

Dismantling Your Anger: Psalm 23
Sunday, May 7th 2017
By Ryan Perry

Outline:

Passage: PSALM 23

- ¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*
- ² He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.*
- ³ He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.*
- ⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*
- ⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*
- ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.*

Let's Pray

A Moment of Anger:

Imagine for a moment that you are in your car, it is 8:55am, and you are in route to a 9:00am appointment for which you are still 10 minutes away. You, of course, are in a hurry, pushing the speed limit as you begin to weave in and out of cars with the hope that in the end you will only end up a couple minutes late.

But then it happens...

All of a sudden, as you are speeding down the highway, you come to a screeching halt as a row of taillights stretches out in front of you as far as the eye can see. Traffic is at a dead stop without any hope of moving in the foreseeable future. This means that the important business meeting, medical appointment, or even lunch with a long lost friend will be missed.

So how do you react?...

A common reaction is to get angry in a way that manifests in itself in spasms of either irritation or disgust, at the fact that some bozo was a bad driver and got in an accident, or that the highway department decided to close down the road this morning.

Maybe you begin to experience a depression because you are thinking that you may now lose your job or that big sale. You might have missed your opportunity to find out if you have cancer, and this specialist can't get you in for another three months. Or your long lost friend is leaving town tomorrow morning and this was your one chance to see them.

You might even experience pessimistic, resentful, or bitter feelings as you say to yourself, “**this always happens to me,**” as if somehow the world, the universe, and God are out to make your life miserable.

Finally, on the other extreme you may experience the full force of a road rage that not only lashes out in anger at the current situation, but also proceeds to yell at and curse the very existence of the other drivers around you.

Recap and Introduction:

If you were here last week you know that I began by first defining what anger actually is. I said that: *Anger is an active stance you take to oppose something that you assess as both important and wrong.*

I then took this definition and applied it to two different types of anger: **Constructive (Righteous) Anger, and Destructive (Sinful) Anger.**

Constructive anger is at the heart of who God is. It works both for the glory of God and for the good of his people, and ultimately for the good of humanity. It is an active displeasure at wrong and wrong doing that pursues whatever is just, whatever makes things right, and whatever does good. **This kind of anger is not only just, but it is also full of mercy, grace, forgiveness, compassion, and wisdom.**

Destructive anger is often at the very heart and core of man and our flesh. It does take an active displeasure at what is wrong, but instead of working in a constructive way for the good of God's kingdom and his people, it is destructive and it is often pursuing its own ends. **This kind of anger can be explosively angry, bitter, resentful, pessimistic, irritable, negative, apathetic, and self-righteous, as we pursue our own desires and our own glory.**

It is an anger that at its very core stems from what I called an “**awe**” problem. The problem is that we have traded the glory and awe of God for the glory and awe of small and pitiful people; ourselves. So we seek what pleases us and selfishly suits our own purposes. And when we don't get it we fight, become irritated, frustrated, etc... We become destructively (sinfully) angry.

But as I said last week there's a solution.

A solution that will help us not only identify situations of anger, but also get to the root of our anger. It's a series of questions that will require us to identify our anger and its underlying motives, and then apply the truth of God's word to them, so that we can begin to truly unravel our anger, while rebuilding our awe of God, and ultimately our joy in Christ.

Are these questions a magic pill? No. Will it work perfectly every time? No. But it is a starting point in the war against the inner motives of our flesh, as we fight to resist sin, and regain our awe and joy. And it is a starting point in turning our destructive anger into something constructive that works for the good of God's kingdom and others.

So if you are a note taker I encourage you to write these questions down so that you can begin to apply them to the everyday anger inducing situations of your life.

1. What is my situation?

This first question is the easiest one. It is asking the question "*What situation, event, or person made you angry?*"

- I was running 10 minutes late for my appointment.
- Traffic came to a screeching halt and I missed my meeting, lunch, or doctor's appointment.
- I may lose my job or I may not get the promotion because I missed this meeting.
- I could have cancer and now I have to wait three long, and what possibly could have been life-saving, months to find out if that is true.
- There is also the highway department or fender bender that has caused this traffic jam.

It is important to notice that none of these things are describing who you are as a person. And they also do not describe the realities of how you react and why. Instead all of them are naming the significant factors that play into your anger.

As David Powlison writes, "*They answer the when, where, at what, and with whom of your experience of anger.*"

This is the first step that each of us must take before we can explain the how and why of our anger. We must know what we are getting angry at before we can recognize how our anger is manifesting itself in a particular situation, and before we are able to rightly dig into why we are even getting angry in the first place.

That is step one.

2. How do I react?

This also can be a fairly easy question to answer. It pulls out the many ways we express our anger within our minds, bodies, action, and emotions. This is the question "*How do we respond to our situation and the factors that surround it?*"

- You mentally curse the highway department or the other drivers for making you late.

