



P.O. Box 66540
Albuquerque, NM 87193
505.890.6806
E-mail: irm@liferesource.org
Website: www.liferesource.org

Presentation Transcript

Anger
By Bill Jacobs
August 2, 2007

Today's presentation is about anger and it's part of a series that we're doing on mental and spiritual health.

Good afternoon everybody. Nice to see all of you on this Sabbath during Unleavened Bread – the Sabbath of the wave sheaf. Right?

We've been doing a series and so far we've talked about depression, anxiety and guilt. Today we're going to talk about anger.

Anger is a part of everybody's life, whether we like it or not. Many people, I believe, think that anger is wrong. Actually, that is *not* the biblical stance. So, I'd like you to turn with me to Ephesians 4, and verse 26, and let's look at, probably the most widely known scripture in the Bible about anger. It's Ephesians 4:26. It says:

Eph. 4:26 - *Be angry and yet do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.*

So this is what the Bible is telling us to do about handling anger. Don't get so out of control that anger causes us to sin, and try to resolve interpersonal problems quickly. Or, if they're unresolvable, just let go of them quickly so that you don't have to pay the penalty for being angry.

Let's look at another scripture, too. It's in James 1, verse 19. This is another one that kind of clues us in about anger.

Jm. 1:19 – *So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*

So there it is again. Don't be impulsive and don't be a hot-head. Don't let your anger produce hurt to others or to yourself.

If you read the book of Proverbs, you'll see that it's just loaded with references to not being soon angry. Keep control of yourself. Just because you have a thought doesn't mean you have to say it – especially if it's an angry thought.

There was a young man who came into my office – the counseling clinic – a few months ago. He told me he had a history of overreacting. And I said, “Well, why don't you tell me about that?” At the time that he was talking to me, he had bandages on both his hands. He told me that he'd broken both of his hands in the past, hitting walls and other hard things when he was angry. He said that his anger was way out of range for the things that had been happening to him – like one time he came home from work late at night and found out that his sister had eaten the leftovers that he was planning to eat for a snack. So, he went outside and pounded on a concrete block wall until he broke one of his hands. I guess that's better than pounding on his sister, but not a good thing. I think he's a phlebotomist, so he has to use his hands in his work. He said that the event that brought him in for counseling had happened just the previous Saturday night. The police picked him up at 2 am without a shirt on – in the middle of winter – and both his hands were pretty well shredded because he'd been hitting a chain-link fence repeatedly with both hands. No alcohol was involved.

So, what do we call that? Well, we call that *intermittent explosive disorder*, where people go out of control – way out of control – compared to whatever provoked them. I'm going to talk more about him because I want to explain what *caused* his problem. But he's just a really good example of what the Bible tells us not to do – to not let our anger go out of control – to not say and do things that are going to hurt us or other people while we're angry.

There's another proverb. In Proverbs 14:29 (not another proverb, but the first one I wanted to quote) it says:

Prov. 14:29 – *He that is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly.* See, this fellow had trouble controlling his impulses.

I think that our past experience in the church has taught a lot of us to be passive – you know, we're supposed to be *nice* people. And we're not supposed to protect ourselves or take care of ourselves. We're supposed to love others. This is the prevailing thing that, I think, a lot of people have been taught: that we're supposed to let God take care of us and protect us. It just strikes me that maybe that's why there are so many whimpy guys these days in western Christian culture. I don't see Muslims having a problem with that. But over here and in Europe, the girls are all complaining about all these guys that are just pretty, and can't make a decision, and don't want to make a commitment, and all of those kinds of things.

I'm thinking that it would be really good for a lot of people to read John Eldridge's book, *Wild at Heart*. It's written from a Christian perspective and it talks about how Christian men are supposed to be.

We know that Jesus overturned the tables of the moneychangers. I doubt that they thought that He was a nice guy after He did that. He was a pretty strong person. Jesus didn't hurt anybody, but He did get angry. He got upset about what happened. So, there again, the Bible doesn't say that it's wrong to be angry. It just says that it's wrong to *stay* angry and it's wrong to *do* things in anger that are sinful – that are hurtful to other people.

So that's the Bible position. Everybody gets angry. If we're not willing to acknowledge that, then we're being self-deceptive. It's okay to express anger appropriately, as long as we do it without sinning, and as long as it doesn't take us out of control, or cause us to do rash things that we're going to regret later.

