

# The Madness of Anger



by Edward T. Welch

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The hearts of men are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live. (Eccl. 9:3)

We were playing racquetball, and he made a shot that was not up to his usual standards. So he did what any thoughtful man would do—he threw his racquet in anger. The problem was that his racquet was tethered to his wrist. When he threw his racquet, it swung around and nailed him on his leg, opening up a manly-looking gash. Then, with anger in full bloom, he yanked the tether off his wrist, threw the new and expensive racquet for all he was worth, shattering it and denting the nearby wall.

It was one of the funniest things I had ever seen.

No, I didn't laugh immediately because, in contrast to my friend, I had all my wits about me, and I did not want him flinging the racquet at me so we could enjoy recovering from mirror-image gashes. Instead, I waited until he came to his senses. Then we laughed hysterically amid the blood and wreckage.

There you have it. Theologians call what he must have been thinking the 'noetic effects of sin'. We just called it stupid; so stupid it was

funny. Comedians capture how people act in non-human ways. Watch someone lumber along like an ape, making whatever noises apes make, and you chuckle. Watch a human being, created to have self-control, act like an untamed beast, and the incongruity of it might strike you as funny. Of course, things like this are only funny if the beast-person sets out on a course of acting human-like, and no one gets seriously hurt.

Anger is a poster child for the noetic effects of sin. When no one gets hurt, we can laugh at anger's silliness and stupidity. But the norm with anger is that somebody does get hurt. In those situations, we must do everything possible to protect the victim and try to restore sanity to the madman or madwoman.

## *Anger and the Noetic Effects of Sin*

There are many ways to describe sin. It is disobedience, missing the mark, hatred, treason, spiritual adultery, self-centeredness. The list can go on. Among these descriptions is that sin is madness or insanity. It is irrational, delusional, unreasonable. It makes absolutely no sense in light of God's love toward us. This is the idea behind the noetic effects of sin. *Noetic* comes from the Greek word *nous*, usually translated as "mind." It emphasizes that sin damages our ability to think correctly. Sin makes us mad.

Locate the noetic effects of sin in Scripture by way of "darkness" or "foolishness." Page

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through Proverbs and notice how the noetic effects of sin prominently describe everything contrary to God's wisdom. Watch the drunkard love his wine and get beaten up. Then, even before he comes out of his stupor, he strategizes how to get his next drink (Pr. 32:29-35). People emphasize a biological understanding of addictions because all addictions seem so stupid, delusional, and self-destructive. Theorists assume—wrongly—that we are rational beings. They can't imagine sane human beings repeatedly performing such irrational acts, so, they guess, the real problem must be biological.

Watch the young man wander, purposely so, into the arms of a seducer (Pr. 7). We want to yell out, "Stop, don't do it. Don't be so stupid. Can't you see what you are doing?" But he can't hear. He is doubly foolish. First, his actions are foolish; he will get burned in dozens of ways, from being cast out of the community to inciting the murderous rage of the adulterous woman's husband. Second, he avoids the voices of reason that tell him to turn back. It's as if he has to psyche himself up to be really dumb.

Romans 1:18-32 spells it out. God has made Himself known to us. We should be able to deduce His power and character from what He has created. And, in fact, everyone does retain the knowledge of God. We are the offspring of the King and have the privilege of living for His glory, which is *our* glory. But humanity suppresses that knowledge through practiced disobedience to the point where we succumb to a self-imposed delusion. We actually trade our royal glory and choose to reflect the glory of birds, animals, and reptiles. In other words, we opt for insanity, a.k.a. idolatry.

The prophet Isaiah writes about a carpenter who fells a cedar that God Himself created (Isa. 44:9-20). The carpenter uses some of the wood for burning, but with the rest, he makes an idol. Then he bows down to this idol and worships it saying, "Save me; you are my god" (Isa. 44:17).

Ludicrous! Laughable...if it weren't so pitiful, self-destructive, and against God. And then we consider ourselves.

All sin is delusional and unreasonable. None of it makes sense. But anger specializes in this madness. See the madness in yourself; start to become more sane. Then, and only then, do

you become qualified to speak to another mad person about their anger.

- I forget my wallet and don't realize it until an hour's drive into our vacation. What do I do? Beat on the steering wheel and scream out the window. Those actions seemed perfectly logical and therapeutic to me at the time, but my wife knew I had finally lost it.
- When I am frustrated with my wife—or anyone—and I *know* that I have contributed to the mess, I choke on the words, "Will you forgive me?" I remember them, but I can't get them out of my mouth. I know exactly what will bring peace, which is what I want. I have the physical ability to say these words. But I don't.
- I get mad at a colleague who doesn't show up for a meeting. While I think of subtle ways to rebuke him and make him feel really guilty, I go through my calendar to find a time to reschedule and happen to notice that the meeting he missed was canceled. He was going to be out of town and had told me weeks ago.

