

Taming the Tiger in All of Us Proverbs 16:32

Please turn in your Bible's today to **Proverbs 16:32**.

"Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city."

"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, he who rules his [own] spirit than he who takes a city." (The Amplified Bible)

Anger seems to be out of control these days. It's an emotion that surrounds us at almost every turn. It's in the media and the movies and the television and in the newspaper. It's in our communities, in our businesses and in our homes. Dads are angry at Little League umpires for a bad call against their son. Passengers get angry when their airplane is delayed or they have to sit on the tarmac too long or are told to turn off their electronic devices. Sports figures get angry over a bad call. Customers get angry when the clerk has to get a price check. Drivers get angry when they are inconvenienced by road construction. Junior gets angry when he can't have a piece of candy from the checkout counter. Little Susie gets angry when she can't have the doll that says "Hello, I'm Ginger? What's your name?" in four languages.

We are an increasingly angry nation and we try to justify it. As I said, it happens in our country, it happens in our communities, it even happens in our churches. Anger sometimes roars like a tiger.

It's happened to me and I'm sure it's probably happened to you. You're driving along and someone doesn't appreciate your driving. *I was passing a car when another car came up on my bumper with great speed. She was riding my tail in an effort to get me to speed up even though I was nearly by the vehicle I was passing. She got closer to my bumper. I did what I was taught in driver's ed. class, I tapped on my breaks to get her to back*

off. She didn't like that very much. When I pulled into the other lane she shot right up beside me, expressed her anger with a few, unrepeatable choice words that showed her true intelligence and then sped up but deliberately swerved over into my lane cutting me off so that I had to break. As the saying goes, "she was hopping mad."

And you all know as your pastor that I have never been angry. And you say "Yeah, right and peaches don't grow on peach trees." Let's see, there was the time in college when I was a camp counselor, emanating spiritual maturity. At that time it was tradition for the guy counselors to play the staff men in a game of softball. The counselors were getting stomped badly. I was not a happy camper or a happy counselor. I suppose I was mad about a bunch of things, but when a boneheaded error allowed by another counselor caused more runs I threw my glove down in anger. I'm sure there was a small seismic tremor that registered somewhere.

How do we tame the tiger that is in all of us?

Proverbs has a lot to say about this emotion we call anger. Our verse says when you consider what it takes to conquer a city, it takes more power and determination to control the temper. It may be less noticeable but it is a greater achievement. The true hero isn't the person who can take an army into a battle zone and bring a city to its knees. The true hero is the person who can control those passions in himself or herself. That is the greater victory. The problem is, anger is always there.

Let's look at three things this morning.

The problem of anger

The progression of anger

The prevention of anger

I. THE PROBLEM OF ANGER

Let's first of all define anger. Webster's says that, **"anger is a feeling of displeasure resulting from**

injury, mistreatment, or opposition and usually shows itself in a desire to fight back at the supposed cause of this feeling.”

Did you catch the very important word in that definition? Let me read it again: “anger is a feeling of displeasure resulting from injury, mistreatment, or opposition and usually shows itself in a desire to fight back at the supposed cause of this feeling.” It’s the word “supposed.” Something doesn’t actually have to happen to you, it is just assumed to be true. You perceive that someone else is deliberately out to cause you harm or mistreat you in some way so you respond in anger. In some way we are put out, inconvenienced.

Let’s say you’re passing a couple of co-workers in the hall. They’re in what appears to be a casual conversation, but as soon as you approach they start to whisper as they both look at you. You assume they are talking about you. Shortly afterward the boss asks to speak to you in the office. The meeting is not pleasant. You have been accused of something that you may or may not have done, but you’re not told by whom and so you assume it was one or both of these two co-workers who were in the hall way. You become angry with both of them.

Or you get a bad grade on a test you needed to pass or you’re stuck in a traffic jam and you start to blame whoever it is up ahead that is making you late for wherever you need to go or you got a flat tire or the refrigerator goes out or insurance won’t cover some procedure you need to have done and the list goes on and on.

Anger can be anything from mild irritation to an outright explosive outburst.

Anger has been a problem since the fall of man. Blame is a form of anger that casts culpability on another person for their actions that also got you into trouble or so you don’t get into trouble.

Adam: The woman you gave me is to blame, so I’m angry at her.

Eve: The snake is to blame, so I’m angry with it.

Then of course we can look at the very first offspring of Adam and Eve.