And, you know, the mental health field, generally, takes that very same position. Isn't that interesting?

Let's talk about anger and health – mental, physical and emotional – for awhile. Research shows that hostility ranks right up there with smoking, obesity and a high fat diet for risk factors. People that are chronically angry are really at risk for a lot of health problems. It causes high blood pressure and coronary artery disease for one thing. We know that the immune system is affected severely by chronic anger.

There was a study done in 1992 with cancer patients and seventy-five percent of those people didn't express anger, or they were unaware that they *were* angry, or they were unaware of all negative emotions. They were, generally, non-assertive kinds of people that let other people have their way all the time and got walked over a lot. They were people that liked to appease others. They were overly concerned with meeting the needs of other people and they were insufficiently engaged in meeting their own needs. In other words, they were enablers. Seventy-five percent!

Paul's admonition to *be* angry – which that is what it was, wasn't it? – “Be angry, but sin not” – was a good one. It's just that we have to learn how to express it appropriately.

Proverbs 11:17 says:

Prov. 11:17 – *The merciful man does good for his own soul.* And we know, in the Old Testament, what the soul is, right? That's our *nephesh*, right? – our life. *But he who is cruel* – sometimes when people get angry, they are cruel to others – *troubles his own flesh.* So, I think that goes back to what we've been seeing in the studies about how anger affects us in a very negative way healthwise.

So, let's talk a little bit about the young man who was exploding and hurting himself. We have to say that it was really good that he didn't hurt anybody else while he was like that. He did have enough of a conscience to pull back from that.

I spent some time talking to his mom and dad. They told me that when he wasn't like that – which was just very short periods in his entire life (maybe he'd only done that about four or five times in his whole life and his rages might last from five to ten minutes, so all

the damage was done in very short period of time) – but they said that the rest of the time he was just the nicest guy you’d ever want to know. And when they said that, that just kind of perked up my ears, and I started talking to him about what his life was like. The book says that people with that disorder quite frequently have been mistreated as children. So I started asking him about his family life. He said his parents were wonderful – that he had a really great relationship with them, that he knew that his parents were fully supportive of him, that he never remembered a time when they weren’t. So, I kind of thought, “Okay, we can X that off.” That was true. We could.

But then I asked him some other questions. He said that he’d always had a hard time at school because he had a reading disorder and other kids made fun of him a lot when he was little. He developed this habit of not retaliating, but stuffing his feelings, because he wanted to be a nice guy and be liked by everybody. So he developed the habit of not standing up for himself very much. Everybody thought that he was an easygoing, super-nice guy, and he always was right up until he blew. And then it would all kind of come out at once.

I asked him how things were going at work, and he told me that he worked as a phlebotomist for one of the biggest labs in the country. And they were always short-handed. They would always call him on his day off and ask him to come into work in place of people that should have been there, but just didn’t want to come in. So he would always say, “Yes,” even though he didn’t *want* to come in. He felt like he couldn’t say, “No.” He was making a lot of money, but he never had any time off. He just couldn’t bring himself to say “No” to his supervisor. I was talking to him some more about that, and he said that it was really unfair of them to call him all the time. And he felt the reason they did was, number one, they needed help, and number two, they knew he wouldn’t say “No.” So they would just always go to him first, because he was easy. That meant that he was the first one all the time that was pulling all these extra shifts for people that should have been there and didn’t really have a good reason not to be. We started talking more about that, and he really felt like he didn’t have the courage to take control of his own life.

So, there it is. He felt picked on, and mistreated and used, so he was really angry about that. But he put on his happy face and go to work and act like nothing was wrong until two in the morning when he didn’t have his snack like he wanted to, and then he’d go crazy for awhile.

I don’t think that this lack of control that he had at work or when he was a little kid at school was the only reason that he would have these rages. I’ve learned that it’s never just one thing. It’s always more complicated than that. After I started pointing these things out to him, he saw connection between his lack of control at work and the rages he had. So that was helpful to him – to make that connection.

Now I was talking to a young woman some time ago, and she felt like her life as a child left a lot to be desired. She thought that her father ignored her a lot. She made a statement to me that it was *not* okay to be angry with her dad. Children don’t do that, because even

though our dads don't pay enough attention to us, they still do a lot. So she felt guilty every time she felt angry at her dad. Good girls love their fathers. In her mind she couldn't love him and be angry with him at the same time. She suppressed, or repressed, the anger that she had. It was frightening to her to experience all the anger that she felt about him. I believe that it was that notion that caused her a lot of guilt and caused her to become clinically depressed for awhile.

