

FM: Growing a Strong Marriage Creates a Healthy Family 4: “ANGER’S ‘HOLY’ WORK”

“The fool who provokes his family to anger and resentment will finally have nothing left.” Proverbs. 11:29

This morning we are going to delve deeper into a subject I introduced in an earlier message from this series. I mentioned in that sermon that anger is a rather inevitable part of most every relationship; including the one with our spouse; our marriage. I wish it were not so, but most couples at some point get angry with each other, and today, my goal is to try to help all of us figure out how to deal with our angry feelings, and how to use the anger we often feel, to make our marriages stronger...and therefore create healthier families.

Most anger and most arguments follow a distinct pattern. They have identifiable stages, or phases.

Phase 1: **RECOGNITION** - “We have a problem”. Usually you are irritated.

Phase 2: **REACTION** - “I’m upset about it! “I’m ticked off! I’m irritated”. This phase sometimes gets a little loud.

Phase 3: **RESOLUTION** - “What can we do about it?” Stay through the Reaction period, and keep working until you reach some level of resolution.

Many marriages in conflict never get past phase two. Why, because they don’t know how to deal with their anger. Typically there are two reactions; I’ll call them the skunk and the turtle reactions. One is quite aggressive, one passive. You always know when the skunk is angry – they stink the place up. When the turtle is angry, they withdraw into a shell! Typically in a marriage one is silent, one is violent! One blows up and the other clams up! We all need to learn how to express our anger appropriately, or our relationships will simply go around in stinky, shell-shocked circles. If we will apply the following 4 Biblical principles about anger...we can learn...

HOW TO EXPRESS ANGER APPROPRIATELY:

1. HONESTLY ADMIT MY ANGER

“Stop lying to each other; tell the truth...when we lie to each other we are hurting ourselves. If you are angry, don't sin by nursing your grudge.” Eph. 4:25-26

There is a right way and a wrong way to express anger. The Bible says when I'm angry and I deny it, I'm sinning. Anger is a God-given emotion. If you never get upset over anything, you may not be 'spiritual', you might be dead! Anger just means you care deeply about some things. Sometimes the most appropriate thing in your marriage is to get angry. Did you know that God gets angry? 375 times in the OT it says God got angry. We all know about Jesus getting angry in the temple.

But did you know that anger not only has a spiritual reality to it, it has a physical and even psychological component as well? Anger is a major contributing factor to depression, and anger that is not appropriately and sufficiently dealt with, will come out in some way; often in physical ailments, or mental illness. When we swallow our anger, our stomachs keep score; they're called ulcers!

Many of us identify that we get depressed, when in reality it might be anger we are feeling. But anger is too scary or hard to admit, so we opt for depression instead! The Bible says if we are going to resolve our anger, we first have to admit it. Don't lie. Don't pretend it's not there. Say, "I am upset about this issue, or concern, or behavior." Once you admit it you can move on to #2.

2. COME TO UNDERSTAND MY ANGER

This is the key: *“A man's wisdom gives him patience.”* Proverbs 19:11 The more I understand my anger, and its causes, the more patient I'm going to be. We need to ask ourselves; why am I angry? What is it that is so upsetting me? Anger is often a warning light that I'm dealing with a different issue than what is on the surface. We typically get irritated by surface issues, but we get angry by life issues.

Have you noticed in your relationships that many arguments don't start with the real problem? They start with surface issues. You only get to the real problem if you hang in there, keep talking until you both get in touch with why you are angry, why you feel the way you do. Like the guy who once said: "No matter what you think you're fighting about, what you're really fighting about is money." (By the way, that's often true in marriage and in churches)

We can start to understand our anger better by observing a few of the root causes of real anger. Much anger in marriage comes from one or more of these root causes:

When I feel **unaccepted**. Being unconditionally accepted is one of the great benefits and blessings of being married. When we begin to feel unaccepted, we'll likely get angry. When you reject what or who I am, when you compare me to other people, when you nag me, when you make fun of me, I get angry, because I feel unaccepted.

When I feel **unappreciated**. This is a 'biggy' in marriage. When you take me for granted, don't value my work, don't value my effort at home or at work, when everything else in the world seems more important to you, than me, I get angry.