Genesis 4:1-16

In verse 5 Cain was angry with God because his offering wasn’t acceptable, so he took it out on his brother. Notice what God said to Cain. God asked him why he was angry. Anger doesn’t just pop up for no reason at all. Something happens that stirs up this emotion we call anger. If I understand correctly it begins in the frontal lobe of the brain where certain chemicals are released in that area. With additional blood flow to the brain due to the event and the chemicals that are released there is supposed to be a balancing act that occurs that helps to maintain rational cognitive thinking. When we react in great anger with rage or malice or revenge, an imbalance in the chemical has taken place. Cain wasn’t happy with God for having his offering rejected and he wasn’t happy with Abel who showed him up. He can’t do anything against God except maybe hate Him, but He can do something against his younger brother. His noodle is going into overdrive here. Notice what God says to Cain in **verses 6-7** that is very important for us to understand here. (Read vs. 6-7)

“Sin is crouching at the door.” It’s the same word used by the ancient Babylonian culture to refer to an evil demon crouching at the door of a building threatening those that are inside. Sin is pictured as that demon waiting to jump on Cain. It was lying in wait for him, desiring to have him. It’s possible he was already planning to murder his brother. But notice what else God said in verse 7 that is key for us: **“you must master it.”** God wasn’t denying the emotion, but He was condemning the direction it was taking Cain.

Let me say here as simply as I can, anger is okay. It is an emotion that God created in us, because anger is also an emotion in Him. **Is God angry at sin?** He

sure is. **Was Jesus angry with the money changers?**
 He sure was. **Is God angry at the injustice done to widows and orphans or to the righteous?**

Absolutely. Anger is not a sin. Where it turns into sin is what we choose to do with that emotion. Cain's anger became sin.

In Genesis 13 we find the herdsmen of Lot and Abraham quarrelling over the grazing land.
 The men of Sodom were angry with Lot for not turning over the two visitors.
 Esau was angry with Jacob for deceiving him.
 Laban was angry with Jacob for taking off.
 The 10 sons of Jacob were angry with Joseph.
 Pharaoh was angry with Moses.
 Moses was angry with the Israelites.
 Saul was angry with David.
 Amnon was angry with Tamar.
 Absalom was angry with Amnon.
 Jezebel was angry with Elijah.
 Nebuchadnezzar was angry with the 3 Hebrew men.
 The Pharisees were angry with Jesus.
 The Sanhedrin was angry with Stephen.
 Saul was angry with Christians.
 The mob in Ephesus was angry with Paul.

That anger is a problem resulting in sin is quite clear throughout Biblical history and indeed even until now and it will continue to be a problem.

Anger is a problem both **psychologically and physically**. As we go through these traits of anger, do a mental check to see if some might describe you and no neighbor nudging. If you find you have a few of these traits maybe anger is more a problem than you realize and sin is crouching at the door.

Irritability, grouchy, grumpy, moody
 Sullen, grim, bad-tempered
 Rude, crass, bad-mannered
 Passive traits include giving someone a cold shoulder or a phony smile. Ignoring someone in the hallway and not responding to a greeting.
 Avoidance.

There might be obsessive behavior of some kind like feverishly cleaning the house.
 Provoking others to aggression. You may not lash out at another person but instead know what buttons to push to get the other person to respond in anger. Gossip is another form of passive anger. You choose to talk behind someone's back, whether truth or not, as a way of damaging their reputation. Resentment and bitterness are passive forms of anger. The person may also anonymously complain or write what is called the poison pen letter – snail mail, email, texting, twitter. I have received some, maybe you have too. The intent is to vent their anger and so hurt you in some way.

Aggressive forms of anger appear in things like bullying, destructiveness to property, harmful behavior toward others. That can be anything from screaming at them to abusive language to physical violence of some kind including explosive rage. It may be slow burning or an instant outburst. Slamming doors, reckless driving, even addictions are all ways we see aggressive forms of anger.

If you remember watching some of your favorite cartoon characters, you may recall steam coming out the ears, clenched fists, their whole body turning red and even an explosion or two or fire coming out the mouth in an effort to express their anger.

When a person gets angry, the part of the brain that deals with emotion is going crazy. Blood increases to the frontal lobe over the left eye, the area that controls reasoning. That's why when anger really gets out of control you tend to have a headache or your left eye might hurt.

Uncontrolled anger can manifest itself in some pretty serious health conditions.

