

Anger

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[0 : 00] So as we said, as we kind of look in the main bulk of the book of Proverbs, these different kind of topics are scattered all about throughout the different chapters. We kind of brought them together there and so that we can look at them as one, look at them on these different topics that are kind of sprinkled throughout the main section of this book.

And we've seen already, haven't we, how these are incredibly practical issues, how the book of Proverbs, it deals with wisdom in the kind of the biggest sense of the word, but then also it deals with these situations that we face day by day.

It deals often with situations which are not black and white, but it guides us, it teaches us how to navigate a wise path through these real everyday challenges of life.

And remember, and I'm going to say this every week until we're sick of hearing it, but it's so important, remember that ultimately, as we saw in the introduction to the book of Proverbs, this wisdom is ultimately based on a right understanding of God and a right relationship with God.

And so all of this wisdom that we're going to look at, all these practical issues are ultimately based on the gospel. That is kind of the power source that we need to keep all these individual Proverbs and topics plugged into.

[1 : 18] Otherwise, they don't really work. They don't really make sense. We're left with a bunch of kind of pithy statements that might sound good, but actually don't really change anything. It is the gospel that transforms us.

It's when we read these passages, these Proverbs in light of the gospel that makes a difference. It's what God has done for us through Jesus that is that most intensely practical, life-changing truth that we always need to keep hold of.

And this week we're seeing, as we said, the difference which that makes. That the gospel makes in relation to anger. Anger. I don't know if people here would say that they are angry people.

I won't ask anyone to put up their hands. I'm sure there's a number of us who have kind of raised our voices or slammed a few doors in our time. I can admit to that. But perhaps kind of the stereotypical picture of the angry man with a red face and steam coming out of his ears.

Perhaps that's not you. Perhaps that's very rarely you. And yet anger can show itself in all sorts of different ways. We can kind of internalize our anger.

[2 : 27] We can think angry thoughts but with a smile on our face, can't we? Anger affects us all in different ways. Robert Burns, his poem Tamashanta, it speaks about a woman nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

That idea that actually sometimes we can quite like that feeling of holding on to anger. Well, the book of Proverbs talks all about anger. We're going to talk about anger because it is not this kind of niche interest that only a few ranting and raving types suffer from.

It's something that all of us need to deal with. And it's something that we all need this wisdom to deal with. So again, as we said last week, before we start thinking, oh, anger, this will be great for that person over there.

We want to look at these Proverbs. We want to look at this kind of passage and this topic looking at our own hearts, trying to recognize the difference that the gospel makes to each one of us.

And so let's look then at those verses. And the first thing that the book of Proverbs highlights in terms of anger, the first thing really I think that sticks out like a sore thumb when we bring all these verses on anger together is that wisdom, and remember the book of Proverbs is all about wisdom, how to live well in God's creation.

[3 : 40] Wisdom is slow to anger. Wisdom is slow to anger. You can see those verses there on the sheet repeating that. Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding.

Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty. Good sense makes one slow to anger. And the same idea there as well in chapter 17, verse 14. The beginning of strife is like letting out water.

So quit before the quarrel breaks out. Time and time again, we see this contrast between wisdom that holds back, which thinks, which considers, and a fool who jumps straight in, who gives full vent to his spirit, as it says there, who is quick to anger.

A quick pit stop before we really kind of carry on to highlight something that we're going to see in these verses. Notice actually that none of these Proverbs are saying categorically that anger is a bad thing.

We probably think of anger as perhaps a bad thing, don't we? And often, perhaps most of the time it is. Certainly Proverbs is saying that this rush to anger, this kind of flaring up of rage is not good, is not wise.

[4 : 47] But the Bible would say there are some things that should make us angry. There are things that make God angry. When God sees the suffering of his people because of the suffering in the world because of people's wickedness, we're told that angers him.

In the same way, when we see injustice, we should have a sense of anger. And so there is a kind of a righteous anger. It's important that we note that, that we flag that up.