When I feel **unsupported**. When you work against me instead of with me, when you don't share the load, when you're not feeling responsible for me, I get angry.

When I feel **unprotected**. It's probably true that women have a greater need for protection from their husbands than husbands do, but anger can arise within either party if you feel that your mate is not protecting you or your marriage.

When I feel **uncertain**. When I don't know if I can trust you. When you don't tell me the truth. When I'm not certain what you're saying is right, I can get angry. The key to defusing and dealing with anger is by starting the process of understanding our anger, by prayerfully analyzing these root causes. That leads to #3.

3. DEAL IMMEDIATELY WITH MY ANGER

All of us can procrastinate some things, but none of us better procrastinate when it comes to our anger. The Bible makes this point clearly: *“Never let the sun set on your anger or else you will give the devil a foothold.”* Eph. 4:26-27 Don’t end the day, don’t go to bed thinking: ‘we’ll sleep on it’, and somehow that will aid resolution. Resolve each day’s anger by the end of that day. This is a great rule we might apply to our marriages, and our other relationships: Neither of us gets to go to bed until we’ve resolved our anger. You may have to stay up all night. Susan and I have. Deal with it now; don’t put in on the shelf. Why? *“You are only hurting yourself with your anger...”* Job 18:4 The longer we wait to share a feeling, the more that feeling builds up and grows, festers, I call it!

Anger produces biochemical changes in our bodies. We get flushed, our necks get tight, our muscles tense, our adrenal glands go into overdrive. Have you ever heard someone say; “that really burns me up”? They aren’t lying! Anger left to fester will likely come out, or rise again somewhere else. Like the monster on the teen horror flicks, it just keeps coming back to life! Unexpressed anger becomes bitterness and that is always trouble. As we have discovered, anger is not always wrong, but resentment and bitterness (the results of un-dealt with anger) are always wrong! When we hold on to our anger we become resentful and bitter. Better to deal with it, now!

4. COMMIT TO CONTROLLING MY ANGER

“A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.”
Proverbs 29:11

How do we do that? The Bible gives us three really specific and practical suggestions. (1) *“Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.”* James 1:9 If you are quick to listen, and slow to speak, you will be slow to anger. James is saying stop and think before you talk. Get your mind in gear before you get your mouth in gear. The quickest way to cut your own throat is by your own sharp tongue!

(2) *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”* Prov. 15:1

I've often wondered exactly what a "gentle answer" looks or sounds like. I have a hunch: I think it means:

A- Be **BRIEF** if you badger and harangue for 20 minutes without coming up for air, that's not gentle words, even if you're smiling while you say it. You need to learn how to state your case and let the other person talk without going on and on. Be gentle.

B- Be **SPECIFIC** Don't tell them "I wish you'd be neater." What does that mean? We have different standards of neatness. You might say, "Would you mind not leaving your underwear on the living room floor, or your dirty socks on the door handle? That's specific.

C- Be **HUMBLE** Proverbs 13:10 says: *"Only by pride comes contention."*

Count on it! At the base line, conflict involves ego – my ego, your ego. When our ego's get hit then we have conflict. Humility is the exact opposite of pride. Be gentle.

(3) *"Do not use harmful words in talking. Use only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed..." Eph. 4:29*

When face-to-face in a conflict, we have to establish the ground rules. For instance; we need to agree not to use Divorce as a threat, or stick to this one issue, or not bring up junk from the past, or to stick with it till we're done.

Because the Bible implores us to use helpful words, here are **the seven rules for fighting fair?** (I call them the battle of the Seven C's:)

1- Never **COMPARE** When you're in the middle of a conflict never say, "Why can't you be like...?" or even worse, "You're just like..." Low blow. It's unfair to compare. Yes, we do have characteristics of our brothers and sisters, and as much as we despise the thought, we often become our parents; we just don't need a spouse to remind us of that, especially one we're fighting with!

2- Never **CONDEMN** Don't use absolutes. "You always..." "you never..." "You should..." "It's YOUR fault!" "You should be ashamed." Condemning doesn't work.

Jesus says, *"I didn't come to condemn the world, but to save it."* You will never change people by labeling or condemning them. Seeing what we can become, not by telling us what we are, changes us. Don't tell it like it is; tell it like it could be.

