LIVING WITHOUT ANGER (PART 1)
MATTHEW 5:21-26

MAIN IDEA
Anger is meant to be a temporary response to danger. If it is not resolved, it will ruin a person’s life and the lives of those around them.

I. YOU SHALL NOT MURDER (VS 1)
Since the God we worship is the God of life; everything and everyone He has created is sacred.

   A. THE COMMANDMENT ITSELF
   B. THE PUNISHMENT FOR VIOLATING THE COMMANDMENT
   C. THE HEART OF THE COMMANDMENT

II. THE DANGER OF UNRESOLVED ANGER (VS 22)
Unresolved anger causes people to murder their own souls and the souls of the people around them.

   A. THE PURPOSE OF ANGER
   B. NURSING ANGER
   C. LASHING OUT IN ANGER
   D. CONTEMPT AS MURDER
   E. THE JUDGMENT OF UNRESOLVED ANGER

III. DEALING WITH UNRESOLVED ANGER (VS 23-26)
The solution to unresolved anger is to resolve it according to God’s values.

   A. GOD’S PRIORITIES (22-24)
   B. GOD’S SENSE OF URGENCY (25-26)
   C. GOD’S BLESSINGS
LIVING WITHOUT ANGER (PART 1)
MATTHEW 5:21-26

Note: Everything I am preaching in this series on the Sermon on the Mount is taken directly from the following sources. There is not much that is original thinking on my part:

- *The Gospel of Matthew* by William Barclay
- *Be Loyal* by Warren Wiersbe
- *The Divine Conspiracy* by Dallas Willard
- *Celebration of Disciplines and Workbook* by Richard Foster
- *The Good and Beautiful Life* by James Bryan Smith

We said that the thought that drives the rest of The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus’ command that our righteousness must surpass that of the super religious people of the day. During the next two weeks, we are going to talk about how we can learn to live without anger and without the need to lash out and retaliate when we are wronged. Keep in mind that we said that none of this can be done on our own power. We can only live with the kind of righteousness Jesus is talking about when we are connected with Him in a personal, passionate, and intimate relationship.

Anger is something we all have to deal with. Given the facts that we are sinful human beings, living together with other sinful human beings, in a lost and fallen world; we are bound to feel threatened. The main idea of this morning’s text is this. ANGER IS MEANT TO BE A TEMPORARY RESPONSE TO DANGER. IF IT IS NOT RESOLVED, IT WILL RUIN A PERSON’S LIFE AND THE LIVES OF THOSE AROUND THEM.

One day a young girl who was writing a paper for school came to her father and asked, "Dad, what is the difference between anger and exasperation?"

The father replied, "It is mostly a matter of degree. Let me show you what I mean."

With that, the father went to the telephone and dialed a number at random. To the man who answered the phone, he said, "Hello, is Melvin there?"

The man answered, "There is no one living here named Melvin. Why don’t you learn to look up numbers before you dial them?"

"See," said the father to his daughter. "That man was not a bit happy with our call. He was probably very busy with something, and we annoyed him. Now watch . . ."

The father dialed the same number again. "Hello, is Melvin there?" asked the father.
"Now look here!" came the heated reply. "You just called this number, and I told you that there is no Melvin here! You've got a lot of nerve calling again!" The receiver was slammed down hard.

The father turned to his daughter and said, "You see, that was anger. Now I'll show you what exasperation means."

He dialed the same number, and a violent voice roared, "HELLO!"

The father calmly said, "Hello, this is Melvin. Have there been any calls for me?"

I think this is a perfect example of how Jesus does not want us to treat one another. Jesus’ point is that first of all, when we feel anger, we need to resolve it quickly in a way that is consistent with His nature and personality. Second, we should work hard at not being the cause of other’s anger. I’ll explain this a little later in the sermon.

Before we get into the actual text of the sermon, I would like to point out a couple of things that will carry out through the sermon. Jesus is claiming to be a higher authority than the written Hebrew Law. We will see Him starting out sentences with phrases like, “You have heard it said,” referring to a Jewish law; and then finish the sentence with, “But I say to you,” and then make an authoritative statement that seems to make even more severe laws. No one but Jesus would dare to say something like that. Those kinds of statements would claim unbelievable authority for that time.

For the Jews, especially for the leadership group of Pharisees, Scribes, and Teachers of the Law; the Law was everything. They felt that they had exclusive rights to interpret and teach the Law.

