

Matthew 5:21-26

Sept. 28th, 2025

Deal With Anger Before It Destroys Your Life

Pastoral Moment

Welcome to Center Church my name's Josh I'm one of the pastors here. You may not know this but we moved into this facility almost exactly 3 years ago. When we moved in I had this sense that if God continued to grow our church family this was going to be a **starter home** but not our **forever home**. At some point we were going to need a bigger facility & **that time has come**.

We just launched a women's Bible study & it's already at capacity, we're parking mini-vans in the back grass. Our prayer team is meeting in a tent outside bc we needed more space for kids ministry & we just launched a 4th service to welcome the people God is bringing us. We're using every sq ft of this facility & we simply need more space.

So about a year ago we started searching for our **forever home**. Our **1st idea** was to expand our current facility, but we looked into it & we don't have enough acreage & the parking is untenable. **Our 2nd idea** was to buy land & build, which is nice bc you get to build what you want, but it takes a really long time, is prohibitively expensive & would require us to move out of Charlottesville. **Our 3rd idea** was to buy a vacant commercial property & renovate it. So we started talking to property owners & heard the same thing over & over "We aren't interested in selling only in leasing." We didn't want to invest a bunch of money into renovating something we didn't own, so we were stuck.

Honestly, it was pretty discouraging, we'd knocked on every door we could find & nothing was open. And then a **new property** came on the radar. To give you some context - our current facility is 9,800 sq ft & we own 45 parking spaces. This property is 45k sq ft & comes with +300 parking spaces. It has a dedicated **stop light** on 29-N, it's only **3 miles** from UVA & is located just **.2** of a mile from where we're currently sitting. It has all the necessary characteristics to become our church's **future home for ministry & hub for mission** & I'm excited to tell you that we've entered into a contract to purchase....the Big Lots building located on Branchlands Blvd!

God's fingerprints are ALL over this process & I'm excited to share those stories in the coming months. But here's what you need to know right now - we're currently in a **due diligence period**. Which means we're doing our diligence on the **facility** - inspecting all the systems etc. - & we're doing our diligence with the **church** - making sure our members have the info you need to support this move. So this week members are going to receive an email from Rick Johnson, explaining why we believe this is a responsible step forward financially. Then on **Mon Oct. 13th** we're hosting a Members' Meeting - at that meeting I'll share stories of God's favor in this process, you'll hear from some of our elders & we'll ask you to vote to affirm the contract.

If **everything goes well** then later this fall we're going to enter a unique season in the life of our church. We're going to study **Acts 1-6** & ask the question "How did the gospel move forward then & how will it move forward in our lives today?" Part of the goal of that series will be to raise the resources necessary to transform an empty **Big Lots into our future home** & hub. Exciting things!

If you have a Bible meet me in Mt 5:21. We're continuing our series in the **SOTM**. The SOTM is the most famous sermon Jesus ever preached & the closest thing to a **manifesto** he ever delivered. It's his description of what he wants his followers to be & to do. Wk 1 was about the **character** of a disciple, wk 2 about the **influence** of a disciple, wk 3 about a disciple's **relationship** to the Bible & today is about a disciple's relationship to anger. **Here's what we know**: we live in an angry society. You see it on social media, on news channels & on bumper stickers. We know the world is angry but a lot of us don't want to admit we're angry - I'm not angry I'm just Italian, I'm not angry I'm from the North, I'm not angry I'm just frustrated.

But seriously we've all experienced the effects of anger haven't we? Maybe anger destroyed your parent's marriage or is hurting your relationship with your kids. Maybe anger is why you lost your job or lost that friendship. For **some of us** anger comes out in loud aggressive ways, **for others** it comes out in passive aggressive sarcastic ways. But we all get angry & here's the thing: if we don't deal with anger it will destroy our relationships & put us in an emotional prison. So here's the big idea for today: Jesus wants us to uproot anger so it doesn't destroy our lives.

Context: Now to understand what's going on we need some context. In verse **v. 20** Jesus said your righteousness must exceed that of the pharisees. That's bc the Pharisees reduced God's law to the bare minimum & taught others to do the same. For example, they taught it didn't matter if you were greedy as long as you **gave 10%**. It didn't matter if your heart was full of lust as long as you didn't **actually commit adultery**. The pharisees were focused on external behavior but Jesus pushed beyond behavior down to the level of the heart.

