

Straight from the "Hart"

January 28, 2024



Enemies of Abundant Living (3): Neutralizing Acidic Anger

Welcome to Hartland UMC's "Straight from the "Hart"". We are glad you are here and participating in worship through this service script.

Affirmation of Faith

(P: Pastor, C: Congregation)

P: We believe in God the Father,

C: who reveals his love to us in Christ.

P: We believe in God the Son,

C: who pours out God's Holy Spirit on us.

P: We believe in the Holy Spirit, **C: who teaches us God's truth.**

P: We believe in one God: **C: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

P: Therefore, we refuse to believe that we are unable to influence the events around us. We refuse to believe we are bound by racism, war, and injustice.

C: We believe those around us are our brothers and our sisters.

P: We believe in dignity every day and that our brokenness can be healed.

C: We believe we can overcome oppression and violence, without resorting to it.

P: This means we will seek to reject revenge and retaliation.

C: For we remember, "Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can."

"Affirmation of Faith (inspired by 1 John)" written by Michael Perry on jubilate.co.uk
"Drawn from the writings of Martin Luther King, Jr." by Abigail Reichard, ccu.disciples.org
Adapted to be responsive

Opening Prayer Loving God, there are so many who are hurting in this world. Some are right here in our community. Some are in distant lands. Since we are all a part of your family, we share what we have. Our minds and hearts reach out to them. We rejoice that we can gather to participate in this act of sharing your love, and it is done in worship of you in Jesus' name that pray. Amen.

Herb Mather © 2002 General Board of Discipleship

Call to Worship

We do not sail calm seas. We are surrounded by tempests of emotions within and without. They drive us toward rocks upon which we and our relationships would be broken. We have learned that ill will creates frustration, futility, and discord. We come to be saved from disrupting resentments, to weed them out by the roots. We gather to surrender ourselves and our emotions to God, that he may move us away from the rocks and to the open seas of expanding accomplishment -- harnessing and channeling us for the true purposes of his kingdom -- a good will that brings peace, effectiveness, and harmony.



Music

As we look at our world, we see plenty of examples where peace and harmony are yet to come, so we must continue to chase God's and his loving call until our world finds hope and justice. Let's sing to the tune of Jesus Calls Us, All Who Love and Serve Your City.

All Who Love and Serve Your City (to tune of Jesus Calls Us)

Words: Erik Routley, 1966 © 1966 by Galliard, Ltd,
Music: William H Jude, 1874

1. All who love and serve your city, all who bear its daily stress,
all who cry for peace and justice, all who curse and all who bless:
2. In your day of loss and sorrow, in your day of helpless strife,
honor, peace, and love retreating, seek the Lord, who is your life.
4. For all days are days of judgment, and the Lord is waiting still,
drawing near a world that spurns him, offering peace from Calvary's hill.
5. Risen Lord, shall yet the city be the city of despair?
Come today, our Judge, our Glory, be its name, "The Lord is there!"

Theme

One of the strife inducing stresses of life is unhealthy anger. Some people are never happier than when they create conflict and rejoice when they irritate someone because it shows them that they have gotten under their skin.

On the other side of it, some people like to hang on to and nurture the hurts they receive from others, even turning the bulk of their prayers and thoughts and

conversations into laments about everything or everyone that is difficult in their life. Inconvenient anthills of their life become unscalable mountains which they constantly bury or expressed in unhelpful ways -- because neither gets to the root cause of the emotion.

There was once (upon a time) a **lion** who had never learned how to roar. No one else realized it because from an early age he had learned how to work around it. He had learned how to talk softly with everyone, and to listen to them. He learned to tell others his point of view without having to raise his voice. This won him the affection and trust of everyone on the plain.

One day the lion spoke to an animal that replied to common sense with offensive nonsense and angry name-calling. This animal didn't even bother to listen to what the lion said. The lion got so frustrated that he felt a strong urge to roar, but he had never learned how. The animal was pleased that he had "beaten the lion" with his tirades and left like a victor. The lion, unable to express what he needed, buried it, and went away feeling defeated, helpless, and angry.

Worse, he couldn't let it go. The anger burned within him. He developed a phone app for his phone that would roar with a special built in speaker so it would exceed the normal full volume of the phone.