Jesus’ whole point is that just obeying the letter of the Law does not guarantee that we are pleasing God. However, if we adopt Jesus’ attitude; we are almost guaranteed to keep the Law and please God.

We need to keep the context of these sayings in mind. Jesus said that not one jot or tittle of the Law would pass away. He also said that it would take a great deal of meekness to live out His way of life. We have already defined meekness to mean, “Power under control.”

Jesus wants not only legalistic compliance to the Law; He wants hearts that are devoted to God. At the heart of all His teaching Jesus says that when we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love people with the same sacrificial love He loves us with; we will automatically keep the Law. His goal is not to abolish the Law; but to live far above the requirements of the Law. For the next two sermons, we will see that it’s not enough to simply not murder our neighbor; we are required to love our neighbor. If we love our neighbor; murdering him or her will not even be a legitimate thought that would ever cross our mind.

I. YOU SHALL NOT MURDER (VS 21)

Jesus lays out the commandment, “You shall not murder,” in verse 21. SINCE THE GOD WE WORSHIP IS THE GOD OF LIFE; EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE HE HAS CREATED IS SACRED.
Jesus starts out by quoting the commandment. In Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17 the commandment simply states, “You must not murder” (NLT). Exodus 21:12-25 goes into detail about what constitutes murder as opposed to involuntary manslaughter or accidental death. For us, we could say the commandment forbids premeditated murder. It could also refer to deaths that happen because of irresponsible behavior such as drunk-driving, etc.

This does not prevent soldiers from killing in war, policemen killing in the line of duty, or people killing in self-defense. The kind of murder we are talking about has to do with someone taking another person’s life without proper authority or reason.

Further, Jesus restated the punishment for violating this command. He said that murderers will be subject to judgment. Exodus 21:12 makes the judgment clear, “Anyone who assaults and kills another person must be put to death” (NLT). The meaning here is clear. God created life and only God can take someone’s life. Murdering someone is in reality claiming to be God. Idol worship and murder are both offenses punishable by death. Of course God passes on His authority to take life to the state in the case of the death penalty, to soldiers and police to protect its citizens, and to individuals in order to preserve the life of themselves or others. However, murder is punishable by death. We will talk more about the law of retribution next week but this is the ultimate eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life system of justice.

Let’s get to the heart of the commandment. Augustine said that God created us out of the overflow of love within the Trinity. It is this overflow of God’s love that is poured out into us as human beings. Each one of us has been created as a result of God’s love. All of creation, and in particular human beings, belong to God. He is the rightful owner. Since each person has been created out of love and belongs to God; every human being should be treated as a beloved and special belonging of God.

No one has a right to harm or kill a beloved possession of God. The nature and character of God is creative and loving. God is not by character and nature destructive. Therefore two things follow. Since we are created by God; it is our duty to reflect His nature and character by being loving and creative. Second, since we are stewards of God’s creation, we must approach the other as beloved and cherished by God. The heart of the command is not simply, “Do not murder,” rather the heart of the command is, “I must love, care for, cherish, and nurture the human beings God puts in my life.” In other words, I must recognize that when I approach another human being that I am approaching God’s special child. Think about a mother bear and her cubs. The last thing you want to do is mess with a bear cub when the mother is close by. SINCE THE GOD WE WORSHIP IS THE GOD OF LIFE; EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE HE HAS CREATED IS SACRED.

II. THE DANGER OF UNRESOLVED ANGER (VS 22)

Jesus is now going to explain the heart of this commandment by laying out the danger of unresolved anger in verse 22. UNRESOLVED ANGER CAUSES PEOPLE TO MURDER THEIR OWN SOULS AND THE SOULS OF THE PEOPLE AROUND THEM.

In order to understand what Jesus is saying, we first must understand the purpose of anger. For the most part, we have no control of the appearance of anger in our lives. It is an emotion that God built into us. It is meant to alert us that we are in immediate danger. This anger gives us the
energy to protect ourselves. Psychology terms the two responses to imminent danger as fight of flight. The anger starts our production of adrenaline and gives us enough energy to get away or to stand up and fight. This anger is given to us for our protection. Let me simplify it like this. Anger alerts us to the fact we are in danger. It lets us know that we have been wronged. Just as an aside, the emotion of guilt alerts us to the fact that we have harmed or wronged someone, or put someone in danger.