3- Never **COMMAND** Don't try to end an argument by force. Don't ever say, "I demand you do what I say." O, go ahead and try it, if you'd like...!

4- Never **CHALLENGE** Threatening a spouse hardly ever works, and if it does, it won't for long! "You just try that, and see what happens!" It's kind of like, "I dare you!" Remember when you were a little kid and your parents would say, "I don't want to hear a peep out of you!" And more than anything what did you want to say/do... "PEEP" – just to see what would happen. Typically in marriage, threats come in three areas: money, sex, divorce. The Bible clearly teaches not to use any of these as weapons against our mate.

5- Never **CONDESCEND** Don't belittle your mate, don't ridicule. Especially don't ridicule their feelings. You may not feel that way, but who said you're mentally stable!!! Never play the psychologist. "I know why you said that!" (what, we're mind readers now!) And don't try to placate someone else's feelings by saying; "Oh I know exactly how you feel." No you don't!

6- Never **CONTRADICT** Don't interrupt in the middle of a sentence. Wait your turn to talk. There is a reason God gave us two ears and only one mouth. We should all listen twice as much as we should talk! Another word for contradiction is interrogation.

7- Never **CONFUSE** Some of us can be brilliant 'confusers'. We are masters at bringing up unrelated issues, just to confuse the real issue. When we are losing a particular point and we know it, we can quickly switch tracks to someplace from left field. So then your spouse starts arguing in that area. Soon you are losing there too, so you jet off to another unrelated issue, and soon you have forgotten what the real issue was.

It's a stupid but oft-employed tactic that produces poor results. Stick with the issue at hand, especially don't bring up junk from the past that has been dealt with or is unrelated. I think many couples would benefit from a healing/cleansing/burial ceremony, early in their relationship, where all the junk from their collective pasts is discussed, and then dismissed, forever. Forgiveness must be extended and received, then leave the past there, in the past.

Remember Scot Peck's quote from week one: "The Road to intimacy is always through the tunnel of ...Chaos." Fighting with our spouse, being angry with the one we love often feels 'chaotic', but it's worth it, and when done right, cannot only make us happy, but just might make us holy! Cool huh?

Prayer

"Thank you Father that your Word is so practical and relevant and helps in every area of our life. Help us to deal with the anger and conflicts that we experience in ways that are appropriate. Help us to admit it, understand it, deal with it and with your help, control it, so you might use it to make us more like your son Jesus, in whose name we pray.

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The anatomy of a typical argument:

Phase 1: _____ - "We have a problem".

Phase 2: _____ - "I'm upset about it

Phase 3: _____ - "What can we do about it?"

HOW TO EXPRESS ANGER APPROPRIATELY:

1. HONESTLY _____ MY ANGER

"Stop lying to each other; tell the truth...when we lie to each other we are hurting ourselves. If you are angry, don't sin by nursing your grudge." Eph. 4:25-26

2. COME TO _____ MY ANGER

"A man's wisdom gives him patience." Proverbs 19:

3. DEAL _____ WITH MY ANGER

"Never let the sun set on your anger or else you will give the devil a foothold."
Eph. 4:26-27 *"You are only hurting yourself with your anger..."* Job 18:

4. COMMIT TO _____ MY ANGER

"A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control."
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What does it mean to share Gentle Words?

A- Be _____

B- Be _____

C- Be _____

The seven rules for fighting fair?

1- Never _____

2- Never _____

3- Never _____

4- Never _____

5- Never _____

6- Never _____

7- Never _____

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Study Guide

1. Talk about anger, how it affects your marriage, how you have learned how to deal with feelings of anger in your relationship.
2. Discuss the 4 suggestions for expressing anger. Are there some you agree with more than others? Are there others you would add to the list? Share them.
3. What have you learned about expressing anger that you think might be helpful to the group?
4. Discuss the “Gentle Words” suggestions, agree/disagree/additions?
5. Work your way through the rules for fighting fair. Maybe do a ‘ranking’ like we did last week of yourself, and your spouse, how are you doing in each of these areas? Are there other rules you employ when fighting that might be helpful to the group.
6. Spend some time praying for your own marriages, and those in our church and community that are struggling.