But alongside that, we need to be honest with ourselves and say that the vast majority of the time, that is not our anger. We become angry when what is precious to us is under threat or is under attack.

The problem is that is, for us, it's not generally the suffering of God's people that moves us to anger. It is not often a righteous anger for the sake of others. Instead, what is it that makes us angry?

Well, we get angry when our reputation is under threat. When our lives are being inconvenienced. Perhaps when our performance is being questioned. These are the things that cause us to be angry, cause this sudden anger to kind of rise up, to flare up.

[5 : 57] It's not a righteous anger. That's a self-centered anger, isn't it? It's an anger because we are not getting whatever it is that we want. And what makes us angry shows what is really important to us.

And so anger can be a right response, but so often it is not the right response. And it's much more the second category that we find in our lives. This quick, hot anger.

And it's much more the second category that Proverbs deals with. The kind of anger that flies off the handle. The kind of anger that erupts suddenly like that. The kind of anger that arises within us.

And even if we don't express it out loud. Even if we don't scream and shout and kick whatever's closest. We can still feel it burning in us. Proverbs says time and time again that that is not wisdom.

But that wisdom is slow to anger. And Proverbs admits as well that is not easy. Look in particular there at Proverbs 16 verse 32. Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty.

[7 : 01] And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. We think of the great warrior who can defeat a city. Who can win great battles.

These were the great men who were kind of looked up to. The biggest, the strongest, the bravest. Surely the reader of Proverbs thinks those guys are kind of the pinnacle of humanity. And yet the book of Proverbs says no.

It says do you know what is better than that? Do you know what is rarer than that? Do you know what is more difficult than that? It is to be someone who in their day-to-day life has control over their emotions.

Someone who despite provocation can keep themselves calm. Someone whose actions show clear thinking even when everything around them is trying to make them snap. Someone who is slow to anger.

And that is true wisdom. And that is true greatness. And look what is missing here in these verses. What is missing in these verses? There are no excuses.

[8 : 03] These verses give no extenuating circumstances. And I was desperately looking, desperately hoping to find the proverb that says, you know, unless you're tired. You know, or unless you've had a really bad day.

Or, you know, or except for that person because they genuinely are annoying. You know, that proverb does not exist. And that is why this is so hard. That is why the one who is slow to anger is better, is rarer, is stronger than the mighty.

Because there's no get-out clause. Proverbs is describing a constant pattern of life. It's consistent. It's ongoing. How can we do that?

Well, we're going to speak more about kind of the how-to shortly. It's the gospel that motivates all of this. One kind of key thing about the Bible is to remember it never says, this is what you do.

This is what you should do. Now just go and do it. It's not a kind of a self-help book saying, you know, bring this up within yourself. You know, the Bible gives us the means and the motivations and the resources to do what it calls us to do.

[9 : 07] We're going to look at that in just a couple of minutes. But before that, it's worth seeing that this is true wisdom, being slow to anger, because it matches God's character.

Throughout the Bible, including, again, Psalm 103 that we sang earlier in our service, it's repeated about God that he is slow to anger. If wisdom in our day-to-day lives is living well in God's creation, then we do that by seeking to imitate the creator, to shape our lives to his perfect wisdom.

And again, we're going to see more how to do that in a minute. We're going to look at the end at the solution to anger. But the first thing that we see there is that wisdom is slow to anger. The next thing that we're going to see, the next thing that stands out as we bring these proverbs together again, really perhaps the reason why it's wise to be slow to anger, the reason why self-control is so important, is that the second thing you'll see on your sheets there, that anger leads to strife.

Anger leads to strife. Remember, again, proverbs isn't dealing here with the kind of righteous anger that we spoke about at the beginning. It is speaking about this hot anger, this quick temper, this rising to the boil because something or someone has offended us or inconvenienced us.

Proverbs is not saying avoid that because that's not a good look or just avoid that because it's kind of frowned upon by people. No, proverbs says avoid that anger because it will get you in trouble.

[10 : 42] It will lead you down paths not of wisdom but of foolishness. Again, you see it repeated in those verses, don't you? A hot-tempered man stirs up strife.

