"Slow To Anger"

Has anger ever gotten the best of you? Have you ever exploded on an innocent person or done something in anger you couldn't take back? Even some of the greatest characters in the Bible made bad mistakes in anger. I am reminded of a story of a father who was trying to teach his son the importance of being slow to anger. The father noticed that the son was getting angry often and getting in trouble due to his lack of self-control. The father told the son that every time he gets really angry, he needs to go to the backyard and hammer in a nail into the wood fence. The first day of the exercise the little boy hammered in 37 nails. He might have had a bit of an anger problem. But soon after he started this exercise, the little boy was putting less and less nails in the fence each day. Finally, the boy went a whole day without hammering in a single nail. He was so happy and told his dad. The father then gave the boy new instructions and said, "Every day that you go without getting angry I want you to remove a nail from the fence." The little boy did this day after day. After several days the father took the son into the back yard and pointed out how the sun shined through all the little nail holes. The father said, "This is why we need to be slow to anger son. Sometimes in our anger we do some damage that is hard to reverse." Mismanaged anger can lead to some bad consequences. Relationships can be ruined over anger. Children can be traumatized by anger. Most importantly, your relationship with God can be hindered by anger that goes unchecked.

Let me ask you this question to think about…how would your life be different today if you were in control of your anger? Going deeper, how would your life be different today if you were in control of all your emotions? Billy Graham has many amazing things to say on emotions but one of my favorite things he said was this:

"Do not be deceived, your emotions are not always honest. They often lie. They speak from wounds that have not healed. Not every opinion needs to be voiced. Not every emotion needs to be followed. Real maturity is when you pause long enough to ask 'is this emotion leading me toward God or away from Him.' That is the question that separates the wise from the impulsive." – Billy Graham

We are not called to pretend that emotions don't exist. Anger alone is mentioned over five hundred times in the Bible. Emotions are given by God, and we can enjoy our emotions. The main thing again is not allowing any emotion to control us. Not only are we to not allow our emotions control us but we must learn how to process and deal with our emotions in a spiritually healthy way. My counselor tells me all the time, "Buried emotions never die." If we walk in anger that is not a righteous anger, we are in danger. Anger turned inward will lead to depression.

My goal today is not to show you how you can overcome anger logically or intellectually. There are millions of websites and videos that will tell you how to deal with anger according to the world. But you and I don't fight like the world does. You and I have supernatural help from Holy Spirit and within our spiritual DNA we have the capability to honor God with our emotions. To begin, we need to understand that we are made in the image of God. God has emotions. God is an emotional God. I love the joke that said, "The next time someone asks me 'what would Jesus do?' I need to remind them that flipping tables and calling people a brood of vipers is within the realm of possibilities." God gets angry. The real problem is not anger; the real problem is a lack

of self-control. Sel-control is part of the fruit of the Spirit. That means if you purposefully walk with the Spirit and live surrendered to His will, self-control will be a natural byproduct. So, understand that we are made in God's image and have the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome our lack of self-control, specifically in the area of anger.

Today I want to look at two very small passages of Scripture. The first will be in the book of James and the second will be in the book of Ephesians. James and Paul offer us some incredible instruction on what to do with anger. If you have your Bibles, go with me to the book of James chapter 1 and we are going to begin in verse 19:

19 This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. 22 But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. - James 1:19-25 NASB1995

Now, go backwards in your Bible a few books to the epistle of Ephesians. Let's look at Ephesians chapter 4 and we are going to begin in verse 23:

23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.
25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity. – Ephesians 4:23-27

The A-B-C-D of Self-Control:

POINT #1 – <u>Abide</u> in His presence and truth.

There's a video online about a cute little toddler who is about to take a seat in his cartoon toddler chair. As he turns to sit down, he starts making grunting noises. The grandpa sitting next to the toddler start laughing out loud. The reason is that the toddler is imitating the grandpa exactly. The toddler saw his grandma make noises when sitting down, so the toddler made noises while sitting down, even though he was not sore. This story is funny but many times we react in anger and hurt others because we were shown a model of getting angry followed by a negative outburst. Jesus said in Luke 6:45 that "out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." Not only could we have a poor example of how to handle emotions growing up, but we often store things in our heart that later become an outburst or explosion.

The bottom line is that is you are surrendered to the Spirit you will behave like the Spirit. When dealing with anger or other emotions we need to remember a few things. We need to remember

who we are in Christ, what we have in Christ, and look to Christ as our example. What do we have in Christ? Identity, authority, and power. God is love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness and guess what? You and I were made in His image. We have taken on the image of the most loving being in the Universe. You and I have the gifts and the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Within the fruit of the Spirit is patience and self-control. If you find yourself losing control, you may not be in control of the Spirit. The more we abide in the Spirit, the easier it will be to live self-controlled.

When you abide in God you will also abide in His Word. Remember, emotions have a tendency to lie to us causing us to be motivated to react in sin. The more truth you have in your heart, the easier it will be to fight feelings with truth. One of the keys to freedom from a lack of self-control is meditating on the Word of God. If you find yourself in a place of wanted to react negatively, say out loud, "What does the Word say about this?" I saw this video online of a construction worker getting super angry. He grabbed a hammer and was about to throw it when another worker shouted, "No, remember left-handed anger!" The construction worker took the hammer by the left hand and threw it with all his might, about four feet. The Word of God does that to our reactions. If we just paused and took a moment to think "what does the Word say about this" it turns out angry outburst to lefthanded anger. We begin to respond and not react.

POINT #2 – <u>Be</u> angry but do not sin.