So what is depression? Depression is how some people express anger. They don't express it as anger, but it manifests itself as depression. The young man client wasn't depressed because he was letting it out periodically. He was unloading it. And after he would have these rages, he would feel this big sense of relief. Then he'd feel remorse, because he'd hurt himself. But the young woman expressed her anger by turning it in on herself. She was angry and she felt guilty, so she would become depressed over it. It's interesting to note that it's mostly men who have intermittent explosive disorder. Very seldom do women have it. A lot more women get depressed than men, which is a way of telling us that women tend to take anger in and hold it. And men, sometimes they hold it in, too, but a lot of them will go rob a bank, or hit somebody, or get in a fight, or go play basketball and bump people around on the court. They tend to take it out on others. That's why at school all the little boys are always in trouble, and the little girls that are depressed and angry are ignored, because they're not causing anybody any trouble. They're just off by themselves.

So how do we deal with anger successfully? Let's think about the young woman who had to be nice to everybody, including her dad – very contained. She told me her friends liked her better when she was drunk. She was more lively and friendly, and more honest with herself and others – more natural and more real – when she was drunk. We would wind up talking about her family life and it was very helpful to her to talk about it. When she'd talk about her dad, at first it was just this adoring picture, but then gradually it started coming out that she felt he didn't really pay much attention to her while she was growing up. Finally, after quite awhile, she got to where she could *feel* anger about it. And I would ask her to hang on to that feeling as long as she could. Then we would go out of it for awhile, and then later I'd ask her questions to get back in it again. And so, in the session we'd go in and out of that angry place. What I was trying to do was help her to feel the anger that she wasn't allowing herself to feel. Now, you might think, "You mean you were actually helping her to get mad at her dad?" Well, no! She already was. She just wasn't being honest about it with herself. She was *really* angry with her dad – so much so that she had a major depressive episode, which includes suicidal thinking. Yes, I was trying to help her get in touch with how angry she was so that she could face it. And, as she was going in and out of her anger, she was starting to become more accustomed to feeling that feeling and becoming less afraid of it. And she was able to admit it to me and to herself. The more she was able to feel it, the less scary it became to her. And finally she was able to admit to herself that she had been angry and that she was able to really express it. Then, as she was able to do that, she was able to talk to her father about her anger and how she'd experienced him as a father when she was little. I don't know if he ever acknowledged his role in her unhappy childhood, but she was, by being able to talk about it and by being honest with herself, and then able to talk to him about her feelings,

she was able to kind of put them to rest and go on with her life. She let go of it. She forgave him. Then after some time, she found herself a lot less depressed, because that was what she was depressed about. So she learned that it was okay to express her true feelings, as long as she did it with control and forethought.

If we can't feel our feelings, then we can't admit them. If we can't admit them, then we can't let go of them. So you have to be willing to feel the feelings before we can let go. A lot of times we'll repress feelings and *think* we've let go of it, but that really isn't it. And that's when we'll find ourselves really angry later about something we *thought* we let go of a long time ago. We never really did the work.

I had an experience a few months ago. I was talking to a friend on the phone, and he was talking about somebody that several years ago accused me of doing something. And when I asked him what I could do to restore the relationship, he said, "Nothing." I thought, "Well, okay." And I thought that I was okay. I thought I was fine. But while I was talking to my friend about it, I found myself really upset. And I thought, "Oh, I haven't figured my way through that. I haven't worked it out yet." So I had to go do some more work on that one.

In my office, not long ago, I was in my office and my door was open. I didn't have a client. And my boss and our landlord were out in the hallway talking. Our clinic was in the process of renting the suite next door, too. He was expanding it to twice as big. It was just exactly the same size square footage-wise as the space that we have. The landlord had just presented my boss with a contract for the new suite. And I heard my boss ask him why the price on the contract was quite a bit higher than the price on the other place, and why it was higher than he said it would be – the price that he had quoted. And the landlord explained that when the papers were drawn up for the first suite, the realtor didn't include one of the fees that he wanted included. So he asked the realtor to add it to the second contract. And my boss said, without any anger whatsoever, "It doesn't seem fair to me that you want me to pay for your mistake. I mean, your realtor made the mistake. And when you gave me that contract, you didn't tell me there was something missing. And so I thought that was what it was going to cost me to rent that building. And you also told me what it was going to cost to rent this new place, and it was the same price as the old one. Now you're trying to raise the price on this new place *after* I've already invested six thousand dollars in getting it ready for our occupancy." And he said, "I'm sorry, but I just can't do that. You never told me about these fees beforehand, so I don't think I want to pay them." And the landlord, after some resistance, finally acquiesced. I told my boss later that I heard that discussion, and I was really impressed with how he stayed so calm and expressed himself so clearly. And here's what he said. He said, "I've learned that if I don't tell what I want, I usually feel angry later."