Jesus said true righteousness isn't just about what you do but why you do it & he's going to give us 6 examples starting in v. 21

21 "You **have heard that it was said** to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 **But I say to you** that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment

Antithesis: When a rabbi quoted from the Bible he would say "**it is written**" but when a rabbi quoted another rabbi he would say "You have heard **it said**." Jesus will repeat the phrase "you have heard it said" multiple times in this section, bc he isn't disregarding God's commands, he's **correcting bad Bible teaching**. See the Pharisees had been doing bad Bible teaching & it made the people spiritually sick & spiritually weak. To remedy that situation Jesus is going to give us some strong Bible teaching. Look back at v. 21

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'

Murder: Jesus quoted the 6th commandment, you shall not murder & whoever murders will be judged. Everyone listening agreed with that. It was one of the 10 commandments & it was simply self evident that murder was a horrible evil. Unfortunately people are not clear about that today.

Today: One of the most troubling things about the murder of Charlie Kirk are the people who celebrated it. It's deeply troubling. Intuitively we all know that the murder of an innocent husband & father is a horrible, dark & wicked act. But if you're a strictly secular person it's difficult to explain why. If you believe there's no authoritative moral standard in the world, if all truth claims, lifestyles & choices are equally valid, how can you condemn

someone for committing murder? You might say “I wouldn’t do that but you lack the intellectual resources to thoroughly condemn it.”

Life: Christians don’t have that problem bc Christians believe what the Bible teaches about the **sanctity of life**. The Bible teaches that every human being is made in God’s image & thus is worthy of dignity, respect & protection. That’s why murder is so wicked bc its the intentional destruction of the image of God in another. **The sanctity of life** is why Christians should care for children with special needs, honor senior adults, work against racism & support single mothers. If you or someone you love has had an abortion, I want you to know that God’s grace is sufficient for you & we won’t shame you here, but we will advocate for children in the womb & oppose abortion, bc every human being is made in God’s image.

Seam: So Jesus said “You’ve heard it said you shall not murder” & everyone is feeling good about themselves, bc this is the commandment most of us have kept. Well next Jesus is going to show us **that the spiritual sickness that leads to murder begins with anger in our hearts.** V. 22

22 But I say to you that everyone who is **angry** with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever **insults** his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘**You fool!**’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

Anger: In the Bible there are **two types of anger**: holy & unholy. Anger can be holy. God gets angry, he’s slow to anger, it takes him a very long time, but he does get angry. Several times we’re told Jesus became angry. And in Eph 4:26 Paul wrote “be angry & do not sin” which implies its possible to be angry w/o sinning. So what is **holy anger**? Holy anger is when you’re angry about what makes God

angry. Its right to be angry at injustice, at murder or when a man abandons his wife & children. That’s holy anger. But the kind of anger Jesus is talking about is **unholy anger** & that’s what characterizes most anger in our lives. Holy anger is when you fight for **what is right**, unholy anger is when you fight for **what you want**. Holy anger is **about righteousness**, unholy anger is about **our preferences**, comfort & control.

Connected: Now it’s important to understand that Jesus isn’t stringing together 3 random prohibitions - don’t be angry, insult people or call someone foolish. No there’s a clear **progression of anger** represented in this verse. **Step 1 is feeling**, step **2 is insult**, step **3 is contempt**.

Emotion: Anger starts as an **feeling**. Your wife criticizes you & doesn’t appreciate how hard you work, your boss doesn’t give you the credit you deserve, you’re kids are ungrateful & you’re mother-in-law is always 2nd guessing your decisions. And that makes you **feel** angry, your blood pressure rises, your heart rate increases, your muscles get tense. First we feel anger. And if we don’t address anger as a feeling it comes out in **words**.

Words: In Mth 12:34 Jesus said out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. So if there’s anger in your heart it’s going to come out in your words - you’ll complain about you boss to your co-workers, trash your husband to your girlfriends or make snarky comments about your Dad to your siblings. Anger starts as an feeling, that overflows in words & eventually becomes **contempt**.

Contempt: The word contempt means feeling another person is worthless, beneath consideration or deserving of scorn. See that phrase “You fool!” It’s the greek word **Raca**. It means you’re “good for nothing” it literally means “you’re empty, you’re less then.” You see anger left unchecked leads you to treat other people with **contempt**, it leads you to minimize the image of God in them. And once you’ve dehumanized someone the table has been set for you to harm them bc after all they’re empty & less then human.