Anger sees others but not itself. I watched one man literally get hot under the collar. He was talking about how he had been wronged by another person. He started to get animated, then got louder and louder. His face flushed through various hues of red until he started glowing. He became one big, bulging blood vessel. By this time he was screaming.

After taking a few steps out of harm's way, and after he came out of his Incredible Hulk mode, I stated the obvious.

"You're pretty angry."

"WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, YOU IDIOT? YOU AREN'T GETTING IT ARE YOU?"

I was talking to a delusional man. I saw his anger, many others heard it, but he couldn't see it himself. The rule of thumb with such people is that you can't use reason to break through a delusion. Such angry acts bear the imprint of insanity.

Like delusional people, those who are angry are always the last to know, if indeed they ever know. Everyone else is peeling him or

herself off the wall, but the angry person can't even see that he is angry. He is simply pleased that other morons might have finally understood his impeccable and irresistible logic. Now *that* is irrational. Anger can see the wrongs of others, but not its own. By its very nature anger says, "You are wrong, and I am right," and it is absolutely certain in its judgment. It never wavers in its self-confidence.

Think of a judge in his courtroom: He sits up high in his massive chair on a raised platform, looking down and pointing, always confident in his or her judgment. And when that angry judge goes home, there is not a mirror to be found in his house. He has prohibited all things that could possibly give him a reflection of his own heart of anger.

Sin blinds us to our sin. We can see sin in other people, but we know we are fine. We are the emperor without any clothes. And the crazy

have already forgotten that they must be on high alert to their own anger. For a flickering moment, perhaps through a particular illustration, everything comes into view. But just as quickly, they forget.

What follows is ordinary material on a biblical approach to sinful anger. But everything is seen through the perspective of the irrational nature of sin.

### ***Making Madmen Sane***

If anger is delusional and opposed to all reason, how can madmen become sane? This is a vexing question until you remember that *all* sin is irrational. Furthermore, all Scripture targets irrational people with the expectation that the Spirit will give them eyes to see. The root of anger is spiritual blindness, and it is the God of light who opens blind eyes. Here are a series of implications for how you counsel an

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thing is we think we look rather dapper! We see other people looking at us as we parade down the road, and we think they must deeply admire our brilliance and rightness.

Anger never says, "Hmmm, I might be wrong, but it seemed like when I was talking, you weren't really listening to me. I *thought* you interrupted me. Perhaps you did. Do you think that's a possibility?" No, an angry person does not talk that way. He is always, absolutely confident that he is right, and you are wrong.

Here is the rub with anger: As a counselor, you can know what God teaches about anger, but your teaching is irrelevant unless you can blaze through the thicket of the person's insanity. While you show what he contributed to the argument, or skillfully dissect the issues of the heart, the delusional person thinks, "I can't wait for my wife to hear these things. This will really help her with her anger problem." Others patiently listen to you, acknowledging that they occasionally get angry, but this isn't *their* real problem. The moment you stop talking, they

angry person.

### **1. Clarify your initial expectations.**

When you speak to people who are not going to connect what you say to their own lives, you must be careful. When you talk about sunsets and art masterpieces, they are blind. To them, a sunset means it feels cooler, and an art masterpiece is just a canvas with occasional irregularities. Given their spiritual disability, you must be creative and illustrative. Look for metaphors that make sense to a blind person. Never assume that they understand what you say. But listen carefully to hear if they are catching the visual realities. And since they have no acquaintance with sunsets and fine art, assume that you will have to repeat, review, reinforce, and remind.

The book of Proverbs can be your mentor. Proverbs doesn't simply say, "Stop this and start doing that." It woos, persuades, paints vivid pictures, rehearses consequences, connects teaching to real life, surrounds everything with the fear of the Lord, and delivers it all in the

context of familial love. It assumes that insanity still lurks in our souls.

Now you are ready to begin. For your opening salvo, try God's question to Jonah. "Do you have a right to be angry?" (Jonah 4:4, 9). But the question is premature. Of course he believes he has a right to be angry!

There are at least two options at this point. One, ask, "Why do you believe you have a right to be angry?" Most anger is sinful, but it is also incited. This angry person might really have been sinned against. As you hear the story, you might decide to first talk about victimization and being sinned against. This takes you directly to Jesus Christ and our sin against Him, His patient endurance with us, and our privilege of loving enemies in the name of Jesus.

If the anger is destroying other people, you can't focus exclusively on victimization. You must do what you can to disarm the angry person. Let's assume that other people from the church are involved in helping the angry person, and those within striking distance of this anger are safe. Now what can *you* do to help to this blind man? If angry people don't even see their anger, all the best teaching is useless. Angry people will hear what you say, but they will be thinking about *your* anger, not their own.

## 2. Speak personally.

Ministry is impersonal when it speaks to an individual in the same way it speaks to a congregation—when private ministry is no different than public ministry. One of the benefits of private ministry is that you hope to be affected and changed by the other person. In most situations, you will learn from others. With an angry person, you will witness their anger, and you can't help but be affected by it.