I am so grateful that Jesus demonstrated righteous anger. The joke is that when someone asks you "What would Jesus do?" You can say, "flipping tables and calling people a brood of vipers is within the realm of possibilities." Jesus showed us that it is ok to be angry when appropriate. There are many things in life that should anger us. Human trafficking should anger us. Child abuse should anger us. Terrorism should anger us. Righteous anger motivates us to act in justice while sinful anger causes us to react in pride and self-centeredness. The question then is "when do we know when our anger is sinful?" I am so glad you asked. You know when your anger has turned to sin when you do the following: violate Scripture, dishonor God, desiring revenge/hatred, grieve the Holy Spirit, or blur your witness to the lost.

Paul said in Ephesians "be angry and do not sin." To help your anger remain righteous, you need to consistent reflect on your heart. Find out if there are any underlying issues that may cause your anger. Have you become lukewarm in your faith? Have you neglected the Word? Are you watching too much news and getting upset over the "those people?" You are in control of ensuring your heart is in a good place with God so that when you become angry it will lead to good things rather than a poor reaction.

POINT #3 – <u>Create</u> a better narrative.

Back in 1938 Orson Welles did a radio broadcast saying that America was being invaded by Martians. Yes aliens. Sadly, hundreds believed the story and began to panic. Hundreds called the police and se3veral fled their homes in fear. It demonstrated the power of the media and fear. It also makes you wonder what "broadcasts" are being played in our world today. It is no secret that the news sells fear, Hollywood sells vanity, and our cultural sells self-centeredness. All throughout our day we are hearing one story after another. If it is not from the media, it is from the devil. The goal is to stir up emotions to manipulate you so that they get their agenda

accomplished. But a Christian with a renewed mind is a dangerous weapon in this world. We have to keep our minds renewed on truth so that every lie will not find a landing place on our hearts.

Not only do we need to keep our minds renewed but we need a better narrative so that we will have compassion on the lost and offensive. There have been many times Nikki and I have been driving somewhere, and someone will cut me off or fail to use their blinker or go 30 in a 55…help me Jesus. I'll say things like, "What is this guy doing now?" Nikki will always chime in and say, "No babe, you never know what that person is going through. Maybe they are rushing to the hospital. Maybe their mother is dying right now, and you are calling them a jerk." I notice that there are a lot of dying mothers in Dallas hospitals. What Nikki is trying to do is get me to be compassionate and merciful like our Savior. When we change the narrative in our minds we are better positioned to be compassionate and not sinful in our anger.

POINT #4 – <u>Deal</u> with anger quickly.

A couple weeks ago I got home and went into the kitchen to start on dinner. I looked in the corner of my counter and noticed that the one of the bananas sitting on the counter looked strange. Upon closer examination I noticed one of the bananas had bite marks. I looked as if a rat had somehow gotten in our home and helped himself to a tropical buffet. If there is ever a rat in the house, I first look at my dogs who were bred to hunt varmint and say, "You guys slacking on your jobs again?' Then I go to Home Depot and get about 16 different kinds of rat traps. I am not kidding you. I have regular snap traps, metal spinning cage traps, five-gallon water bucket trap door traps. My goal is to find and kill that rodent as fast as humanly possible. I do not want rat droppings all over my stuff. I deal with it fast. We need to deal with anger fast. The Apostle Paul said, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." Basically, don't wait until a later time to deal with anger or negative emotions.

How can you deal with anger quickly? The first thing is to be assertive. Don't be passive or passive aggressive. Be honest with your emotions and what's going on. But here is the key, be honest and vent to God. Nikki says this all the time whenever someone whines, complains, or is negative. She will say, "Nope, you talk to God like that not me." She always says if we need to vent all of our negative emotions we need to start with God. Read the psalms and you will discover very quickly that the psalmists vented all their emotions about to God. Vent your frustrations to God He is a big boy and can handle it. Then you ask Him "what should I do? God what do you have to say about this?"

It's a good idea to have a great Christian counselor. If you need a recommendation let me know. Nikki sees a great female counselor and I see a great male Christian counselor. I have often shared about my victory with burnout and adrenal fatigue. I have conquered adrenal fatigue, and do you know where the victory started? When I sought help. My counselor said, "Rudy you don't need to use your adrenaline on everything. So, when people are speeding to their dying mothers on the roads in Dallas, I say out loud to myself, "Rudy, you don't need your adrenaline for this." There are many times when you want to get angry but ask yourself in the moment, "Do I need my anger for this?" Sometimes we won't have to deal with our anger if we take control of it form the start.

The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:31 that whatever we do in life we need to do for the glory of God. Let me close with this testimony:

Bruce Goodrich was being initiated into the cadet corps at Texas A & M University. One night, Bruce was forced to run until he dropped -- but he never got up. Bruce Goodrich died before he even entered college. A short time after the tragedy, Bruce's father wrote this letter to the administration, faculty, student body, and the corps of cadets: "I would like to take this opportunity to express the appreciation of my family for the great outpouring of concern and sympathy from Texas A & M University and the college community over the loss of our son Bruce. We were deeply touched by the tribute paid to him in the battalion. We were particularly pleased to note that his Christian witness did not go unnoticed during his brief time on campus." Mr. Goodrich went on: "I hope it will be some comfort to know that we harbor no ill will in the matter. We know our God makes no mistakes. Bruce had an appointment with his Lord and is now secure in his celestial home. When the question is asked, 'Why did this happen?' perhaps one answer will be, 'So that many will consider where they will spend eternity.'"