Not long after this, he happened to meet that same animal who started spewing the same kind of irritating gibberish. In almost no time, the lion was so annoyed that he pulled out his phone and used the terrifying roar.

The animal shrieked in terror and ran away. As for the lion, he felt good to get all that anger out of him, and to get the upper hand in that situation and earn the respect over that irritating animal. But it wasn't really respect, it was just fear. But the incident was also seen, and news spread and now all the animals on the plain were afraid to come near the lion. Over time, the lion became sad and lonely. and realized that roaring in anger MAY, sometimes, help you get your way in the moment, but over the long haul, it is not a fun way to live. He figured out that his lack of a roar had made him good at talking and listening to others and making many friends, and that was a much better way to live -- even if it means there are a few stubborn animals that may not like you.

He deleted his roar app, and by using his kind and friendly voice, little by little, he eventually managed to restore the animals' trust in him, and never again did he consider returning to roaring.

(story inspired by "A Lion Without a Roar", by Pedro Pablo Sacristán)

They say a cornered rattlesnake will bite itself in anger. Buried anger eats us alive. Inappropriately expressed anger may give temporary relief and settle, but will re-build to yet another uncontrolled explosion. And it has the additional consequence of straining the relationships that receive these explosions. E Stanely Jones says, “If we give people a piece of our minds, we shall probably lose our own peace of mind.” You must not cover over a boil, you must lance it, draw up and out the infection, get the cause out, and heal the boiling rage of anger, or it will just become worse. The Bible says “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:30-32 (NIV)

Responsive Reading

(R – Reader, C – Congregation)

R: Our ancestors were told, “Eye for eye and tooth for tooth.”

C: The punishment is limited to the level of the loss.

R: Jesus takes it further: Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you, don’t strike back. If someone sues the shirt off your back, gift him with your coat. If someone takes unfair advantage, use it to practice the life of service.

C: Getting “even” by escalating retribution will not hurt the offender as much as ourselves and our community. We will live graciously.

R: Another ancient saying is: “Love your neighbor”, and its unwritten companion, “Hate your enemy”. But Jesus challenges us to love our enemies.

C: There is no special reward for loving the lovable. Even corrupt, evil people do that.

R: When someone mistreats you, respond with the energies of positive prayer. You are citizens and children of the heavenly kingdom. Live out your true God-created identity. Allow the worst of others to bring out the best within you.

C: As our heavenly Father is perfect in showing his love to everyone, so we are to love completely.

Inspired by (with commentary on) Matthew 5:38-48

Bible Reading 1

Paul applies it this way:

Love sincerely. Hate evil. Hold on to what is good. Be devoted to each other

like a loving family. Excel in showing respect for each other. Don't be lazy in showing your devotion. Use your energy to serve the Lord. Be happy in your confidence, be patient in trouble, and pray continually. Share what you have with God's people who are in need. Be hospitable.

Bless those who persecute you. Bless them, and don't curse them. Be happy with those who are happy. Be sad with those who are sad. Live in harmony with each other. Don't be arrogant, but be friendly to humble people. Don't think that you are smarter than you really are.

Don't pay people back with evil for the evil they do to you. Focus your thoughts on those things that are considered noble. As much as it is possible, live in peace with everyone. Don't take revenge, dear friends. Instead, let God's anger take care of it. After all, Scripture says, "I alone have the right to take revenge. I will pay back, says the Lord." But,

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him.

If he is thirsty, give him a drink.

If you do this, you will make him feel guilty and ashamed."

Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil with good. Romans 12:9-21 (GW)

Special Music And in those places where we are victorious in conquering evil and anger and revenge through the successful practice of sincere love and joy and forgiveness, and peace -- God dwells among us and makes us one. The Seasonal Singers are going to sing for you Where Charity and Love Prevail...

Where Charity and Love Prevail

(to tune of O For a Thousand Tongues)

Words: 9th cent. Latin; trans. by Omer Westendorf, 1961

Music: Carl Glasser, arr. by Howell Mason, 1839





1. Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found;
bro't here together by Christ's love, by love are we thus bound.
2. With grateful joy and holy fear his charity we learn;
let us with heart and mind and soul now love him in return.
3. Forgive we now each other's faults as we our faults confess,
and let us love each other well in Christian holiness.
4. Let strife among us be unknown; let all contention cease;
be his the glory that we see; be ours his holy peace.
5. Let us recall that in our midst dwells God's begotten Son;
as members of his body joined, we are in him made one.