Think about the phlebotomist. If he had just developed that habit as a small child – of talking about what he needed and wanted – and took some responsibility for communicating his wants to people, he probably wouldn't have that problem.

We tend to get angry when we think we're not being treated fairly. And so the solution is to speak up and seek fair treatment. The problem is, a lot of times when we do that, we're so angry by the time we do it, our presentation is...I know for myself – when I do it that way – my expectations have been skewed. So I'm asking for way more than I would have if I hadn't been angry. What we want to do is keep the pathways of communication open with people and say what we want right away.

So how did we help that young man? What we started out with was sort of first aid. I asked him at the beginning, "Would you rather learn how to manage this anger?" And he started nodding his head. And then I said, "Or would you rather not get angry in the first place?" He said, "Oh, I'd rather not get angry in the first place." I said, "Well, that takes some doing, so let's work on just managing it first. And then we'll work on not getting angry at all." What we did was, we taught him how to recognize when he was *about* to get angry. And then how to calm himself down. He also learned how to talk to his boss, and say, "No, thank you," when they would call – or just look and see on his cell phone who was calling and shut off the ringer – because he always knew what they were calling about. And he really enjoyed doing that after awhile, too. You and I – that's the first thing we would have thought of, but he was just such a nice guy he just couldn't say "No" to anybody. We taught him to sort of enjoy being unavailable for mistreatment. He reported feeling a lot better about everything after that. And really, his treatment only lasted a few months. I don't think he was in a place where he really was able to do the work necessary so that he would not be angry at all, but he was learning very well how to manage, and speak up more, and be more assertive and take care of himself.

So what did I teach him about recognizing his anger? Everybody feels anger somewhere in their body before they actually explode. So the thing is, to figure out where that is. Some people feel it behind their eyes. Some feel it in their neck, or in their back, or the back of their neck. Some people feel it in their hands or their gut. A lot of people feel it there. Wherever it is, if we know that that's where we feel it, we can use that like an early warning and take steps to control it.

You know, we talked about low-mode functioning – I think it was last Pentecost – and how once the outer part of the brain shuts down, and we are just totally in that angry place, we stop caring about what other people are thinking. We stop thinking about what they need. We only think about ourselves at that point. So, if we're going to have any kind of control over the situation, and as Paul said, "Sin not," we have to learn how to stop it before it gets to that place.

What's going on when we get angry? Well, our brain signals our adrenals to pump a lot of adrenalin into our blood system. That's so that we can fight or run, depending on whether we're afraid or whether we're angry. The adrenalin, at least in part, causes us to lose it, and the thinking part starts to shut down when this is happening. So, one thing that we can do is, if we catch it in time, we can start to control our breathing, because that does two things. One, if you're thinking about how you're breathing, we can't be thinking angry thoughts. So that helps right there. It takes our mind off it. And number two, if we control our breathing, then that adrenalin is oxidized out of the system more

rapidly and it helps us to calm down quicker. There are lots of different ways to do that. If you're having a problem with your anger, you can call me and I'll walk you through some of it, or you can get a book about it – there's a lot of anger management material on the Internet. There's all kinds of ways to handle it.

So, let's talk now about the thoughts. I said, "If you're thinking about your breathing, you can't think angry thoughts." Let's think about the kind of thoughts that cause us to get angry. You know, my nice girl, who couldn't experience her own anger, and who was consequently depressed, couldn't work on it until she could find it. You know, the Bible does say that we're self-deceiving. And that's what she was doing. She wanted to be a nice girl, so nice girls are not mad at their dads. So she stuffed all of that and got depressed. She didn't like seeing herself as angry at her father, so she didn't. But once she could feel the anger, then we could talk about the thoughts that she had about her father. What usually happens once a person gets the anger out in the open, they usually go on the attack and say a lot of hurtful things. You know, it's just so good once the secret is out in the open that we kind of launch on the people that we're angry at. But then later we start thinking about our angry thoughts and we start moderating all of that. That real angry time right after it comes out just lasts for awhile. Then we learn how to process it. It kind of takes the sting out of it.