Anger doesn’t have any degrees. It simply alerts us to the fact we are in danger. This danger could be physical danger; in other words, our life could be threatened. However, the same feeling of anger arises when our egos have been bruised, or that we have simply been treated unfairly, or that someone or something is blocking us from getting what we want or having our way. So the challenge we face is to evaluate the level of threat we are facing. In the case of an actual threat on our life, the anger should motivate us and empower us to fight back or run for our life. In the case of not getting our way, the anger should motivate us to see how petty we are and let it go. The Bible commands us to be angry without sin. Sin would be to emotionally punish someone simply because we did not get our way. The Bible also instructs us not to let the sun go down on our anger. This means that anger is only meant to be temporary. It must be resolved in a relatively short period of time. If anger is out of control and if it is not dealt with appropriately in a timely manner, Satan will attach himself to the anger. Keep in mind, Satan’s goal is to steal, kill, and destroy. Unresolved anger is destructive. In his letter to the church in Ephesus Paul stated both the concepts in one short verse:

26 In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

Ephesians 4:26-27 / Today’s New International Version

Now that we understand how anger is supposed to work, we can address what Jesus has to say about anger. In this verse, Jesus talks about the escalation of unresolved anger. He starts with nursing anger. Jesus starts out with the statement, “anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.” Let me start out with the phrase, “will be subject to judgment.” That is the exact same phrase He used in the previous verse to describe the consequences of murder. So Jesus is not only saying that this kind of anger is like murder; He is saying it is murder.

Now let’s get to the word He used for anger. The Greek language had a word to describe the anger we talked about earlier. The word is thumos. It is the response to a particular situation. It is like fire. It rises quickly but quickly subsides. It is temporary. The word Jesus uses is the word orgizo. This has to do with an attitude of provoking or being provoked. This is the kind of person walking around with unresolved anger. Let me give you an example. We see incidents of road rage in our time. Some motorists commit an unintentional driving infraction. Perhaps he inadvertently cuts off another car. The offended motorist madly chases this car down, gets out of the car, and kills the guy. The murderer did not kill the guy for cutting him off; there was some deep anger inside this murderer that boiled inside. This was just the incident that allowed this unresolved anger to come out. Some people have an attitude of entitlement and because we can’t always get what we want when we want it; these people walk around angry all day long. It will only take one little incident to cause them to blow up.
Now to be sure, there are some legitimate reasons people carry around unresolved anger. Perhaps they were physically, emotionally, or sexually abused when they were little. Perhaps they were raped or forced into the sex trafficking industry. Perhaps they lost their parents when they were young through death, abandonment, or divorce. We have all experienced tragedy of some sort or another.

However, if we start to nurse that anger, carry it around like a badge of honor, use it to justify all our failures and bad behaviors, and don’t take steps to resolve it; we are guilty of the word Jesus uses here for anger. Not only will this type of unresolved nursed anger destroy our souls, it destroys the lives of those around us, and as we see every day in Chicago, people are actually killed as a result; and oftentimes the victims are innocent children who get killed by stray bullets.

Here’s how to tell if you’re carrying around or nursing unresolved anger. If you were objectively able to evaluate how harshly you responded to a particular event, can you see that your response was much more severe than the infraction? Secondly, have you nursed a particular hurt for a long period of time? Do you often think about it and does it affect how you respond to other incidents in life? Does your unresolved and nursed anger color your entire outlook on life? If so, you need to get it taken care of because Jesus shows how this escalates to the next level.

This anger next moves to lashing out. And since we are mostly with people we love and choose to be around, we usually lash out against people we love. We want people to love us and respect us; but in the end people don’t want to be around us and look at us as if we are jerks. We almost always work against the things we want. Take for an example a woman who wants to spend time with her man. She starts to nag. The more she nags, the further away she drives the man. This works the same way with anger. We want love and respect; but when we act out in anger no one wants to be with us, they can’t love us, and they certainly don’t respect us.

The lashing out takes a verbal form here. Jesus says that calling someone a Raca is an offense that should be punished. The word was probably chosen because it sounds like the sound we make when we are forcing up saliva to spit out. It has that guttural, contemptuous sound. It describes someone who is empty headed and useless. In our culture, it would be like calling someone an idiot. In other words, we are lashing out at them verbally. Our intent is to punish them for their infraction. There is no other purpose except to put the other down and to punish them. Is that what we want to do to those we love? Is that our goal? Keep in mind that Jesus has told us that His primary command is to love one another as He has loved us. Can you imagine what it would be like if every time we committed an infraction; Jesus would lash out at us? Which one of us could be able to stand God expressing His displeasure for us every time we made a mistake? None of us could stand up under that. If Jesus consistently loves us and extends us grace; we become more Christ-like when we can extend grace to those who make mistakes. Lashing out escalates the anger.