A man with great wrath will pay the penalty. A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls. A man of wrath stirs up strife. And one given to anger causes much transgression.

And then finally, a slightly kind of grotesque one at the end, isn't it? For pressing the milk produces curds. Pressing the nose produces blood. And pressing anger produces strife.

But all that same idea that anger leads to strife. Anger causes trouble. And we know this really, don't we, if we think about it. When was the last time that you were angry, that it had kind of boiled over, that you'd acted out of your anger?

Anger. And then when everything's calmed down, you've had time to reflect and you've thought, well, that was a good decision. Or yes, oh, I handled that situation well. Or, you know, that's definitely the way I would do it again looking back.

[11 : 45] I'm proud of my actions there. But we find that when we have given in to anger, we have to go and apologize. When we have given in to anger, we've generally made situations worse.

Perhaps we try and justify our actions, but ultimately we know that they were not good actions. They were not the wisest course of action. The Bible says, actually, that we've been a fool. The opposite of wisdom.

The fool is the one who goes against the grain of God's creation and so makes a mess of things. Anger gets us into trouble. It gets us in trouble individually in the heat of the moment.

We do something we might regret for a long time. It's an extreme example, but I have a friend who now has a criminal record. He was being wound up and wound up and wound up until he snapped and he hit someone and they got hurt and the police got involved.

And there's that one moment that we all wish that we could take back. Perhaps more likely for us, it's that thing that we say in the heat of the moment. And no sooner have the words left our mouth than we long to take them back and yet it's too late.

[12 : 52] And we've caused damage. And if we're prone to anger, we will make those mistakes again and again and again. Anger drains us. Anger damages us. There's been studies that show that holding on to anger or acting out of anger can increase your risk of heart damage, of a stroke.

It reduces your immune system. It increases anxiety issues. This kind of anger is bad for us. The Bible says that and the world around us says that. And yet not just bad for us, but bad for other people as well.

And this repeated term, strife, this word that we don't use that much, but that is generally used in the Bible in terms of interpersonal relationships, interpersonal conflict.

Anger ruins community. Anger acts against the type of friendship that we spoke about last week. Anger can be contagious. Anger can cause people to have to pick sides.

You'll know that awkward feeling if you've been somewhere and someone's really got angry and really kicked off. Anger can kind of poison that environment. The picture that Proverbs paints is almost like that kind of punctured oil tanker out at sea.

[14 : 07] That one impact, that one crack, and what flows out covers a vast area. It's impossible to get it back in. An oil tanker. Oh, sorry. The phone is telling me what an oil tanker is, which is helpful.

But, you know, that oil comes out and it's impossible to get back in. It affects things. It affects animals that are nearby. It affects the environment in which it's released into. It can take so long to get things back to what they should be like, if they ever can get back to that stage.

And that is the picture that Proverbs paints of anger, that one outburst that causes so much trouble. Even more so, even more dangerous, is if that is our settled behavior.

Is if that is our general pattern, the hot-tempered man. Or one given to anger, as Proverbs calls them. Rather than a kind of a one-off collision of an oil tanker, it's more like a broken pipe constantly pumping out this oil.

Constantly causing damage. Constantly causing strife. Constantly disrupting the way God's world is designed to work and works best. Anger leads to strife.

[15 : 19] So wisdom is slow to anger. Anger leads to strife. So much of what we've said so far, probably, we might just call that common sense, mightn't we? It's not good to be quick to anger.

We need to take a step back and have self-control. The damage, the strife that anger can cause. Perhaps we're sitting here thinking, well, actually, we didn't need the Bible to tell us these things. Perhaps these things are common knowledge.

And we shouldn't be surprised if the Bible backs up what seems like good sense. You know, this is how God's world works best. We observe that as we look at God's world.

And yet where Proverbs and the Bible and the Gospel moves beyond what the world's wisdom and observations offer us, it is that God's wisdom offers us the solution to anger.

