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Teakettles, Sundown and a Second Hand

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

Teakettles, Sundown & a Second Hand

A lawyer is not a lawyer because he goes to law school. Law school equips him to be a lawyer, but until he goes out and practices law, he is not really a lawyer. Likewise, Sunday school classes, sermons, seminars, radio broadcasts, tape recordings, quiet times, study groups, even Scripture memory will not make you a wise Christian. All of that may give you knowledge. Some of that may even give you understanding. But wisdom is choosing to act on what you know.

To this point we have accumulated knowledge about the subject of anger and have begun to examine methods of dealing with it. In the previous chapter we came to see that the first step is to yield up our “rights” to their proper owner. In this chapter we will look at more suggestions that help us tame the temper once and for all.

KEEPING AN EMPTY TEAKETTLE

When I worked through the project at the end of the last chapter, which was designed to surface patterns of anger, it was personally very revealing. I found that I am basically a “teakettle” person.

Most of my bouts with anger center around my right to my time and my privacy. I concluded that somewhere along the way I had repossessed from God that right and had come to consider interruptions as intrusions. The result was resentment—more fuel to the fire under the teakettle.

Looking at how Jesus handled his interruptions changed my perspective. He planned his time and executed his plan, but he never seemed resentful when the plan gave way to people. They interrupted his quiet time and his days alone with the Father. They interrupted his sermons, his rest, his traveling. They touched him, called him, sent for him, confronted him. They demanded his time, his energy, his attention, his love.

Yet he was never too busy to stop to heal a blind man, help

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a stranger or teach a multitude. He had the whole world as his mission field; eternity was hanging in the balance. He had only three years to form a team, train his men, and implement his plan, but he stopped to love a little child, stopped to dry the tears of those who grieved, stopped to meet the needs of a concerned centurion, stopped even to listen to a searching Gentile woman. He was operating on God's clock and interruptions were adventures, not intrusions. He knew his Father was sovereign.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave us most of the foundational principles for attitudes and relationships necessary to live this revolutionary Christ-controlled life. Matthew recorded some guidelines from Jesus concerning anger.

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

(Matthew 5:21-24 NIV)

The principle in this passage is that, from God's perspective, ungodly anger is murder—murder of the heart. The damage done by such anger is both brutal and eternal. Thus, the consequences are so severe that God says that when you go to him in prayer and remember an offense or a residue of resentment caused by uncontrolled anger, you must do immediately whatever it takes to settle the account and settle your heart. Left to fester, the resentment will begin to boil. It will eventually erupt in some form of ungodly anger and destroy not only your spiritual health, but that of the body of Christ.

Even our power in prayer will be affected by whether or not our teakettles are emptied of resentment and bitterness. That's why Paul warned Timothy to pray “with holy hands lifted up to God free from sin and anger and resentment.”

(I Timothy 2:8 TLB)

In other words, if you let unresolved anger boil inside of you, your spiritual life will falter. Is your teakettle empty? Or is it

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still full of resentment toward others, toward circumstances, or toward God himself? You will never get victory over anger until you empty the teakettle.

You must deal with your resentments as you did with your rights. Every time the enemy resurrects those angry responses and whispers in your ear, stop immediately and say, “Sorry, Satan, I gave that matter to my Lord.” That is what God wants us to do with our resentment—catch it immediately, and call it sin. Consciously give it to him. Pour it out. Next, fill the kettle with the word of love, the word of joy, and the word of peace.

OBSERVING THE SUNDOWN PRINCIPLE

Another vital solution to anger is learning to apply the “sundown principle,” as found in Ephesians. Paul said,

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

(Ephesians 4:26, 27 NIV)

The Living Bible translates it,

“When you are angry you give a mighty foothold to the devil.”

This passage says that anger gives Satan a dramatic inroad into your life, so God’s division of time into days gives you a checkpoint for your anger. When you have learned to check out your anger every night and make things right without fail before nightfall, you have discovered part of the reason for the sundown principle. There are a number of reasons why God divided life into twenty-four-hour days.

To glorify himself through creation- In Genesis 1 and 2 God divided time into days and nights (using as his picture book darkness and light) to demonstrate his total control over time.

To remind us of his faithfulness and to give us a series of fresh starts.