Music And as one, we serve each other, let's prepare our hearts for prayer by singing...

Together We Serve

Words - Music: Daniel Charles Damon
© 1998 Hope Publishing House Co.

1. Together we serve, united by love,
inviting God's world to the glorious feast.
We work and we pray through sorrow and joy,
extending your love to the last and the least.
2. We seek to become a beacon of hope,
a lamp for the heart and a light for the feet.
We learn, year by year, to let love shine through
until we see Christ in each person we meet.
3. We welcome the scarred, the wealthy, the poor,
the busy, the lonely, and all who need care.
We offer our home to those who will come,
our hands quick to help, our hearts ready to dare.

4. Together, by grace, we witness and work,
remembering Jesus, in whom we grow strong.
Together we serve in spirit and truth,
remembering love is the strength of our song.

Prayers Lord, we serve together because your life and love is in us. You have done marvelous things, working your salvation, renewal, and restoration -- and making it known and accessible to all. You remember your love and faithfulness to your people. All of nature proclaims your glory. We hear waves lapping the shore, rivers rippling over their beds, the splashing of fish leaping with life. The mountains too, stand as a joyful testimony to your majestic and decisive rightness. The plains of your steady faithfulness. You invite the sea, the earth, and everything that lives in it to praise and serve you. And we do. For we love you, and your Son Jesus.

And you are teaching us that our inner beings are designed for love, so forgive us when we flood that delicate fabric with the havoc of hate and anger and resentment and regret. Like sand in the machinery of life, it strains and even breaks us down, leaving us exhausted and ineffective. Forgive us and remind us that we are constructed for positive good will, and for the way of your love, which works like oil in the machinery of life. Oil works better than sand.

That is why we desire to do what Jesus taught, and what he taught is not burdensome because we can overcome by our trust in you. Strengthen our many talents and skills and instill in us confidence in your plans for our future, where energies can be gathered up and used for the good of all people in your name.

Petitions Today we remember Michael and Terri Pries and ask for safe travels as they go to Florida for a while, we continue to pray for Kathy Novak's good friend's son, Danny Dunham – only 38 and serious heart attack(not his first) We pray for his recovery. * We continue to pray for Pat Schleh's friend Elaine, * for Jan Martin, who says hi and misses us, * for those who are not feeling well in any way shape or form, * for those facing challenges of any kind, * for peace in our world and in our homes.

We pray for our church, our community, for ourselves. We know that negative attitudes, such as resentment and angry criticism will eat at us like acid eats through whatever it touches. Deliver us from what ails us, that we may truly live as you taught us to pray. **Lord's Prayer**

Intro to and Bible Reading 2

Jesus enters a synagogue, and a man was there who at some time in his life had experienced an accident or illness that made his hand lose his strength and he could not use it. Tradition says that the man did not want to beg, but he was a stone mason or plasterer, and he could not do that work with only one hand.



Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath. They asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" He said to the man who had his hand withered, "Come and stand in front of everyone." Then he turned to his critics and asked, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good or to do harm? To save a life or destroy it? What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if this one falls into a pit on the Sabbath day, won't he grab on to it and lift it out? Oh how much more value then is a man than a sheep! Yes, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day." [James would add later, "If you know what is right to do but you do not do it, you sin."] But they were silent and wouldn't answer Jesus. He looked around at them with anger, and he was deeply grieved by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored whole, as healthy as the other. The Pharisees went out, and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy Jesus.

Mark 3:2-6 (WEB, NLT) with Matthew 12:10-13 (WEB) and James 4:17 (NLV)

Music Various versions call the man's hand crippled, paralyzed, shriveled, deformed, but most translate using the Greek word's literal meaning which is to be dried up or most often chosen -- withered. Many people today still suffer not only physically, but from spirits that are in a dry place, emotions that are sometimes shriveled or paralyzed, minds that are hurting, relationships that are crippled, living in a society that is deformed from its original intent. We all need to heed Jesus, stand, and in faith, reach out to him for healing for ourselves, for others, and for our world. If comfortable, let's stand before the sermon and sing ...

