

CARING ENOUGH TO **NOT** FORGIVE SERIES #4  
“Don’t Forgive - When ‘Forgiveness’ Denies Anger”  
Mark 3:1-6, Ephesians 4:25-32  
March 22, 2023

I want to start tonight by asking each of you to recall a time when someone did something that really angered you. Something that really hurt you to the point that your anger might have, or did cause you to say or do things that you were ashamed of after that. I’m not going to ask you to share the incident - we’d be here all night sharing the times when others have really made us angry. But I will ask what you did with that anger? Did you swallow it, saying to yourself that you had to forgive that person, even if you were angry with them? Did you give into the anger and let it rip at the other?

You see, how we view anger at another person depends upon what we do with it. Some will tell you that because you’re a Christian you have to forgive that person, unconditionally. Others will tell you that it’s just and right to let your anger be expressed every time it gets to you. And some will try to tell you that you must not get angry at all, but rather to let whatever it is that hurt or upset you “roll off your back.” And where does forgiveness fit into all of this? Is there a right way to put anger and forgiveness together to bring a resolution to our situation?

Tonight I want us to consider anger and forgiveness, but let’s look at it not as a way to dispense anger or to repress it. Let’s see how we can deal with our anger as we learn how to forgive in the midst of it. Let me give you an example.

This father shared his situation that brought hurt and anger. “I’m not angry, as God knows my heart, I’m only concerned that [Butch] gets his life straightened out. Sure, he’s ruining my daughter’s life with his fooling around and I worry about what his example will do to little [Barry]. But I forgive him. What else is there for a Christian to do?”

This father certainly has much to be angry about, but his denial of that anger isn’t changing the situation. Is there a way for his anger to bring about a reasonable result? Yes, but it’s not through denial of that anger that he will bring forgiveness. The blanket of denial will only bring about his anger to the breaking point. And that will cause further damages to himself and others

The father continues, “I feel all torn apart at times. I must forgive. IF we do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will ours be forgiven; yet it seems to me that I have some things to say to him, some demands to make. Right is still right whether I forgive him or not, and what he is doing is not right. How do I live with that? If forgiving does not call for some reconstruction, what then? Is there nothing more to say?”<sup>1</sup> All very good questions.

Anger shows itself in many different ways. There are two particular ways that anger works: 1) destructive annihilation of the one causing the hurt or pain and 2) constructive affirmation of the self as well as the other in an effort to reconstruct the endangered relationship and restoring the offender.

Destructive anger sees the offender as the enemy and begins to desire nothing but evil for that other one. It is turning away from the other, ready to totally destroy them for what was said or done. The anger within the one can either be held within to fester and boil, or it can blow up and become volcanic. But neither of these brings about any positive change in the situation because its intent is total destruction.

Constructive anger, on the other hand, faces the other person with the intent of restoring the relationship while at the same time confronting the misunderstanding or addressing the tiresome misbehavior that creates the problem. This anger is not attacking the person as much as it is going after the problem or behavior. The intent of this anger is to creatively address the situation with the intent of stopping the old patterns of behavior and reinventing new patterns that will bring a better result in the relationship.

Love is key here because the intention is to love the other person while at the same time disprove of the actions or words that are creating the hurt or pain. Love and hate are mixed up here in that each anger depends upon which way it leans. Destructive anger tends to move toward the hate more than the love. Hate is expressed toward the person with all of the blame being forced toward them. Constructive anger tends to move toward the love of the person, but hate of the misunderstanding or behaviors

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<sup>1</sup> (David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to NOT Forgive*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1981) pg. 53-54)

involved in the situation. Instead of turning away from the other, the desired result is that those involved communicate so that there can be understanding and respect given by each other, creating a new way of interacting in the future.

But there's a difference in angry love and loving anger. Angry love looks good on the outside, but there is great frustration lingering within the person. Angry love tends to work for perfection, allowing no negative feelings. It works to hide the emotions and the rational demands toward the other. But this kind of love is contaminated by the hidden emotions, because the anger is not owned by the one, giving rise to great resentment in them. This blocks the needed acceptance and affection that goes with a healthy relationship. Angry love is that constant churning inside a person who is trying to resolve an issue.

Loving anger tends toward genuine acceptance, while at the same time showing love and anger. The anger shown in love treats the other with respect, yet brings about the work of addressing the hurtful or painful situation. However there is danger in this, in that a person can express the anger within them to address the situation, yet become a persecutor of the other rather than one who desires overall change in the relationship. Beware the one who says, "I'm only doing this for your own good."