Poor immune system
 Gastrointestinal problems like gastritis
 High blood pressure and heart attacks
 Headaches and migraines
 Kidney disease
 Arthritis

Skin disorders
Circulatory disorders
Nervous system disorders

Medical testing has documented that these health issues can be a direct result of uncontrolled or long-term anger that is not dealt with.

Anger is a problem and that's why our verse says that a person who can conquer his anger and keep it in check or use it appropriately is greater than the guy who conquers a city.

Let me just mention some positive elements of anger before we go on.

Anger can channel energy to fuel intensive work for many hours. It produces an adrenalin rush that keeps you going.

Anger can help you persevere when you are facing a difficult goal.

It can encourage creativity or innovation and encourages healthy debate among competing ideas which result in better outcomes.

It motivates people to deal with wrong doers (such is the case with Jesus).

It draws attention to injustices.

When I was a senior in High school, we were competing in a Cross Country meet against Alpena. I didn't think the course was marked out very well because I and another Fairview runner missed the very first turn. I became angry because of the poor markings and yelled to the coach about which way we were supposed to turn. It motivated me to run faster, reclaim first place and win the race with my best time that year.

We won't take time to discuss the financial cost to businesses or families or communities or schools who have to bear the burden of fixing property that has been damaged, or who have to incur medical expenses from doctor or hospital visits because anger was a problem. I will say this, a survey was

done in 2009 among middle schoolers. 8% said they purposely skipped school to avoid running into the bully who threatened them.

Not only are there psychological and physical ramifications, what about the personal damage done because of anger.

There are broken relationships. Homes that are torn apart when family members lash out verbally or physically.

Spouses tear into each other.

Kids are at each other's throats.

Parents and kids are angry with each other.

Bosses are angry with employees.

Employees are angry with management.

Employees are angry with each other.

Reputations are damaged or lost because of anger.

Anger in relationships erodes trust like a flash flood erodes the soft soil of some valley. Relationships are shredded by anger and the one who is crouching at the door is grinning with glee because we can't get along or keep our anger in check.

Louis L'Amour, the famous author of western novels said that "anger is a killing thing; it kills the man who angers, for each rage leaves him less than he had before. It takes something from him."

Marcus Aurelius once noted "how much more are the consequences of anger than the causes of it."

Anger is a problem. **Is it yours? Is it mine?**

We have considered the widespread problem of anger; now let's look at the progression of anger.

II. THE PROGRESSION OF ANGER

Ephesians 4:25-32

This passage helps us understand the progression of anger.

Verse 26 – “In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath.”

Amplified – “When angry, do not sin; do not ever let your wrath – your exasperation, your fury or indignation – last until the sun goes down. Leave no [such] room or foothold for the devil – give no opportunity for him.”

The New English Bible – “If you are angry, do not let anger lead you into sin; do not let sunset find you still nursing it; leave no loophole for the devil.”

According to this passage, the progression of anger for it to become sin begins when we harbor it. Now he’s not saying that I can let these emotions run wild during the day, but by nightfall I better have them in check. It’s night like Cinderella where once the clock strikes midnight there is a change. I think Paul is really trying to stress that we must take care of whatever the issue is that is causing the anger right away.

Often times what happens is that our anger leads to a greater degree of more anger. **Proverbs 10:12** **“Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions.”**

I read a story about a man who came to President Lincoln with an issue that had caused him to become very angry. The President told the man to sit down and write a letter to the opponent who had caused him to become angry. When he had written the letter, the President read it and then told the man to burn it in the fireplace and then write another. The man asked why he should burn the letter that expressed his disdain and contempt for the other man, Lincoln explained that he never sent a letter he has written in anger, when he had calmed down and more facts were evident.

Never harbor your anger. **The anger that is spoken of here, writes John MacArthur, “is not the boiling**

over rage or inward seething resentment, but rather a deep-seated, determined and settled conviction.” I believe it was the kind of anger Saul had for Christians before he was saved.

Chuck Swindoll offers some help in understanding the progression of anger that leads to sin.