Heal Us, Emmanuel, Hear Our Prayer

Words: William Cowper, 1779 Music: Johann Cruger, 1647

1. Heal us, Emmanuel, hear our prayer; we wait to feel thy touch;
deep-wounded souls to thee repair, and Savior, we are such.
2. Our faith is feeble, we confess we faintly trust thy word;
but wilt thou pity us the less? Be that far from thee, Lord!
3. Remember him who once applied with trembling for relief;
"Lord, I believe," with tears he cried; "O help my unbelief!"
4. She, too, who touched thee in the press and healing virtue stole,
was answered, "Daughter, go in peace: thy faith hath made thee whole."
5. Like her, with hopes and fears we come to touch thee if we may;
O send us not despairing home; send none unhealed away.

Sermon Neutralizing Acidic Anger

The healing of the man with the withered hand is not only a story of law versus grace, of man-made traditions versus heavenly compassion, it is a study of healthy anger versus unhealthy anger. As we sang, we can see ourselves in the man needing healing. It is also easy for us to see ourselves supporting Jesus against what appears to us to be a cruel stance. The challenge of this story, especially for us Gentile Christians, is to see ourselves in the people who were already opposing our Lord. We'll come back to that story in a minute.

One of the best studies on good versus bad anger is seen in the story of Jonah. I don't have time for him today, except to say this. Jonah is a good study on this topic because he is supposed to be the good guy. We relate to him. We have to, he is the hero of the story. In fact, the way I remember this children's story engrained *in me*, this is what you learn: God doesn't like sin. There is an evil city sinning. Our good guy is sent to straighten them out by preaching that destruction is the consequences of their evil sin. He is afraid to go to those mean people and goes another way. God forces him to the city via a big fish. (Not a whale, "big fish" says the Bible 😊). The city hears the bad news, repents, and is saved from destruction. Application – we should not be like the reluctant prophet, and we should be eager to go and tell everybody about their sins... That is how I learned it as a kid. This summary of the story ignores or at least downplays the final chapter of the book, the climax of the story, and the author's primary lesson.

Yes, it is true that God is sad and angry when we treat each other badly, so much so that he wants to do something about it. Yes, it can be true that it is scary to talk to who we perceive as bad people about our faith and about what is right, especially people we don't know, or don't know well, or are considered "enemies". We can relate to Jonah's fear to go. The problem is that in that chapter 4 that we don't talk about much, we learn that Jonah wasn't afraid to go to them because they were a big evil foreign city. He was afraid to go to them because God might show love and save "*those bad people*" who are different than our hero, different from us – and our bible writer has God make a *big point* about how we, the "good guys", the ones who are God's and are representing God, may need to change our attitude toward others if we want it to match God's attitude toward others. It is a study of God's healthy anger that leads to redemption, and Jonah's unhealthy anger that leads to running away, to self-absorbed pity – to the point he wanted to commit suicide, anger turned inward and deadly dangerous, so it is important that we can distinguish between healthy anger and unhealthy anger, and how to deal with it.

E Stanley Jones says healthy anger is a God given instinct of protection for self and others that causes us to stand up and defend against potential harm. If we are indifferent or complicit with evil, we allow it to invade ourselves and others. God sent Jonah because their ill-treatment of each other angered him, and they didn't know better, and he wanted them to be better to each other for all their sakes. It is the desire for everyone's well-being that inspires grief and anger when someone's reality falls short of that shalom, that peace that goodness. And it compels us to work on constructive solutions. Like a car engine that has powerful explosions within it, controlled and channeled and directed to drive you to a better destination. It is not about damaged pride, nor hurt egos, nor personal fears.

Healthy Anger

- **flows from loving good**
- **is constructive**
- **is other oriented**

When anger is bound to personal wounds and grudges, (like it was with Jonah) it is harnessed to destructiveness; it escalates dysfunction in the world, the engine doesn't drive you anywhere, it just blows up, causing injury to you and to everyone who is nearby.

Now here is the tricky part. We often do not realize how skilled people are (including ourselves) at claiming, and indeed, thinking they are fighting for "right and for principle" when they are really fighting only for personal pride, power,

position, irritation, resentment or revenge. We are really good at covering it up and rationalizing it out. How easily the dark shadows of distorted anger and hate clothe themselves in the white robes of love and justice.