I had another client who had a terrible case of road rage. It was a lady. She was about forty. Her anger was displaced anger. She was also angry about the way she was treated as a child. We eventually went to that place, but I was trying to get her some kind of relief, for fear that she'd ram somebody, because she really would get upset. So I asked her what she was thinking about when something unexpected would happen. And she said, "I think, 'that idiot!'" – only *idiot* wasn't the word that she used. And I asked her why was somebody who cut her off in traffic an idiot? And she said, "Because people shouldn't do that." Have you ever had that thought? Then I said, "What do you mean, *shouldn't*?" She said, "Well, it's not polite or considerate. I wouldn't do that to somebody." I said, "You mean you've never cut anybody off in traffic?" She said, "Well, not intentionally." "So you think that everybody that cuts you off in traffic is doing it on purpose." "Well, no." "Let me ask you this. Do you get angry when you see somebody cuts somebody *else* off in traffic?" And she said, "Not as much." I said, "Why not?" "Well, because it happened to *me*." "Well, if someone does something to *you*, they're worse than if they do it to somebody else." She said, "Well, no." I said, "So why do you get upset when it's done to you?" "Well, because I don't deserve that kind of treatment." "Does anybody?" "No." "So why do you get upset when it happens to you?" And she looked at me with this totally frustrated look, and she said, "Help me out here." I said, "Well, you said it before. This kind of thing shouldn't happen to *you*." She looked at me, and she said, "Well, that sounds really dumb." "You said it. I didn't. Why shouldn't it happen to you? It happens. It happens in the world. Why shouldn't it happen to you? People are sometimes impolite. People sometimes make mistakes. Sometimes they even act rudely, because they're angry. But isn't it kind of bizarre or magical to think that it shouldn't happen to *you*? But it's okay to happen to everybody else?" So she said, "So I *should* think, 'It's really nothing personal – just a mistake or one more rude person.'" I

said, “Is that true?” She said, “Yes.” I said, “Well, it’s always better to think what’s true, isn’t it?”

See how that works? If you haul it out in the light of day, and look at it, it’s *always* really dumb. And it’s not true. One of the things I told her about – she was really happy to learn this – that it’s nothing personal, just a mistake or another rude person. And I’ve been working with her now for, I think, almost a year and a half. She’s still saying that to herself when she gets in traffic. “They either didn’t mean it or they’re just having a bad day. But, in any event, it’s not against me.” And I said, “You’re really in a habit of thinking that way a lot, so if you want to stop, you’re going to have to apply some effort to this. You can’t expect it to change just because you now know.” And we talked about how the neurons are used to traveling down a certain pathway in her brain – got it all wallowed out because she was so used to thinking that thought in that situation – so she has to build a new way of thinking – build a new habit. “It’s not against me. It’s just a mistake.”

So that brings us to the fact that other people can’t make us angry. We do it to ourselves by the way we think. And there are a few thoughts that we think that cause us to get angry. One of them is, that “I should never be hurt or inconvenienced.” That was the thing she was thinking. When you just put it out there like that, that really shines the light on it, doesn’t it? “I should never be hurt or inconvenienced.”

The second one that she was thinking was, people who are hurt or inconvenienced are bad. That’s why she used that bad word to describe them. “*Anybody* who hurts or inconveniences me is a terrible person.” It’s kind of self-centered, isn’t it, when you think about it.

Then the third thing that we usually think, if we completed those two, is that bad people ought to be punished. And that’s usually when we roll down the window and make gestures to them. See, *we’re* going to punish them for what they did.

Okay, so what do you think *instead* of bad things as a Christian? Well, bad things happen to everybody some time. Right? Isn’t that what Jesus said – “Time and chance happens to all men?” Who am I to think they should never happen to me? It’s true, isn’t it? Isn’t that a good way to think about things?

I was talking to a lady the other day who was telling me that one of her friends prayed a lot, and then her husband divorced her. So she and her friend were both angry with God, because He didn’t cause everything to work out right. I asked her if she understood what that scripture meant – that time and chance happens to everybody – since she was religious. She wanted to talk about God, so we *did*.