- You begin to mentally beat yourself up for not leaving earlier.
- A nervous and angry tension now pervades your body and your fists are now clenching the steering wheel of your car.
- You experience many different emotions like intense anger, irritation, bitterness, fear, worry, pessimism, or an apathy that makes you want to give up as you sit in halted traffic that looks like it is never going to move.
- In your anger and frustration maybe you don't let anyone merge into your lane and you press right up to the bumper in front of you.
- You groan and sigh and you even vent your frustration in a verbal ways, *"This is so stupid,"* or *"I can't believe this is happening to me today of all days."*

Evaluating these reactions allows us to see how our destructive anger manifests itself in the various circumstances of our life. They also can become a starting point as we seek to confess our sinful anger to God and seek to turn away from these destructive reactions to constructive ones.

However, before we get there, these reactions also point to something deeper that we need to deal with, **our motives.**

3. What are my motives?

This is the all-important question, "why do we get angry?" or "why do we react the way we do?" And our answers to this question will either keep us mad or help us to turn to Jesus and respond constructively.

You see the easy answer is to point the finger right back to the situation and circumstances. It is the traffic jam, missed meeting, possible loss of job, medical issues, or not seeing my friend that are making me angry. Those things are to blame, and if you just take those away then I won't be angry.

So if my kids would just stop disobeying, or if my boss would stop hounding me, or if my spouse would listen and respect me more then I wouldn't get angry. **This in turn makes your anger someone else's fault and not your own. And once you blame someone else you will never be able to actually free yourself of destructive anger.**

Instead, like last week, we need to be willing to look within ourselves and see that the root of our destructive anger lies in the sinful motives that exist within our hearts.

Let's look once again at our main passage from last week. James 4:1-3 says this:

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

James is making it clear that our destructive anger arises from our passions; those passions being **what you most passionately believe and cherish.**

- We get mad in the traffic jam because we want to get where we want to go in our timing because our schedules are most important.
- We get frustrated and irritated because we so badly want and need the money that would have come out of that sales meeting.
- Maybe we are short-tempered with our spouse or we give them the cold shoulder when we felt like they weren't giving us the attention we wanted, because we have made them the center and source of our happiness, identity, and security.
- You yell at your kids when they are making messes around the house because it not only inconveniences you (**because your time and your plans are most important**), but it also creates an environment that feels in disarray and out of control and you so badly crave control, and maybe your well-being is dependent upon being in control (**I will freely admit that this is my struggle**).

All of these reactions, and the self-focused and self-serving motives that are associated with them, reveal something to us (this is what I ended with last week).

They reveal to us that we have traded the eternal glory of our perfect, powerful, holy, gracious, merciful, and loving God for our own self-glory and the building of our own kingdoms.

In so doing, we have not only lost our “awe of God,” but we have become destructively angry people who (as James says) fight, quarrel, covet, murder, and steal because we are seeking our own passions.

And as we saw last week in the story of Tom, our destructive anger can have serious consequences in our jobs, homes, and even in our own emotional and physical well-being. **It can affect everything we do.**

So where do we go from here? **How do we move from knowing the problem to a place of hope and resolution?**

We can begin by looking at God's word and reminding ourselves of what is true. What is true about God, who he is for us, how he is with us, how he meets us in trials, and how our greatest fulfillment, joy and peace are found in him. So let's look at “**What is True.**”

4. What is True?

Look with me once again at Psalm 23 again: ***¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.***

In the moments of destructive anger we can often feel like no one is looking out for our good, or that everything is going wrong and it is working against us.

But this verse not only helps us to recognize that we are not alone and that someone (our Shephard) is taking care of us, but it is also the realization **that we already have everything that we could need and want in God through Christ.**

As the psalmist says in Psalm 16:11:

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Or Jesus says in John 6:35:

“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

If we are to turn from destructive anger we must first be reminded on a daily basis that all of our greatest wants, needs, desires, cravings, hungers, and thirsts only find their fulfilment in Christ.

When we begin to believe this we are more able to be okay with the inconveniences and the outcomes of life’s situations because our hope and fulfillment doesn’t hinge on those situations.

As a result, we will be more able and equipped to calm ourselves and have peace in the stressful situations of traffic jams, disobedient children, spousal disagreements, medical and family trauma, etc... **because we know and believe that our Shephard is with us, and our wants are met and fulfilled in Him.**

David continues in Psalm 23:2-3:

² *He makes me lie down in green pastures.*

He leads me beside still waters.

³ *He restores my soul.*

*He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name’s sake.*

Do you believe this? When you are in the traffic jam, and when the inconvenience of your kids tantrums come, or when you lose your job, or tragedy strikes your family, or your spouse is upset with you; do you believe that God is working for your good?