A common resulting strategy is that when others are angry at us, we run to the Bible verses that tell them not to be angry, to forgive, to love enemies, and to get over it quickly. But when we feel anger at others, we run to the verses where Jesus overturned the tables at the Temple (John 2:13-18) and claim we are feeling “righteous indignation”. By the way, that Temple cleansing was considered a – do you know what I mean when I say Temple cleansing? Jesus came and saw them exchanging money for exorbitant profit, and deciding that the sacrifices that they brought were not sufficient, finding the smallest defect and so then they had to buy the ones that they had on hand. They turned the house of prayer into a den of thieves, we will hear Jesus say. This was considered a dramatic prophetic action in the line of the Old Testament prophets that Jesus did when he did what he did. Turned over the tables, and took a whip to drive away the animals, creating chaos in the Temple courts. The response from the leaders was a demand for proof of his authority as a legitimate prophet. They recognized it was a prophetic action, they wanted him to prove that he had a right to be a prophet to them.

So let’s look at the synagogue story that was read for us, and the temple cleansing story. The leaders sat in the places of honor, the front row of the synagogue. These particular ones were not there to learn or worship, they were there to examine all the actions and teachings that took place to make sure no one would lead people away from their perception of truth. These experts were convinced that they were doing right -- upholding principles in the name of God against detractors.

They were already in conflict with Jesus, who now enters. They were looking carefully for something with which to accuse him. Seeing the man with the withered hand, Matthew puts the words right into their mouth “Is it right to heal on the Sabbath?” one paraphrase even suggests they were hoping he would say, “yes” so they would have evidence that Jesus was in the wrong, saying it was right to work on the Sabbath.

Jesus answers the voiced question based on their own law. You work to help a sheep caught in a ditch on the Sabbath, is not a person more valuable than that? Jesus’ opponents knew they could not give an answer that would not violate the principles of their own Law. But it was more than that. Among Jesus’ opponents,

their anger had ceased being about the topic, about principles – or they may have entered the debate about the Law and learned something about their own Law. Despite the assumption that their goal is to uphold and enforce holy principles, their real goal was not redemption and correction, that noble goal had become irrelevant.

It was now personal, it was about the person, the power, the authority. That is why at the Temple, they questioned him about his right to act prophetically. This attack served to turn the tables of power in the struggle, but more importantly, shifted the topic to Jesus as a person and away from the corruption that was obvious to everyone. Has anyone ever made you angry, and then you ask them, “Why are you doing this?” and they accuse back, “You are mad at me!” and all of sudden it is about your anger and not the conflict that caused it is lost from the conversation. That is what is going on here. This is still a common symptom of unhealthy angry arguing today – no argument on the content of the topic? – no worries -- attack the person making the argument.

Unhealthy Anger

- **is personal**
- **is blinding**
- **leads to hate**

And it is why they were silent in the Synagogue story. They had taken it as a personal attack. It wasn't about the Law's holy principles anymore, (upon which Jesus had the better interpretation), but that was no longer relevant to them. They instead chose to take Jesus' question as a personal attack – and their anger wasn't about the root cause topic, but directed at the defeat (and what eventually came to be, the literal destruction of Jesus). In fact, their anger drove them to associate with the unclean, Gentile, Herodians, violating their own sacred traditions (and becoming unclean) in order to team up against Jesus. Unhealthy anger causes us to not see straight, to see red, distorting our perception, Jones claims, even physical sight can be affected; and quotes some scientific studies from the back in the 40s about it. But more importantly, anger impacts our spiritual vision, our inner life, and distorts our outlook on life and faith.

On the other hand -- Jesus was angry and grieved at their silence. His anger was not anger because they hated him. His anger was not because they confronted him. He was angry because of the holy stand these leaders were taking in the name of God – a stance which hindered the compassionate grace and wholeness that God wants to offer the hurting. And it was the same at the Temple Cleansing incident, it was Jesus' love for the good and right of God and heaven that angered him because people representing God were using his name to enrich themselves

in money and power and status through corrupt, abusive practices that were taking advantage of and burdening the sincerely faithful. In both cases it drove him to stand with those being taken advantage of, who were hurting, to make a positive, constructive difference in the lives of the people on whose behalf he was angered.

It is too easy to become hurt, and angry, and lose a true perspective as to what anger is healthy and helpful and what anger is unhealthy and disruptive to our life; blinding us to God's grace and God's truth and claiming righteous indignation to what is only personal fear and frustration and hate. Unhealthy anger is a very dangerous emotion.