Apply: v. 22 explains what’s happening in our society & what happened with Charlie Kirk. If anger convinces you your opponent is less then human it’s only a matter of time before you start treating them that way. Notice what Jesus says “if you do this you are liable to **judgement**”. IOW - disciples of Jesus aren’t free to say whatever we want about other people. Not in the world & CERTAINLY not in the church. Your ex might have wronged you, your neighbor might be hard to live with, your pastor may have made you mad & you may disagree with a politician but those people are still made in the image of God & worthy of respect. As disciples of Jesus we must resist the temptation to dehumanize others. **Seam:** Anger leads to insult, which leads to contempt which leads to violence. See Murder doesn’t begin with a weapon it begins with anger in the heart. So how do we deal with anger? V. 23

23 **So** if you are offering your gift at the **altar** and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. **First** be reconciled to your brother, and **then** come and offer your gift.

Serious: “So” is a word of causation, it means based on what I’ve just said about the progression of anger you need to be serious

about dealing with it. That’s why Jesus used the extreme example of a guy at the temple. If you’re at the temple it means you’ve traveled a long distance, it’s probably taken you days to get there, you’ve bought a sacrifice, which wasn’t cheap, you’ve done all the necessary cleansings & you’re about to offer your sacrifice & right b4 you do God brings someone to mind who has something against you. **Notice**, not someone you have something against, someone with something against you! Jesus said anger is so serious you shouldn’t offer your sacrifice, instead you should leave, find your brother, be reconciled & then offer your gift.

Reconciled: Jesus used this example bc he’s reminding us it’s not easy to uproot anger & seek reconciliation. The easy thing is to let anger fester. To manage your anger & avoid people you’re mad at. But the righteous & wise thing to do is take extreme action to get anger out of your life before it mutates into something worse.

Church: Jesus placed this illustration in the context of a worship bc this is particularly true within the church. Do you know why? Bc one of the primary ways Satan attacks the church is through anger & unresolved conflict. That’s why Paul said in Eph 4:27 “do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil.” How does the devil get into your marriage? Your family? Or our church? Through unresolved anger & conflict.

Apply: So is there someone you need to reconcile with? Guys, is there a **lady** you need to call & apologize to? **Wives**, do you need to apologize to your husband for being disrespectful & critical? Maybe you’re a **boss** & you need to apologize to your employees for being harsh? Maybe you need to apologize to someone in our church for

slandering them? Do it today before things get worse. Jesus ends with a warning, v. 25

25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. 26 Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Gets Worse: Remember this isn't legal advice, Jesus is **illustrating** how anger works in our lives. Here's what he's saying - if you don't deal with anger now the consequences get worse. IOW- **Anger doesn't go away it only gets bigger.** If you don't deal with anger it will become **like a prison**, preventing you from entering **the future** God has for you. **Moses is a vivid example of that.**

Moses: **Moses is one of the** greatest leaders in the Bible. By the power of God he defied Pharaoh, delivered the Hebrew people from slavery, split the Red Sea & received the 10 Commandments. And yet **anger prevented** him from entering the Promised Land. In **Num 20** Moses was under a lot of pressure. His sister Miriam had just died, he was leading the people through the wilderness & they kept complaining against Moses bc they didn't have water. In response God instructed Moses to **speak** to a rock, so water would flow out of it but instead Moses **struck** the rock with his staff & said "listen you rebels shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" Feeling of anger, resulted in insult & contempt.

Moses was supposed to represent God to the people but in this moment he didn't. And the LORD told him bc you didn't uphold me as holy bc you exploded in unholy angry, you won't bring this people

into the promised land. Sinful anger prevented Moses from entering the promise land.

Apply: Guys, **God has amazing plans for our lives.** He wants good for you in marriage, parenting & relationships. He has a promised land prepared for you but anger wants to keep you from entering it. Maybe there's no intimacy in your **marriage** bc you've allowed anger to fester. You keep blaming her, she keeps blaming you. Maybe your **kids** disrespect you, slam doors & scream I hate you but rather than address it you've allowed anger to take control of them. Or maybe you've gone from one **church** to the next bc you refuse to resolve conflict. You're struggling to grow spiritually bc every year you change churches. Jesus wants more for us than that, He wants us to uproot anger so it stops destroying our lives. So how do we do that? Let me share a tool I find helpful.