The next step is contempt as murder. Contempt goes beyond punishment. This totally devalues the other person. Contempt says that the other person means absolutely nothing to me so it doesn’t matter how I treat them. Jesus describes this verbal attack as calling someone a fool. The word is a serious word in the Greek and the Hebrew. It attacks the very character and nature of a person. It says that the person has no intellectual, religious, or social worth. It is meant to destroy
a person's dignity and worth. Without actually physically killing someone, this is meant to kill their soul.

There is a sever judgment for those who refuse to take steps to resolve their unresolved anger. When we say things like we don’t care about other human beings and don’t care how we treat them or what we say to them; that is murder in Jesus’ eyes. The punishment is separation from God. If we are people who do not care about other human beings; then we have no connection with God. We will be separated from God in this life; and we will be separated from Him forever in the afterlife.

Look, if we take these as religious laws, we could say, “I don’t call people a fool,” but don’t treat people with the love God has for us, we are lost. The sin is to not love as Jesus loves. I can’t imagine what it will be like for those people who spend eternity in hell separated from God forever; but much more than that, I can’t imagine what life would be for me now being separated from God and His love for even one minute in this life. UNRESOLVED ANGER CAUSES PEOPLE TO MURDER THEIR OWN SOULS AND THE SOULS OF THE PEOPLE AROUND THEM.

III. DEALING WITH UNRESOLVED ANGER (VS 23-26)

Jesus was talking in terms of the soul damage we can do with words, but as I said earlier, we can see that this attitude of unresolved and nursed anger leads to actual murder; especially in the City of Chicago. If Jesus took unresolved anger so seriously, we would do well to take seriously His strategies for dealing with unresolved anger in verses 23-26. THE SOLUTION TO UNRESOLVED ANGER IS TO RESOLVE IT ACCORDING TO GOD’S VALUES. In other words, the solution to unresolved anger starts with understanding God’s priorities in verses 22-24.

Jesus gets us to examine this by causing us to reflect on our own sinful behavior. He is clearly saying that getting our relationships right with one another takes precedent over formal worship. It’s hard for us to understand how radical this is. Taking a sacrifice to the altar was one of the holiest moments for a Hebrew of the day. It was a special time for me and my family. I would bring a perfect animal to the priest. There at the altar, I would lay my hands on the animal; symbolizing the transfer of my sins to the animal. At that point, the priest would slit the throat of the animal and catch its blood. He would pour out the blood on the altar; signifying that my sins were now atoned for through the death and shed blood of this animal. It was an important event in the life of every Jew.

For us in a secular society, let’s picture ourselves at our wedding, at our baby’s dedication or baptism, or at our own baptism or confirmation ceremony. For our discussion, let’s take a wedding. If I am the groom and we as a couple are standing before the minister, and then all of a sudden realize that someone has something against me; Jesus sees the priority as stopping the wedding, finding the person, and then making things right. Then I can return to my wedding. Keep in mind these are examples; not necessarily to be taken literally. Jesus is trying to establish priorities. The priority is that loving and caring for people is God’s highest priority. If we do not care for the people God created in love; then we cannot worship God.

Can you imagine if someone came up during the worship service to dedicate their baby; and all of a sudden they realize they have a broken relationship that needs to be restored; hands me the
baby and says, “Pastor, I’ll be right back. I need to be reconciled with George.” That’s how stunning Jesus’ example is meant to be.

Now let’s look at this little twist. Jesus asks us to remember a brother or sister that has something against us. Jesus has been getting us to examine the unresolved anger within us. However, here I think He is asking us to think about if we have been the cause of some else’s unresolved anger. Have we treated someone unfairly? Has our words or behaviors towards someone been threatening? Have we hurt someone because of our contempt for them? Have we cursed at someone or talked to them as if they were idiots? Even worse, have we lashed out in anger towards someone and caused them to have these feelings of anger. Here is how important it is to resolve this in ourselves and in others. If our hearts and minds and souls are going to be in a state where we can freely worship God; we must get rid of our own anger and try to make peace with those in whom we have caused feelings of anger.

The first step in dealing with unresolved anger is to understand that we are deeply and profoundly loved by God. If no one else in the world loves us; we are loved by God. We are so loved by God that He sent His One and Only Son Jesus to die so we could be in a right relationship with Him. When we feel loved, cherished, respected, and valued; it’s much easier to let go of our past hurts.