It tempts us to make mountains out of ant hills as I said earlier. A small misunderstanding or slight becomes a full force attack. When we are hurting, it is easy to imagine or exaggerate the extent of people talking negatively. Early in my ministry (sometimes not so early) people would make criticisms about the church, and as the leader of the church I would take it as a personal failure even I had absolutely nothing to do with whatever they were talking about. If I had let on that I was taking it that way, most of them probably would have been confused. I'd guess that most of those things I received as attacks were more likely attempts at helpful, constructive suggestions to make the church better. They just weren't couching it (presenting it) in a way that I was receiving it right – and (in my youth) that was probably more my fault than theirs. Despite their intent, whichever their intent was -- if I hadn't taken it personally, I may have been better able to move forward to potential solutions to whatever the topic might have happened to be. Sometimes we think the "attack" is coming from without, but the conflict is actually coming from within our own spirit and mind. Jones summed it this way: When you go around with a chip on your shoulder, the chip is probably from the block above.

Whether the slights or attacks are imagined, exaggerated, or real; the feelings of anger and resentment are real emotions. In nursing them we may think we are hurting those it is directed at, but most of the harm is to ourselves and those who are close to us. Nor can we pretend they do not exist. Denial needs to remain exclusively a river in Egypt. If you push emotions out, they will find a way back – perhaps buried and hidden where their root cause is now hard to find, cloaked in the shadows of the soul, they will be even more free to wreak havoc on our spirit, and mind, and body. As Jones says, some diseases are contagious, some are structural (I think that may include genetic), but some are caused by mental and spiritual issues because unhealthy anger and resentments (as one example of

these issues), are a poison, and acid that infects and eats away at our whole being.

So we strive to do the difficult things and try to deal appropriately with these emotions. On the basis of the stories we have gone through, here are some suggestions.

The first I already named. Don't take attacks personally or make personal attacks. Stick to the topic at hand. People that launch true or false personal attacks – it may be their strategy

**Don't make or
take it personally**

to win, it may have nothing to do with the person they are attacking, they just want to win the argument, and it is often easier to defeat a person than a topic. Or it could be the attacks come out of their own woundedness. Hurt people tend to hurt others. Sometimes, we receive things as an attack that are never meant that way. Some people grew up in a background, a culture, where concise, blunt talking is simply the way they communicate and there is no malice or negative intent at all. But the way we receive it, because we didn't grow up that way, it is received as crude and tactless and an attack, but it wasn't the intent of the sender, it is just how we received it.

Whatever the reason, if we take it personally and get angry, the emotion causes a distraction and reduces clarity of thought; and begins shifting power and control to the other person. That doesn't happen if we don't take it personally. Someone told Jones, "I don't think you know when you are insulted." He replied, "I am not looking for insults and so I don't see them." I suspect he saw them, but he stubbornly chose not to be distracted by the personal attack and patiently and persistently stuck to the topic at hand.

A reporter was shadowing a person for a story. Each morning they would meet and then walk to his office. The man would buy a paper from a grumpy newsstand owner, but he always responded with polite cheerfulness. Near the end of the week the reporter finally had to ask— "That newsstand owner has been grumpy to you all week, why are you always so nice to him?" The man replied, "Why should I let him control the kind of day I am going to have, much less the kind of person I am going to be?"

When the point of conflict is over, and you win, be gracious. British writer Edward Dicey wrote that he was introduced to Abraham Lincoln as "one of his

**Be gracious,
when it is over, it is over**

enemies". Lincoln said, "I did not know I had any enemies," and offered his great boney hand in friendship. Dicey said he had seen a lot of people distinguished by

their talents or their office, but he never saw anyone like Lincoln who seemed so unaware that his office granted him any superiority." When we win, win graciously.

And when we lose, lose graciously. [Lions fans, beware! 😊 I didn't mean to say that. But for either case, win or lose, do it graciously.] When we lose, don't hang on to the loss and become bitter and resentful and let that build in you. Jesus gave practical advice when we are on the short end of the stick. Don't strike back, try to settle out of court, go the extra mile, make friends quickly with your accuser. If in your prayers you realize someone has something against you, go to them and try to work it out before you do anything else. (Matthew 5:39-42,23-26) He knew how damaging hateful feelings are to our life. Don't let real (or imagined) conflicts fester. Make it a habit to settle disagreements at once. Don't let them get cold and become fixed in thought and attitude.