1. Mild irritation which is nothing more than an innocent experience of being upset about something or by someone. Your kids repeatedly leave lights on or dirty laundry lying around. Your neighbor puts his trash on your lawn for pick up.
2. Indignation results when the irritation is not dealt with. You feel like some type of response is required. You must avenge the wrong. You might reprimand your kids with a strong tone, especially if it’s the umpteenth time you’ve told them. Both irritation and indignation can go unexpressed. You choose not to respond. If you let it go, it’s not sin, but if you persist with some action, even if it is just to harbor it or nurse it, then it becomes sin.
3. If fed, indignation leads to wrath. Wrath always results in some action. Psychologists tell us that wrath is a strong desire to avenge. You can’t wait for God to do it, you take matters into your own hands. **Proverbs 27:4** begins by saying that **“wrath is cruel.”** It’s actions are always with evil intentions.

Now keep in mind that it was Paul who wrote in **Romans 12:19 – “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”**

4. Wrath leads to fury. This word suggests violence of some kind. Trouble is brewing. It is used to speak of the fury of a storm or the fury of the sea. It’s violent.
5. The last phase in this progression is rage. It is the most dangerous form of anger. Rage is described as a temporary loss of control involving acts of violence; the angry person scarcely realizes what he has done. We call it a “fit of rage.”

Ephesians 4:26 says that anger becomes sin when we harbor it and allow it to fester, especially overnight. That's when we begin to plan our revenge. Paul is saying here that we need to keep short accounts. Before nightfall get the matter resolved or else you're running the great risk of sinning. Indignation that begins with the right motive can turn south quickly. If we don't deal with it, we give the devil an opportunity to turn it into something not initially intended.

Anger is a problem. There is a progression, but there is also a prevention.

III. THE PREVENTION OF ANGER

Our verse in Proverbs suggests that anger can be controlled. If a person is able to do so, he has achieved something far greater than taking a city.

Let's look at the Ephesian 4 passage again because it provides some keys in how we can deal with anger so that it does not become sin. We already suggested one key and that is not to harbor it. Don't let it sit and boil in you, don't dwell on the wrong or the perceived wrong. It will always get you in trouble.

You might say, "well Pastor, that's easy for you to say, but you don't know my situation. If you only knew what they did to me, they deserve it."

I don't think Paul is qualifying what is justifiable and unjustifiable anger. Remember that even when we believe we can have what we call "righteous indignation" it borders on the fence of falling into sin. Remember our verse from **Genesis 4:6-7** that **"sin is crouching at the door."**

Friday I was reviewing some of memory verses and just happened to be meditating on **Ephesians 4:26 and 31** and the little light bulb went off. Remember we talked about some of the forms of anger being,

rage, wrath, and malice. Malice is an active ill will with the intent of doing harm to something.

Here's the thing – you can prevent anger welling up in you or in someone else by following the principles of this passage.

A. Keep Short Accounts – vs. 26

Paul suggests to the Corinthians that it all begins with love. John also says the same thing. **"Love one another."**

I Corinthians 13 supports the notion of keeping short accounts if we will demonstrate love.

I Corinthians 13:4-7

I saw on the news this week the evidence of this passage on display. In Greece, New York the school district has an adult ride the bus to monitor activity and ensure safety on the bus so the driver doesn't have to contend with problems. There was a video clip of four 7th graders who for a full 10 minutes berated and belittled her, using profanity and ridicule. She attempted to speak kindly to them but they kept it up. While the school is going to seek disciplinary measures against these students she has chosen not to press charges. She was interviewed on Fox News not too long ago about the incident and someone wanted to encourage her with donations to pay for a nice vacation. They were hoping to get \$5,000 but as of this morning there has been over \$500,000 donated to her. She chose not to be easily angered. She chose not to keep a record of wrongs done to her. Love bears all things and keeps short accounts.

B. Speak Wholesome Words – v. 29

In verse 25 Paul said we should speak the truth. If you don't want someone to get angry with you, be honest. Then in vs. 29 along with honesty don't speak garbage or don't be foul mouthed. Don't swear. Don't be condescending or critical or judgmental. And that goes with how you say it.

The tone in how you say things is important. I like the KJV rendering better because it is clearer. **“Let no corrupt communication proceed from your mouth, but only what is good for edifying.”**

(Emphasis is mine.)

Corrupt means things that are spoiled, contaminated, things that destroy. When bacteria settles into food it begins to destroy the contents making it contaminated.