The second thing that we can think – and this corresponds to the three things we mentioned earlier – the negative side – is that people often make mistakes or they often misunderstand, rather than being deliberately cruel or bad. Most of the time, when people are upset with each other, it’s usually a communications thing. Sometimes it’s not.

Sometimes people do things deliberately to be mean. But most of the time, most people are not intent on that.

The third thing is, not that bad people should be punished by me, but that God says that *His* job is to take care of everybody's bad things, doesn't He? I mean, He says that vengeance is His. Right? We have to let Him take care of those things if we're going to be Christians. So, do you see how that puts everything in perspective when we think about it from that point of view?

There was this famous example of this man who was standing on a busy street corner in New York City, waiting for the light to change. And somebody just slammed into him from behind and poked him in the ribs really hard. And he was coming around with his elbow – or at least, reputed to be – when he saw that the man had a white cane and sunglasses on. He was blind. And he had run into him by accident. And the anger just drained out of him, because he realized that the man...nothing personal. It was just a mistake or an accident and he couldn't help it.

So when we start thinking this way, that bad things happen to everybody sometimes, and who am I to think they should never happen to me, and people often make mistakes or misunderstand, or maybe they don't have enough to share with us or take care of us, or whatever, and that God says it's His job to take care of that stuff and not us. See how it puts everything in perspective for us? It sort of strips the self-centeredness and the vengeancefulness out of our thinking.

There is one other thing, as long as we're talking about God taking vengeance and taking care of everybody. How do we let go of anger? A lot of people hang on to anger because they think that people do something and they need to be gotten even with.

I was talking to a single mom the other day, and her ex-husband abandoned the family. I asked her if she was still angry with him, and she said she was. And I said, "Why?" And she said, "Because somebody needs to be." Because he was making himself look good to the judge, you know, and all of that. And we want people to get what they deserve, according to us. But if we're Christians, God said that He's going to take care of that. There isn't anything that we have to do – nothing we have to do. God will take care of it.

And there's something else about letting go of anger that I think is really important. Let's go to Matthew 18. It says:

Mt. 18:21 – *And then Peter came and said to Him – we're in verse 21 of Matthew 18 – "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times." And Jesus said, "I did not say to you, 'Up to seven times,' but up to seventy times seven. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle certain accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle them, there was one who was brought to him who owed ten thousand talents. But since he did not have the means to repay, the lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children, and all that they had, and repayment to be made." They really did that back then. The Caesar could take your children, if you didn't pay your taxes, and sell them into*

slavery, or servitude, to pay the debt. *“So the slave, therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.’ And the Lord of that slave felt compassion, and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred dinari”* – which is a very tiny amount compared to ten thousand talents – *“and seized him and began to choke him, and said, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’ But he was unwilling, and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.”* So you see the double standard developing. Right? *“So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved, and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave. I forgave you all that debt, because you entreated me. Should you not also have mercy on your fellow slaves, even as I had mercy on you.’ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall my heavenly Father do also to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”*

Most of the parents that I meet, I meet because their kids are angry with them because of the way they have treated their children. And yet, most of those parents are also resentful toward *their* parents for the way they were treated. So they’re doing the same thing to their kids that their parents did to them, and they have not made the connection. And the same time, they’re making these huge mistakes, which are causing their kids resentment. And not a one of them is intentionally hurting their children. They’re *not!* They just don’t know any better.

Parenting is a very complex thing. And most of us come into it with a measure of damage from the past anyway, so it’s hard for us to do a good job.

I think you might remember that I was talking to a young woman a while back, and she told me that, at thirty she finally realized that her father had had a hard life as a kid, and he did the best he could do. *“And I’m thirty years old, and I can take it from here.”* So she finally let go of it. Isn’t that a good story? It is, especially during this time of year – when we have been forgiven so much. And we are to recall that we have been forgiven. The lesson for us in the parable is, that it should be easy for us to forgive other people, and let go of our anger toward them, because we’ve had so much wrong that we’ve done forgiven and let go of – separated from us as far as the east is from the west, never to be brought up again.

When we boil it down, anger really, for Christians, is a *grace* problem at its root, isn’t it? We can be gracious to those who have hurt or offended us just as Christ has been gracious to us, in spite of our sins. So, at this festival, when we celebrate being freed from sin by the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and forgiven of our past sins, we also ought to consider the need to forgive those who have hurt us. And then when we do that, then we’re going to be headed *away* from anger – *away* from anger – and headed *toward* spiritual, emotional and physical health.