Gloating winners and sore losers are, at least in the long run, ineffective defense mechanisms to boost ourselves by pushing others down. But in lingering on the perceived flaws and shortcomings of others (through gloating or sore losing), we create in ourselves the additional flaw of becoming both oversensitive and highly critical, and that leads to a more challenging personal life. So let it go.

Seek Understanding, Don't Generalize. Often, dissension and anger come because we have not walked in the shoes of another, or they in ours; and we don't understand each other. A doctor saw a group of workers being very lethargic as he passed them each day on the highway. Their lackadaisical way of working upset him since they were being paid by his tax dollars. One day he drove by at their quitting time, and they were packing up with the same lethargy, and then he realized they weren't lazy, they were sick from undernourishment, vitamins, and parasites. Instead of being angry, he began to work for their health to the benefit of all.

**Seek Understanding,
Don't Generalize**

We tend to generalize and angrily find fault on some of the most brief and casual of observations. Even more to the point, many tend to see a single fault in a person and generalize it to the whole person. We don't like one issue, one trait, one opinion, some one-time act; even some innocent quirk (and who doesn't have an innocent quirk?) And because of that *one* thing, we decide we don't like *all* of them. Jones suggests that if we *must* speak of negative traits, name only those specific traits. But then also add what traits you like about them. Train yourself to think

**Train Yourself to Pray,
Speak, Act - Positively**

positively. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton was difficult and stubborn. Lincoln said, "Folks tell me that there are a great many men in the country who have all Stanton's excellent qualities without his defects. All I have to say is, I haven't met 'em. I don't know 'em! I wish I did!" Lincoln appointed opponents over friends if they were better qualified. Boy, wouldn't that be nice if that happened today. Negative thinking makes a negative person; positive thinking makes a positive person. Always end on a positive note in prayer, in words, and in actions.

Prayer dissolves enmity like heat dissolves ice. Speaking well of someone reinforces positive attitudes about them, and acting kindly may quickly wear down you negative feelings toward them, and if they feel the same way about you, it **may** even wear down their negative feelings toward you.

When Mrs. Lincoln talked to her husband about those who did him evil, he would answer: "Do good to those who hate you and turn their ill will to friendship." At a time when the Japanese disliked the Chinese intensely, one of each was at a certain college, and the Japanese student fell ill. The Chinese student brought food to him every day. They became the best of friends.

Praying, speaking, acting positively may or may not lead to these kinds of results, but we heard Paul remind us that sincere love does *what is within our power to do*. We can't control what the other person does, but we can control what we do. Even if the other person does not respond, at least it can change us and our attitudes toward others. The caveat here, is that it cannot be a game of manipulation, a scheming strategy to defeat them in the end. It must be genuine love.

If you can't find many genuine positives to say about a person, love anyway. Even if it is imagining what they may become. Christ **Love anyway** loves people not only in spite of what they have been or what they are, but for what they can be. Love is real and redemptive. Thomas Kidd wrote that Abraham Lincoln "would join hands with all in friendship, believing... that the world would be a better place for all of us if suspicion was less cultivated as one of the characteristics of our nature." Lincoln's wartime letters reveal his refusal to assert that he had been right, or his critics wrong... He claimed that we shouldn't alienate people just because we won or lost on any given issue. We should never burn relationships behind us.

Lastly, and closely related, anger and resentment and evil is best overcome by forgiveness. An Armenian girl and her brother had

Forgiveness

been attacked by Turkish soldiers. He was brutally killed before her eyes as she escaped over a wall.

She was a nurse. One day, while on duty, she recognized one of her patients as the same Turkish soldier who had killed her brother long ago. He was hovering between life and death. The slightest neglect and he would die, and no one would ever know the difference. She was tempted, but she decided for Christ's sake to forgive him and nursed him back to health.

As he was recovering, she told him who she was. He asked, "Why didn't you let me die when you had me in your power?" She answered, "I couldn't, I am a Christian. My Master forgave his enemies who crucified him. I must do the same, for his sake." The hardened Turk said, "If that is what it means to be a Christian, I want to be one."