Love and anger need to be shown in such a way as to create trust, respect and equal relationships. Love is not to be used as another weapon against another, but to graciously lead the other into changes that will improve and build up the relationship. So love and anger work together to bring about a forgiveness that continues to respect the other, yet brings about the justice that is needed in the situation.

Yet, the anger that we show to another, either destructive or constructive, there are always demands that are made toward each other. These are often found in multiple layers.

"There are just demands. When I am not equally heard, I feel the demand for equal justice in communication. When I am not seen as trustworthy and I have acted in good faith, I feel the demand for equal trust. When I am not valued as a person, I feel the demand for equal regard. These are demands grounded in the justice of our equal created worth.

“And there are unjust demands. I may demand that you think as I think, feel as I feel, and act as I act. I may demand that you know what I wish without my needing to tell you, and do what I wish without my respecting your voluntary choice. These are unjust demands which can be cancelled, and then, as finished business, forgotten.”<sup>2</sup> In every relationship there is need for more just demands rather than unjust demands.

Forgiveness can happen in a situation of hurt or pain when the angry demands are centered around rebuilding the relationship, not so that it fits only one party of the situation, but for both parties. The wrongdoer has to be seen as a person of value, and has to be treated with integrity. Yet the confrontation has to occur so that changes can be made to benefit both sides of the situation. Thus demands as conditions for loving are not acceptable. Love must be a part of the whole equation before resolution and reconciliation can come about. So there cannot be manipulative conditional demands made upon the wrongdoer in order to gain the love of the other.

Forgiveness develops as demands from both sides are dealt with honesty, straightforwardness, and equal respect one for the other. However, seeking impossible demands never brings about reconciliation. Demands that seek to change the past cannot possibly happen, so they are useless in any way to being about forgiveness. Conditional demands only puts one up over the other, creating another injustice instead of resolving the first one.

In forgiving, both give up the right to have impossible demands met. They give up the demand to seeking to change the past or to promise that the future be completely wrong-free. There has to be a stop to fighting unwinnable battles of forcing the wrongdoer to plead, mourn, or sacrifice to make amends. In order for forgiveness to be real, there can be no conditions attached with regard to redoing the past. You have to start from this moment and work forward with no unjust demands being made.

That means that we need to own our own anger about the situation, not to deny it. If we deny our anger, the resentment that builds up intermingles with the negotiations and the unjust demands sneak

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<sup>2</sup> (David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to NOT Forgive*, pg. 59-60)

in to make the resolution impossible. Whenever we have unowned anger involved, revenge is always a silent objective that destroys true forgiveness. Owning our anger as a part of the resolution process, the unjust demands can be dropped, being seen clearly as impossible to meet. Then the just demands can be expressed, negotiated and resolution of the problem can be achieved in love for one another.

We see that in the way that Jesus dealt with the calloused indifference and critical coldness of the Pharisees. When a man needed healing on the Sabbath, the Pharisees were so stuck on doing no work on that day, that they missed out on the chance to bring healing. Jesus confronted them in anger, expressing His demands. “*Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill*” (Mark 3:4)? Having owned His anger, having addressed the need for justice, He then showed love to the man with the shriveled hand. Healing came even if they did not accept Him as the Messiah. Yet His anger addressed the situation in order to right the wrong.

Likewise, Paul tells us, “*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ‘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 4:25-27). Own your anger, but make it constructive so that it brings about the good that needs to be done. Let the words of our mouths and the intentions of our hearts be used for the “*building others up according to their needs*” (4:29).

“Don’t forgive easily, quickly, superficially without reflecting on your demands, cancelling the unjust ones and working through what remains. It is the way to real repentance and full forgiveness.”<sup>3</sup>

Let’s pray: Father, it is so easy for us to let our anger want to take revenge on the ones who hurt us. But that only brings more hurt and pain. Instead, work in each one of us so that we might begin to resolve our hurts and pains in creative ways, using our anger to bring justice and reconciliation and healing. Give us the courage to speak truthfully to each other so that we might grow together in love, finding Your forgiveness. This we pray in Jesus’ Name. AMEN.

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<sup>3</sup> (David Augsburger, *Caring Enough to NOT Forgive*, pg. 62)