Those of you who have been campers at Barakel know that it is tradition for tribes to go out and cookout on Thursday nights. All the staff families also got a box of cookout stuff as well: hot dogs and buns, chips, an apple, usually some dessert like pudding and individual cartons of milk. This particular night our family was home, hot dogs had been cooked over the stove and the meal prayed over. It was a hot day so I opened up my paper carton of chocolate milk, tipped my head back to take a long, deep, satisfying drink. Instead of a smooth liquid of silky chocolate tantalizing my taste buds I instead got chunks of cold curdled, sour milk. It had become corrupt.

Colossians 3:8 “But now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.” They are to be put off like we would take off old clothes.

Some people call it a potty mouth. Others call it a gutter mouth. Whatever the term if you don't want others to become angry with you, anger that could lead to rage and malice, speak words of encouragement instead, not words that corrupt and destroy. Off-color jokes, profanity, dirty stories, vulgarity, innuendos or double-entendres and every form of corrupt talk should be repulsive to us because they can lead to anger in someone else. Keep short accounts. Don't speak unwholesome talk.

C. Get Rid of Sour Grapes – v. 31

They are listed in this passage as bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, and slander.

These are all sins that come from us. So on one hand Paul just said be angry and don't sin, but here he is telling us to get rid of anger. It can come from or produce strong feelings of bitterness, which is smoldering resentment toward someone. We become angry with them for some reason and when something bad happens to them, we smile with glee. We have touched on some of the others characteristics so we won't go into them, but slander is something that intentionally defames another.

D. Be Sympathetic – v. 32a

If you want to avoid anger growing in others show kindness and compassion to them. Jesus suggested that we give a cup of cold water to an enemy. Kindness is a command. It's not an option. When someone does something to you that you feel justified in retaliation, instead of allowing anger to well up, show kindness instead.

E. Be Forgiving – v. 32b

Here the command is to forgive. It's not an option to consider or we'll forgive this but not that or we'll forgive this time but not next time. The example Paul lays out for us to consider when someone has wronged us is that of God Himself, who forgave us of all our wrongdoings.

In **Colossians 3:13-17** Paul tells us not only that we are to forgive and how we are to forgive but why. Forgive because Christ forgave. Where forgiveness is lacking there is no unity

Here's how to forgive.

Put on love which binds us in unity. How many believe that if we are angry with someone there isn't any unity? If we can't honestly and Biblically

love someone then we have an issue with anger toward them and its sin. How many believe that? I've heard people say about someone else "I can love him in the Lord but I don't have to like them." That's baloney. There isn't any love there at all. There is anger in some form or another. Put on love. If you don't love them, you can't forgive them. If you don't forgive them, there is no love.

Let Christ's peace settle your heart. If His peace is in you then you won't be angry toward someone.

Be thankful. If we honestly thank the Lord for whatever it is we may have cause to be angry about joyfulness will keep us from becoming angry. We learned about this Wednesday night. **Philippians 2:14** tells us not to complain about anything and **4:4** says to be joyful in all things. We can't complain and be joyful at the same time. One cancels out the other. Which will we let rule. If we complain we aren't thankful. Complaining leads to resentment which leads to bitterness which leads to anger which leads to rage which leads to malice. Be thankful instead.

Let Christ's Word dwell in you – how? Richly. His Word richly in us leads to a joyful heart and a joyful heart diminishes the predisposition to anger. If I'm angry about something God's Word is the last place I want to go to, yet it is the best place to go to keep me from becoming angry in a way that is sinful.

Let our attitudes and actions be honoring to God.

Are my actions and attitudes honoring God?
 Are my actions and attitudes promoting unity?
 Is God's Word richly dwelling in me?
 Am I experiencing God's peace?
 Am I unwilling to be kind or forgiving?
 Do I believe that in some way my rights are being violated?

Proverbs 20:3 says that "a fool is quick to quarrel."

Proverbs 15:1 suggests that "a soft answer turns away wrath, but harmful words stir up strife."

James 1:19 adds "Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger." That's great advice if you want to avoid a response in anger. Give a soft answer.

Anger is a real problem, but if we practice these principles we can tame the tiger that is in all of us and in the end God will be glorified. I hope that's what you really want. Only on the rare occasion can God truly be glorified through anger and then Christ is the one who did it best.

Be angry, but don't sin. Keep a short account. I can't think that being labeled a hot-head is very gratifying. **What steps will we take to tame the tiger we call anger?**

Is there someone you have been angry with, no matter to what degree, whom you need to ask forgiveness?

Is anger a problem you want to ask God to help you with today?

F. Give a Soft Answer – Proverbs 15:1