The solution to anger. And that's what we're going to spend the rest of our time looking at together. Those three verses or pairs of verses on the sheet there. Chapter 19, verse 11.

[16 : 18] Good sense makes one slow to anger. And it is his glory to overlook an offense. Next one. Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause. And do not deceive with your lips.

Do not say, I will do to him as he has done to me. I will pay the man back for what he has done. Last one. If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat. If he is thirsty, give him water to drink.

For you will heap burning coals on his head. And the Lord will reward you. And what's the common theme there? What are all these Proverbs really getting at?

Well, it's this idea of breaking this cycle of anger. Breaking this cycle. They've done that. Bang. Bang. I will do this. They have said that.

Bang. I will react like this. Often reactions or retributions, which in a worldly sense are very reasonable. That might seem very appropriate. People would struggle to kind of complain about.

[17 : 16] But that God's wisdom says it is your glory to overlook these things. Not to pay back people for what they've done. It is not a kind of tit for tat.

It is not even turning a blind eye. Instead, we read it is loving and caring for your enemies. Doing right to those who've done you wrong. That's what that final proverb is about.

Giving your enemy food and drink. That idea of burning coals on their head. That doesn't sound overly loving, does it? But the idea there is that responding with love is what will help people see where they're going wrong.

It's responding with love and not anger that is able to melt people's hearts. To change people's opinions. It has that chance to see them change. But again, we come back to that question, well, how do we overlook these offenses?

Sure, that's what Proverbs is saying, but how do we do it? How do we respond with love? And how do we break this cycle of worldly anger when really we just want to get our own back? It's much easier said than done, isn't it?

[18 : 21] But the answer really is in that last line there on the sheet. And the Lord will reward you. And the Lord will reward you. Really, the solution to anger is all about where we're looking for our reward.

It's all about where we're looking for our satisfaction. All about where we're looking for our identity. Are we looking to God? Are we looking to the Lord to reward us? Or are we looking to the things of the world?

We said at the beginning that we get angry when what is important to us is under threat, or is challenged, or is attacked. And yet the gospel tells us that the most important thing of all is our relationship with God.

That relationship made possible through Jesus. And the gospel tells us if we trust in him that nothing can take that away. That that cannot be under threat.

That that cannot be challenged. And we sing those big words in the hymn, If that is where my security and satisfaction is found, well then and only then can I be free from anger.

[19 : 40] Because that is the only foundation I can have that nothing can take away. If the Lord is my reward. If that is where I find my value. When other things get at me.

When other things happen which are annoying. It's not a matter to explode over. Because those things are not at the center. Those things are not challenging the very core of who I am. But rather they're inconveniences.

That can be dealt with knowing that I am loved by God. United to God through Jesus. That that is where my hope lies. That that is the greatest thing. And that is the solution to anger.

That it is looking to God as our reward. It is the fear of the Lord and not man. Which is the beginning of wisdom. It's trusting the Lord with all our heart and not our own understanding.

It's all these big ideas that we see in the book of Proverbs. All of which are pointing us toward Jesus and the gospel. These are what give us the solution to that very day to day. Very practical, very real issue of anger that we all face.

[20 : 47] Now that doesn't mean that this is an easy solution. It's not that now that we know this. Now that we've kind of got these verses. Now that we've sat here for 20 minutes. That none of us will ever be angry again.

But that is the solution that we're to strive after. Day to day looking to God more and more. Day to day looking to find our hope. And our reward in him rather than anything else.

Let me just finish, I suppose, with a bit of a worked example for my own life. This might apply directly to you. This might seem very real and day to day to you. It might be different. You might have to kind of join the dots to whatever your situation is.

But I was thinking this week. What is the thing that is most likely to make me angry? Well, I can, and it didn't take me that long to think about it. And I can say it because they're not here. And because you won't tell them.

And because I love them incredibly much. But it's my children. If you ask me next week, were you angry last week? If I say yes and I have to give the reason, there's a very high percentage chance that the girls will have been involved.