Second, when we realize how much we have hurt God and yet how passionately He still loves us and forgives us on a daily basis; it is much easier to forgive those who have sinned against us and have hurt us. We practice this by saying the line in the Lord’s Prayer, “Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” To sum up the priority of God, it’s love; love for God and love for one another. That helps us to deal with unresolved anger.

In verses 25-26 Jesus gives us a sense of God’s urgency. In this example, Jesus assumes that we are the ones who are holding on to and nursing anger. We are the ones who are lashing out and treating people with contempt. However, we could be the cause of someone else’s anger. In their anger they may be acting out in sin. We could say that we had a part in their sin. He pictures us going to court with someone we have wronged. Let’s put this in today’s society. We have wronged someone and she is taking us to court to sue us. We are wrong and if this thing gets to court, there is no telling how much we’ll have to pay or how much time we’ll have to serve in jail. The best course of action is to settle outside of court; and preferably without getting lawyers involved.

If we get rid of our own unresolved anger and resolve ourselves to not being the cause of other’s unresolved anger; we will be considered to be a peacemaker. Jesus said in Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” That’s an incredible motivator to get rid of unresolved anger in our lives. God’s children are loving, caring, giving, and forgiving. The negative motivator is that nursing unresolved anger causes us to lash out and to view other human beings with contempt. Not valuing human beings separate us from God. That dooms us to a life of darkness and depression in this life; and hell in eternity. But for me, I’m focused and being called a child of God. There is no one I’m not willing to forgive or no thing I’m not willing to let go of in order to receive the blessings God gives to His children. It’s all a matter of perspective. THE SOLUTION TO UNRESOLVED ANGER IS TO RESOLVE IT ACCORDING TO GOD’S VALUES. The great promise to us in Jesus’ words is that we do not have to live with anger. We can actually learn to live without anger. Doesn’t that sound freeing? All we need to do is go to God with our unresolved
anger and hand it over to Him. He is much better equipped to hold it than we are. Anger is a specific and temporary function. ANGER IS MEANT TO BE A TEMPORARY RESPONSE TO DANGER. IF IT IS NOT RESOLVED, IT WILL RUIN A PERSON’S LIFE AND THE LIVES OF THOSE AROUND THEM.

In his book The Good and Beautiful Life, James Bryan Smith puts forth the Spiritual Discipline of practicing Sabbath as an antidote to unresolved anger. Most of the anger we face today has to do with unmet expectations and fear. When we experience unjust treatment, when we feel disrespected, and even when we nurse wounds from the past; we start to fear that we will never be loved or accepted and unless we go out and take what we want we will never receive anything. Sabbath is an exercise to practice receiving from God; He provides for us, He cares for us, and most of all He loves us. When the Hebrews were first given Sabbath to practice; it was meant to build up their confidence and trust in God. What we are unable to finish in six days, God will finish on the seventh. Resting on the seventh day is meant to give us spiritual, emotional, and physical rest. It is also meant to help us establish a healthy rhythm of life. I am not going to give you laws for Sabbath. Those are habits you have to work out with God. If you are interested in exploring how to make a great Sabbath, pick up Wayne Muller’s book Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives. This week we will be practicing the spiritual discipline of Sabbath.

**Preparation**

During the week, Read Exodus 16:1-30. Think about how the Hebrews were going to experience that Sabbath instruction.

Think about what that means to you in your world.

**Practice**

Set aside about an hour on the day you choose for your Sabbath and practice a mini Sabbath.

Close your eyes, make yourself comfortable and take a few deep breaths.

Jesus is now saying to you: Come unto Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

“Come unto Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Let all the things that you are concerned about fill your mind. Let all your fears, hurts, worries, and burdens fill your mind. (10 minutes)

“Come unto Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” As you watch and listen to all these things, notice how helpless you are to affect any change on them. (10 minutes)

“Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Bring Jesus into focus now. Intentionally sit down in His presence. Hand one of these burdens, cares, fears, worries, and all that concerns you off to Jesus; one at a time. Hand each one off to Jesus. (10 minutes)
As you sit here empty handed before Jesus, enjoy the freedom as you hear Him say to you, Come unto Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (10 minutes)

Closing prayer: Lord Jesus, we know that we cannot complete everything we have to do. Many things we have no control over and many are simply humanly impossible. We have chosen to rest in You and trust that You will complete those things we cannot complete on our own. Amen.