fueled by usurping God's place. The grace of Jesus Christ forgives and reinstates God's rule in our hearts."*

So what does this look like, practically?

Well, if you blow up at your spouse, it means being quick to drop the fight,

And to admit: "Whether I'm right or wrong here, my response was sinfully wrong

I need God's grace and your grace... Will you forgive me?"

Or if you blow it with your kids, be humble enough to own up to it:

"Listen, Mommy's a sinner/Daddy's a sinner, and I need Jesus just like you"

"I need his help to conquer my anger... I'm sorry I hurt you... Please forgive me"

You know that those will likely be some of the most powerful words you
ever speak to your kids? That kind of humility changes more than just you

Kids, you can do the same when one of your siblings is being especially annoying

Or if a loved one legit sins against you in anger, don't let yourself get self-righteous

You will not forgive if you're only convinced of your rightness and their guilt

Or if someone is a jerk to you on the highway, remember you were first a jerk to Jesus

If you need his grace so dearly, maybe you can be quicker to offer it to others?

And if you're ever like I was, thinking 'I don't need this kind of grace, because I'm not angry'

Drop the delusion... There is anger in your heart

And if you don't feel it now, there will be something in your life that draws it out

We should recognize now: All our anger is first and foremost sin against the Lord

After all, he's the one who sovereignly directs all the details of our lives

But when we get angry, it's usually because we want to be in control instead

We effectively supplant him in our hearts

So whether or not we need others' forgiveness, we need his

Thankfully, graciously, he delights to forgive us and cleanse us

Ed Welch says: *"God doesn't forgive us because of our resolve to never be angry again. He forgives us because of his resolve to forgive those who come to him."* ...Praise the Lord for that!

Are you thankful for his grace? Because gratitude and anger can't coexist at the same time¹⁰

[tr] So the Lord gives more grace to us when we recognize our need... But why?

What's God's goal in all this? What is he seeking to do in us, through his grace?

We'll have to do a bit of review to see this, but I think this truth is clear, from Scripture:

God gives more grace so we will grow more like him (Colossians 3:5-10)

[r] God gives more grace so we will grow more like him—more like Christ

Let's **TURN** again to **Colossians 3 [page #984]**, which talked about putting our sins to death

Because the old people we used to be are spiritually dead... We are new people now

Look: **READ v.5-10¹¹**... So notice: Believers, we *are* being renewed and changed... That's a fact

Our anger is like a mangy, starving lion we're keeping around as a pet

We think we can tame it... But it will eat us one day when it gets the chance

To borrow how I heard another pastor put it: Take the lion out into the street and shoot it!

We need to ruthlessly do whatever is necessary to rid our lives of destructive evil

And why? Colossians 3 says we need to put anger away for good, seeing that

we *have* put off the old self, and *have* put on the new self, which is being renewed

Believe it or not, we are currently becoming more like Christ right now

Thus we're called to seek to reflect our Saviour, the humble and wise Prince of Peace

And *he* gives more grace

2 Timothy 1:7 says God has given us a spirit of self-control... You have that, now

Galatians 5 tells of how we have the Holy Spirit living in us and filling us now

And that the fruit he *will* grow in us includes patience, gentleness, and self-control

Fruit can grow very slowly at times... But it grows nevertheless

James 3 told us heavenly wisdom has come down to us to fill us with mercy and peace

Because our Saviour was perfectly like this, we can and will become more like this... Believe it

In **1 Thessalonians 5:8-9**, it says: "*But since we belong to the day*, [we already belong to a new day, to the light, to a new way of life] *let us be sober*, [the opposite of being out of control]

having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. [Why?]

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."

And we're supposed to encourage one another and build each other up with these truths

[tr] Speaking of... That's a final thing I want you to notice from Scripture today

God doesn't just change us for our own sake... He changes us for others' sake too

I'll have you **TURN** over to **1 Peter 2** to see this truth **[page #1015]**... But here's the point:

God gives more grace so we can give more grace to others (1 Peter 2:18-25)

[r] God gives more grace so we can give more grace to others, and their angry hearts

Now, don't misunderstand: Grace never excuses sin or just looks the other way...

No, grace chooses to bear with offenses and hurts... It chooses to endure through them

Grace chooses to forbear and forgive... To carry the pain other people cause us

And then to hand it over to Jesus, because we can't carry it alone

Grace still calls people to change for the better... It calls out sin and rebukes it, gently

Titus 2 makes it clear that grace is meant to *train us* to renounce our worldly passions

Grace helps us live self-controlled, upright, godly lives, here and now

I've always loved the truth that Jesus invites us to come to him *just as we are*,

With all our sin and brokenness and messiness and confusion and, yes, anger

But Christ will not leave us as we are... He cleanses and heals us over time

Look with me at 1 Peter 2, starting in v.18: **READ v.18-19¹²**

Man, suffering unjustly... There's not much that makes us angrier than that!
But it is what, if we endure? A *gracious* thing... Keeping your cool is showing grace
Peter repeats this idea: **READ v.20**¹³

What in the world could ever change our hearts to live like this?

To show grace to the graceless... To show mercy to the angry...

To let go of our own anger and leave room for the wrath of God... To pass on grace

The only thing that could ever make us like this is Christ and his cross

READ v.21-25¹⁴... Christ has done this... And now we are *called* to follow his example

He bore our sins, so that we would die to sin—so that we'd die to our anger

And he died so that we would live to righteousness

"And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Pastor Steve Midgley tells the story of one of his church members named Mark

Who came to him one day, extremely distressed about his work situation

He was feeling overworked and bullied by a very unreasonable boss

He wasn't eating or sleeping properly, consumed by his anxiety and anger

And he was starting to take out his irritation on the people around him

Steve had Mark read through 1 Peter 2, not sure how the Lord might use his Word that day

But the Spirit did a remarkable work in Mark's heart

A few weeks later, Mark reported that everything had been transformed, by 1 Peter 2

He explained how up till then, his focus was on his boss, wanting them to behave better,

and treat him more reasonably, and notice his efforts, and praise his work

But as he meditated on Scripture, a different, greater desire gradually rose up in his heart:

The desire to please God by living in imitation of Christ

God had been eclipsed by his boss in his vision...

But now God was being returned to the proper size and place in his heart

Now when he went to work, he wasn't asking, 'Will my boss treat me well today?'

But rather 'Will I live in a way that is pleasing to my Lord today?'

Mark now had something to do—something worth doing—

Even (or especially) if his boss was unreasonable: Imitating his Lord

CONCLUSION

And the same can go for us... You too have something worth doing... And you can do it

Whenever the brokenness of this world inevitably brings real wrongs to your attention

You will feel anger, but you don't need to hold on to it or nurse it or let it explode

You can imitate your Lord, who was gracious beyond belief to you

Who died, so you could live a life of humble wisdom before the Lord

He gives (present-tense) more and more grace... As much as we ever need

So do you need it? Good news: You can have it... And even better news: You *have* it

It's like you were broke and in debt,

But God's riches have already been transferred into your account

The money is already there for you to withdraw... So live accordingly, by faith

Know your need... And be grateful that your need has been met

"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."

PRAY

Benediction: prayer, 5min,

¹ Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

² What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?

³ But he gives more grace... But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

⁴ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

⁵ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

⁶ Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,

⁷ forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ HT Hansen

¹¹ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

¹² Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

¹³ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

¹⁴ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.