It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

(Lamentations 3:22, 23)

Man need not feel trapped in an endless sea of time with no hope for forgiveness.

To keep us dependent- Exodus 16 tells the story of manna and the children of Israel. Every day God met their needs with

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the manna, but every day they had to make use of what they had gathered. If they tried to save it and hoard it, it spoiled. In this way, their faith was tested one day at a time. In other words, twenty-four-hour periods are time capsules man can handle which create maximum glory to God by creating maximum dependence on God.

To keep us from worrying about the future- Jesus said:

So don't worry at all about having enough food and clothing. Why be like the heathen? For they take pride in all these things and are deeply concerned about them. But your heavenly Father already knows perfectly well that you need them, and he will give them to you if you give him first place in your life and live as he wants you to. So don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time." (Matthew 6:31-34 TLB)

In other words, God has given us life in faith-sized chunks. He knows we cannot handle long periods without fear of the future, so he divides life into twenty-four-hour segments and says, "Here, just trust me for one day. Then tomorrow we'll start over."

To give us a logical place to check our spiritual progress-

Most of God's commandments and promises for spiritual growth are couched in the vernacular of days. For example,

Paul said, "I die daily" (I Corinthians 5:31).

Jesus said, "Take up your cross daily" (Luke 9:23).

Paul wrote, "The inner man is being renewed daily." (II Corinthians 4:15)

God has given us twenty-four-hour days to give us logical places to check out our faithfulness and to remind us of his!

To dramatize the conflict between Satan and God- After the fall, Satan's kingdom became the kingdom of darkness. God's kingdom is the kingdom of light. Paul said,

And what communion hath light with darkness?
(II Corinthians 6:14)

The light (Jesus) is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.
(John 3:19)

Jesus reminded us,

I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.
(John 8:12)

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Paul wrote,

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

(Ephesians 6:12)

Again and again the Scriptures use night and day, light and darkness to dramatize the conflict between Satan and God and remind us that they cannot coexist.

God has also divided the days with darkness to remind us that we live in two worlds, and that only when we walk in the light does the darkness of sin become obliterated.

To give us a checkpoint for our anger- God knows the deadline of anger and our propensity to store it up in life's teakettle until it explodes. So he divided life into days. He is saying to us, "Mother, father, don't carry that anger with you through the night. Husband, wife, don't carry that grudge with you through the night. Don't bury that resentment and carry it through the night."

Every time you see the sun go down, God is saying, "Stop! Empty the teakettle. Make your wrongs right. Pour out your resentments to the Master. Lay down your rights again, and lay your head on your pillow with not a trace of anger lingering in your spirit." If Christians would obey that one principle, what a difference in relationships! What a demonstration of God's mercy! What a dramatization of God's love! And what a doorway to freedom!

USING THE SECOND HAND OF CHOICE

Another step in resolving anger is learning to use the "second hand of choice." The second hand on the clock is the one that monitors the seconds. It breaks time down into tiny fragments, and if you can control the seconds, the minutes take care of themselves.

Self-control really manifests itself in two stages. The first is a once-for-all determination to do the will of God in a given area. But that must be followed by minute-by-minute choices of obedience.

It is true that we first must decide to put away certain sins. Paul said to cast off, throw away, once and for all—as a deliberate choice of your will, anger, rage, and bitter feelings (Colossians 3:8).

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Having made a decision, drive a stake in the ground and consider your decision final. Then comes the second hand of choice. Now that you have put off the filthy garment of anger, once and for all, you must choose to monitor your yielding to anger second by second. As the enemy approaches you, he will use the deep grooves in your mind where you have preprogrammed an angry response. It is not enough to have prayed, "Lord, don't let me get angry today!" God doesn't "let" you get angry. You choose it! The problem is that we drive a stake in the ground or hold up our hand at a seminar and say, "I choose to give up being angry." But then we walk away as though the battle were over.

When you say to God, "I want to stop being angry," the real battle has just begun. The enemy calls a meeting, garners his forces, and looks at the game plan of your life under the listing "vulnerability to anger." He finds your weaknesses, and he comes at you with all he's got. Why? It is because you are saying to God, "Satan has a stronghold in the area of anger in my life, and I want to bring every thought captive to your Spirit. I want Jesus to occupy that stronghold."