That he is taking all of life’s stressful and potentially anger inducing moments and is working to take you from a destructive place to a constructive place?

Do you believe that God is actually working to restore your soul, to refresh you, and to give you a renewed life in Christ? **(I struggle to believe this, and I definitely need these reminder).**

Because if you are a believer here this morning this is what God is doing on your behalf.

God is working to bring us into green and lush pastures in our life; pastures where all of our needs and wants are met beyond our wildest dreams. And he is leading us to still waters. He is working to bring peace and comfort to our souls.

This is why David could write in verse 4: ***“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me...”***

He understood that even though death itself might be at his door step he has no reason to fear or live a life of anger, bitterness, and resentment because God is with him. And not only is God with him, but he is working in and through every situation in David’s life and ours so that we can experience peace with God and the restoration of our souls.

So that anger inducing situation that causes us to want to freak out is really a moment that God is using to bring us to a place of restored trust, hope, and joy in him. He is working to give us a renewed life in Christ.

Now I realize that in the moment of anger it can be hard for us to really believe that God is working that way in our lives. **I know for me at times I wonder if God is working at all.** Yet David writes at the end of verse 3: ***“He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”***

When we find it difficult to believe that God is working for our good and the restoration of our souls, we need to remember that God is at the same time working for his glory and for **“His name’s sake.”**

This means that God has connected his glory with our good and restoration. And if they are connected then it means that God will make it happen because he is passionate about his own glory.

As Isaiah 48:10-11 says:

***Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver;
I have tried you in the furnace of affliction.
For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it,
for how should my name be profaned?
My glory I will not give to another.***

In these moments God is refining you, and working for your good, so that his glory will shine brightly and be made known in you and through you.

Now this doesn’t mean that stressful and anger inducing situation will go away, but it does mean that if we are believers here today that God will take us from our destructive self-centered ways to a place where we are able to experience real peace and joy, and will be able to work for the constructive good of our God and other people.

And as we look into God's word, and begin to believe that God is our Shephard, that all our wants and needs are met in him, that God is using every situation to bring us to green pastures and still waters, and is working for the restore our souls in Christ we will begin to regain our **"awe of God."**

We will begin to see the power, majesty, grace, mercy, kindness, and love of God at work in our lives, and will open our eyes and our souls to a renewed zeal for our maker that makes us more in love with his kingdom and his purposes than our own.

And we will begin to believe what David says in verse 6 of Psalm 23 (even if just a little bit):

*⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.*

We will begin to believe and live as if God's goodness and mercy are always upon us, even in the most anger inducing situations we can think of. And we will begin to believe that these anger inducing situations are nothing in comparison with our forever life with Jesus.

And not only are these anger inducing situations nothing in comparison with our eternity with Jesus, but God is using them to prepare that eternity for us when this short vapor of a life is over. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18:

17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

God is using that traffic jam, that unruly child, that hounding boss, an argument with your spouse, that illness, that family drama, the angry neighbor, etc... to prepare glory for you.

This is what it looks like to turn to what is true. We continually put the truths of God's word in front of us in these anger inducing situations and we begin to take our eyes off of our own kingdom and we put them on the eternal kingdom of a God who is working for our present and eternal good. And we begin to believe that this is true because he has made his glory dependent upon it. We begin to regain our awe in the everyday stressful situations of life.

And once we begin to do that we will be better equipped to ask the final question.

5. How can I respond constructively in this situation?

As we turn away from ourselves and our own kingdoms, and we turn to God and his kingdom in faith, and recognize that he is in control we will be more likely to let go of the anger, bitterness, resentment, irritation that arise in things like traffic jams, and will be able to actively work for the good of the other drivers, your kids, your boss, and your spouse.

You will no longer be working in a destructive way, but will be working in a constructive way for the furthering of God's kingdom and the good of other people, because you are no longer captured by your anger, but by who your God is and who he is for you. You will be captured by awe.

Now is this going to be easy no. Will you ever perfectly stand in awe of God? No. Does this mean that you will never experience destructive anger again? No. But this is a starting place.

It starts us down the path of identifying our destructive anger and what drives it, and it begins the process of reorienting our hearts toward God's truth so that we respond in constructive ways that are driven by faith and awe and not by self-focused and self-serving motives.

As we do this we will begin to see change in our lives. We will more easily and readily confess our destructive anger to God and ask for his help. We will begin to see ourselves responding constructively and even mercifully in situations that before produced destructive results.

And as we continually put the truth of who God is before us we will begin to taste the sweetness of His soul satisfying joy. Joy that comes from Him being our Good Shephard, the one who has fulfilled all our wants and needs, the one who is restoring our souls and is working for his glory, as he prepares us for an everlasting kingdom of glory with him.

Now the only question that you and I have left to answer is, "will we take the first step?"

Let's Pray