[21 : 49] Emily is five. Louise is three today. Which is a relief because that means that at 9.14 this evening, the terrible twos will be over and there'll be no more tantrums ever. So perhaps I won't be angry anymore.

But no, I'm not an especially angry person. But probably most of the times I get angry involves my children. Either they're not listening. They're not doing what they're asked to do.

They're not doing what I want them to do. And so often it happens just like we said in Proverbs. I can be quick to anger. I forget that wisdom of being slow. And self-controlled.

Also, like we see in Proverbs, it causes strife. It doesn't result in me dealing with the situation as well as I should. It means me having to go back and apologize afterwards.

It makes a mess. This anger can happen just as Proverbs says it will happen. It can be quick and it can be messy. And what is actually happening in that situation?

[22 : 46] Well, ultimately, what is happening is that I have a false security, a false god, you could say, of being in control.

What am I looking to for my hope and my values? It's things panning out the way I want them to go. I'm finding my value, my reward in being a good parent, in having good children.

My god, almost, is this kind of perfect family. If this bad behavior happens in public, you can kind of multiply everything by 10 because I want people to think I'm a good parent.

I want people to think I have the perfect family. And now that is under threat as well. Because just in case anyone has missed the last five years and thought we were the perfect family, you know, now it's clear that that's not the case.

That's under threat. Can you see what's happening? It's all of these false securities, false values, false places that I'm looking for reward, false gods, ultimately, idols in my life.

[23 : 47] And again, these are not bad things in themselves. It is good for children to obey their parents. The Bible is very clear on that. It's good to be a good parent. The Bible is very clear on that. But the Bible is also clear that if these become the ultimate thing, if even just for a few minutes in a busy morning I functionally forget the gospel, if these other things, good things, become the ultimate thing, where I find my ultimate reward, well, then I will be angry.

I will do exactly the foolish things Proverbs says I'll do when they're under threat, when they're not working out exactly as I'd like them to. And so what is the solution?

Well, the solution for me is to be parenting, remembering the gospel. It's to strive to be a good parent. It's to strive to teach my children to be obedient.

But ultimately, knowing that the ultimate thing, that my true foundation, the unshakable rock of my salvation is only found in Jesus Christ.

And through him having a perfect relationship with a perfect loving Heavenly Father. And that nothing can change that. It's when I remember that, that I'm able to deal with other frustrations because my foundation is secure.

[25 : 06] I cannot lose what matters most. It's only when I remember that, that I can have this wisdom that is slow to anger. That I can live in a way that brings peace and not strife.

And this wisdom that responds to hostility, not by reacting in just the same way, but reacting with love. Because in the gospel, that is exactly what God has done for me.

And nothing can take that away. God himself is my reward. So for you, it might not be kids. For all of us, it will be a whole range of things. For me, it's not only kids.

We could go on and on if you'd like, but that's probably enough for now. But all of us will have things that we feel this is pressing our buttons. And what people say about us.

What people say about our performance. The expectations people have on our time. The way people speak or act or do things that we would never do. And you know what it is that will wind you up.

[26 : 06] The proverb says that the solution to that anger is not to separate yourself. It is not to avoid those people. It is not to simply hope that one day there will be a change in circumstances.

But the solution is to look to the Lord for our reward. To trust in him. To find our satisfaction and our hope and our joy in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As the very foundation of our lives. If you're not a Christian this morning, as always, we're so glad that you're here with us. I hope this makes sense. I hope it makes sense why we'd love you to accept the gospel.

Because it changes everything. The gospel does not say stop being angry and then God might love you. The gospel says God loves you. He has done all that is needed to save you.

And nothing can take that away. So you don't need to be angry anymore. The gospel affects every part of our life for the better. That is the only way to true wisdom.

[27 : 06] The gospel which is the heart of the Christian life from beginning to end. The gospel that gives us this wisdom to be slow to anger. This wisdom to avoid the strife that comes from that for ourselves and for others.

Ultimately by looking to the Lord God for our reward. By trusting in him. By trusting in Jesus. And living out of that day by day. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.