It is not easy, especially for deep wounds and hurts and betrayals and all the rest. But over time, for the sake of Christ, and for the sake of our own health, and by the help of Christ, we can forgive wrongs and at least move toward having a more positive good will toward those who have hurt us, or at least work to minimize its negative impact on our own life as we seek to live abundantly...

Dr George Washington Carver refused to name a university that denied him because of his color, passing it off as nothing. Somebody said of Carver, he had "the peace that passes not only all understanding but all misunderstanding."

Jones says that one of the reasons we are overly sensitive is because we have not completely surrendered to the will of God. We are still living more to ourselves than to him. When we do give ourselves and live for him and his world, we will throw off anger as easily as healthy skin throws off germs. Martin Luther advises us to be "too glad and full of heart... so preoccupied with good will that you haven't room for ill will. Wesley said it similarly – I have summed up one of his general rules as being so busy doing good you don't have time to do bad. I think the formal, official quote is something like: Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all the souls you can, in every place you can, at all the times you can, with all the zeal you can, as long as ever you can. (I like mine better 😊)

When Jesus announced his mission at the beginning of his ministry, he read from Isaiah ... "he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor." And the next line in Isaiah is "and the day of vengeance of our God" (See Isa 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19). But Jesus did not read

that line, instead he closed the book. Do the same. Leave vengeance to God and practice redemptive good will.

In your bulletin you have a fill-in-the-blank handout that sums up some of the things I have been talking about. We'll go through them quickly to make sure you got them all. I think I've touched on them all, but let's fill it out as a review...

Tips to Overcoming (Unhealthy) Anger	
Don't love being angry	Resolve quickly
Don't make mountains out of anthills	Seek understanding
Don't suppress (bury) or avoid anger	Stay specific on <u>needed</u> topics, (Don't generalize)
Don't express (destructively)	Pray, speak, do positively
Don't make (or take) it personally	Focus on potential
Forgive for Christ's sake, (and leave vengeance to God)	

So what will we do with our anger... the implication of the author of Jonah's tale leaves the reader with a choice. He doesn't come right out and say it, but he implies it, he is leaving the reader with a choice: We can copy Jonah's ridiculous and embarrassing choice of blinding hate, and spewing its damage primarily on ourselves; or we can choose to see the world as God sees it, a great world of neighbors, strangers, and even enemies – people and cities and nations that are always in need of deep mercy. Jesus' answer was clear -- he declared that one of the weightier matters of the Law is mercy. (Matthew 23:23) and if we want to receive mercy, we need to show mercy (Matthew 18:33).

Prayer Lord, when hurt or confused, we feel angry and resentful. We confess that too often we want to remain offended and hold on to our hurts, building that negative energy. Open our eyes to grace again and again. You have called us to end the cycle of personal judgmental hatred, leaving vindication to you. You have forgiven us so graciously, help us not grudgingly, but graciously forgive others, praying your mercy will change our lives from the inside out, and our world can become a better place by channeling our hate of evil into a love of good – constructing a better world for the sake of Jesus and his mission here, we pray this. Amen.

Music

To put ourselves in God's hands, and channel anger to pray, speak, and act with constructive grace is a tall order. The key to living it is, as Jones said earlier, and Paul says it now: "I eagerly expect and hope that I will... have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body... for to me, to live is Christ [not me] (Philippians 1:20-21) I live for God, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. (Galatians 2:19-20) Therefore, in view of God's mercy, we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice which is holy and pleasing to God." (Romans 12:1-2) This surrender is the key to finding the abundant life in Christ. Let's sing

I Surrender All

Words: J.W. Van Deventer, 1896 Music: W.S. Weeden, 1896

1. All to Jesus I surrender; all to him I freely give;
I will ever love and trust him, in his presence daily live.

Refrain

I surrender all, I surrender all,
all to thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all.

4. All to Jesus I surrender; Lord, I give myself to thee;
fill me with thy love and power; let thy blessing fall on me.
(Refrain)

5. All to Jesus I surrender; now I feel the sacred flame.
O the joy of full salvation! Glory, glory, to his name!
(Refrain)

Blessing No go into the world in peace; be courageous; hold on to what is good; return no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak, help the suffering; honor and love people; rejoicing in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, as you bring glory to the Father by serving in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.