Fruit/Root: **In Mt 7:17** Jesus said "Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit." The fruit is what we see - behaviors, emotions or habits. In this context **anger**. But that fruit comes from roots - what we believe we need to be happy. Breathing techniques & regular exercise are helpful to manage your anger in the moment but they don't address the deeper cause. If we want to stop bearing the fruit of anger we need to address the roots that are causing it. To discover the **root of your anger** you have to ask the question "**Why am I angry?**" And you have to keep going until you get down to the very bottom of your heart.

Me: **Let me give you** an example from a time when I was angry. Last weekend we needed to drive to my parents house to help them after a surgery. We were glad to do it but by the time we were

driving home I was really worn out. I asked Meredith to drive for a bit so I could rest. When I switched to the passenger seat my kids asked if they could watch a movie. Well we don't have a van with screens built in, so we have this tablet holder that you have to jerry rig to hold the iPad. So I'm turned around trying to get the iPad to sit right & I'm starting to feel nauseous & all at once the kids are saying it's too high or too low or I can't hear. And finally I said "STOP", just stop, let me get this figured out. I didn't yell or anything, & generally speaking, I have an awesome relationship with my kids but in that moment I got angry.

So they're watching Anne of Green Gables or w/e & I'm feeling convicted so I start asking the "why" question. Why was I angry? At first I wanted to blame my circumstances - I was tired, I was nauseous, everyone was talking at the same time & they need to be more patient. But that's not the real reason, bc I've been tired b4 & not angry. No, I was angry bc in my heart I believed **what I needed to be happy** wasn't the presence of God, it was peace & quite, so I could read ESPN articles & take a nap. My kids were getting in the way of that so I got mad. I confessed that to the Lord & asked my kids to forgive me & they did. You see my fruit was anger, my root was a false belief that what I needed to be happy was comfort rather than Christ.

Apply: Can I encourage you as a fellow pilgrim on this journey to stop blaming your anger on your circumstances? If we blame our circumstances we will NEVER change, bc there will always be a reason to be angry. If you're a disciple of Jesus can I encourage you to **take anger seriously** like Jesus does? Can I exhort you to stop **blaming everyone & everything** else & own the fact that it's your

fault your angry? Can I invite you to **start asking the "why"** question? To partner with the HS in discovering the root of your anger so you can uproot it from your life?

Prison: Jesus says such serious things about anger bc he doesn't want it to imprison us. You know prisons back then were different then they are now. Prisons today you have a toilet, a cafeteria, clothes to wear etc. That wasn't true then. Back then the only way you got food was if your friends brought it to you. The only way the waste got cleaned out of your cell was if someone took it away. You couldn't do anything. So in v. 26, when Jesus said "truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny". He was making the point that you'll never get out on your own, bc there's no way for you to make money & pay your debt. The only way you can get out of prison is if someone else came & paid your debt. Then you could be set free, not by your own power but bc of the generosity of another.

Gospel: And that is a picture of the gospel message. We may not have committed murder, but everyone of us has harbored anger in our hearts. We've insulted people & we've treated people with contempt. The truth is we deserve to stand under divine judgement for our unholy anger. We don't deserve to enter the promise land, we deserve to be in the prison of God's judgement.

But Jesus Christ came to pay our debt, so that we could be set free & welcomed into the promised land of God's presence & blessing. You see Jesus was angry a few times but never in a sinful way. He never insulted his brother or treated anyone with contempt. Instead, he values **every human life** so deeply he was willing **to give**

up his own life so we could be saved. On the cross the wrath of God against my anger & your anger was poured out on Jesus, so that through repentance & faith we could be set free from our prison of judgement & welcomed into the family of God.

Call: The 1st step to uprooting anger in your life is bowing your knee to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The 2nd step is asking him to help you identity & uproot the causes of anger in your life. So I'll invite you to bow your heads with me & I have **2 questions**. #1 Are you tired of being destroyed by anger? Are you ready to bow your knee to the Lordship of Jesus Christ today? You can do that today by praying a simple prayer from the heart like God I admit I'm a sinner who deserves your judgement, but I believe Jesus died to pay my penalty & rose again so I can have new life, and I commit to follow him as Lord of my life. You can pray that right now and if you do we'd love to give you a Bible today.

#2 Do you need to be **reconciled** to someone today? If so do it today. Don't give satan a foothold in your life or a place at your table. Hell is the place where everyone is angry & no one is reconciled, we don't need anymore hell in this world & you don't need anymore hell in your life. So seek reconciliation today.