Do you think Satan is going to pull out and give up without a fight? Sure he will, like the Russians would if the U. S. said they would like to take over Moscow. Satan will fight you for every inch of the territory. The renewed activity in your life in that area, the increase of anger, is only proof that you made the right decision. The devil will leave you alone when you are not attacking anything worthwhile, but if you get close to a stronghold, he will fight you with everything he has.

If you do it God's way though, everything Satan has is not enough to stop you. Suppose you decide to tackle the stronghold of anger and the problem gets worse. Should you be discouraged?

No. That only means you are getting close to pay dirt. Next you begin to bury your anger at sundown every day and you appropriate God's faithfulness at sunup every day. Things go OK until about nine o'clock in the morning. Then the commitment wears thin and you begin to yield. Or you see a situation coming that you know could generate ungodly anger. You stop and pray, "Lord, help!" Ten minutes pass. Here it comes, and you are confronted with the very situation you just prayed about. But still you get angry.

Then you really get discouraged and moan, "It didn't work."

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That is what Satan wants. He wants you to give up! Well, what went wrong?

What went wrong was that you did not monitor the second hand of choice. You made your decision once and for all. You renewed your decision that morning. Then you prayed again when you saw the enemy approaching. But as the second hand began to tick and the moment of choice grew closer, instead of stopping once more and invoking the power of God to resist anger at the precise second of the attack, you let your guard down and took off your armor and lost the battle.

It is not God's fault. He honored his Word. He was waiting for you to resist the devil so he would flee from you. Don't blame Satan, either. He was just doing what he does best—tempting the saints. You simply did not continue to choose to reject the spirit of anger until the attack was over. You listened to the voice of the enemy instead.

Paul pleaded,

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

(Ephesians 4:30-32)

Do you want to stop grieving God's Spirit where anger is concerned? Then put away anger as a deliberate choice. Embark on the process of becoming, minute-by-minute, second by second, God's man or woman.

The second hand of choice is one of the most important principles we will ever learn. It is important not only in overcoming anger, but also in dealing with every besetting problem of self-control that you and I face.

We must give up sin once and for all. We must yield it up daily We must renew our vow as the enemy approaches. Then as the split second of choice looms on the horizon, at that second we must choose not to get angry, and God in us will respond accordingly. Try it for yourself and see if Satan has not been needlessly robbing you of victory.

Victory will not come overnight. It may take days, months, and

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for some, years. But one day you will awaken to find an ebbing of the old urge to retaliate, a softening taking place in your spirit. No lingering bitterness beckons to be defended. The sudden impulse to rage has given way to patience. Your day in court has become a lifetime of giving as Christ gave, and your rights are ceasing to be even distinguishable. Now people enjoy being with you. Your friendships have deepened, and your testimony falls on ears that want to know where your kind of self-controlled life comes from.

What happened? God has been making you over. It is not the old you with more theology. It is a new you growing in ever-increasing splendor into his likeness. On that day you may say to yourself, "Praise God, it all started when I really began to seek the mind of Christ in controlling my anger." God means business. He wants to change us. The question is, do we want to change?

FOCUS ON APPLICATION

List the three solutions to anger discussed in this chapter.

- 1- Empty the _____ (Matthew 5:21-24)
- 2- Observe the _____ Principle (Ephesians 4:26, 27)
- 3- Use the _____ of choice (Ephesians 4:30-32)

Which of these three solutions to anger is most needed in your life? Why?

PROJECTS

1. For the next two weeks, make a covenant with God not to let the sun go down on your wrath. See that every wrong has been made right, every offense forgiven by sundown. Empty the teakettle every night. Get up every morning, praising God that “his compassions fail not, they are new every morning” and a new day—increasingly free from anger—is awaiting you.

2. (optional) Ask the person closest to you to help you honestly to discover the roots of your anger and the results of your anger. Become vulnerable to correction, particularly where you are assuming rights you do not realize you are assuming.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Considering the life of Christ, do a study of how Jesus used time, and from that study determine the order of his priorities in life. Next, consider his response to interruptions, and see if they confirm those priorities. Give specific examples when you can.

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