"Let me tell you what it was like for me as you were talking. I was scared. I was so scared, I was tempted to leave the room, but I thought that would just make you angrier."

"It probably would have."

"You might have a hard time thinking of yourself as a scary and dangerous person, but please listen to me. I was scared, and I am guessing that other people have been scared by your anger, too. I don't think you

want to destroy other people and your relationships with them; that's why I want to talk with you about this. So let me ask you a question: 'Do you think you are an angry person?'"

"I guess everyone can get angry sometimes."

## 3. Bring anger into the light.

Whenever anger is noticeable, it becomes a priority. It is too volatile to wait until you have examined less critical matters. As such, you want to stay on this topic.

Here is another way to ask the question about anger:

"Do you usually feel confident that you are right?"

"Sure, there are times when I believe what somebody did was wrong."

"People certainly can do wrong, but there are clear guidelines for our judgment. For example, whatever wrong we see in another person, we should first find the same problem in ourselves. That immediately tempers our judgments and means that we come alongside the other person in humility rather than in judgment."

Try to let light shine on their delusion. To that end, follow God's revealed pattern for ministry: Walk with the other person in love and humility, considering them as more important than ourselves. This is a means of grace to the other person through which the Spirit works.

## 4. Explain how angry people hurt other people.

Here is a disarming question for an angry person. Asking such a question can sometimes break through the spiritual fog. "Have you ever been hurt by the anger of others? Have you been hurt by the anger of a father, mother, or other person whom you respected?" Anger is monomaniacal, and this question invites a bigger view.

Angry people can invent anger without any help, but anger begets anger (Pr. 22:24-25). If the angry person has been hurt by the anger of others, you can appeal to them to stop the carnage and bring all their attention to this sin

that hides in the shadows.

### **5. Show anger's sympathy with the devil.**

Since anger is so adept at hiding, spiritual desperation is natural. Left to ourselves we will be blind. If we ever see anger, we will be convinced that it is justified. Our potential blindness to our own anger should be enough to cause us to cry out, "Lord, search me." But there is more. Among Satan's signature traits is that he is a murderer (John 8:44), and all angry people are on that same murderous continuum. Anger is a sign of kingdom allegiances. It shows a temporary alignment with the devil himself. This association with the devil sends shivers up your spines in a warning that should be more than enough to compel angry people to cry out for mercy and grace.

Darkness is making more sense. As followers of Christ we are brought into the kingdom of light. When Scripture talks about darkness, it doesn't just remind us of our own blindness. It is tell us that we are blind people who grope around in the dark kingdom. The deceptive, delusional nature of sin is right in step with the deceptive and delusional nature of Satan himself. As such, the angry person is blind, walking in darkness, wandering through a mine field that could destroy him or her, and on the turf of a sworn enemy. This is no time for sterile teaching or leaving blind people to fend for themselves.

### **6. Be alert to anger's many faces.**

Another angry man (women can get angry, too, but men's anger tends to be more obvious and dangerous) is told by everyone close to him that he is angry. He, of course, denies it. His speech is punctuated with images of mutilation: "I want to snap her neck in two." "If he comes around again, I will smash his face in." How can he deny that he is an angry man? It is easy. Like any creative Pharisee he draws the boundaries of the law so that it doesn't include himself. This is gerrymandering at its finest. His definition of an angry person is someone who kills another person. That excludes him, and he basks in his own righteousness.

Anger, however, has many faces, and if we have not been able to identify some of the faces it takes in our own life, then we can be certain that we are utterly blind. Be careful not to do all the work here. Ask the angry person to stop,

think, and tell you about anger's subtleties. Listen for these seven clues to anger.

**Desire for Revenge.** Revenge is not very loud. It is not accompanied by screaming and overt hatred. The angry person simply wants to get even for a perceived wrong committed by a spouse, a friend, a fellow church member, or a work associate. He dwells on it until he conceives a plan that satisfies him. He is angry and he wants to get even. He wants you to feel the anger, the pain, the embarrassment that he feels when you committed that offense against him. He cannot overlook it. He feels compelled to take action. The revenge can be purely imaginary, but even that can satisfy a deranged mind.

**Fantasies of Another's Misery.** The angry person fantasizes about another person's miseries and failures. He is the type of person who is willing to spend extra money on gas so that he can drive by a house and make an obscene gesture, even when no one is there to see the gesture. He puts a curse on you and your house. Like a voodoo priest he damns you. It seems innocent; after all, it's only a gesture, and no one else even witnessed it. That's the creative Pharisee at work again. He redefines anger so he doesn't get caught in its web.

**Cursing.** I am always surprised by active church members who, when details of their marriage and family emerge, casually aim profanity at their spouses or children. I am even more surprised when, once exposed, they aren't even embarrassed. Somehow their cursing escaped the notice of "building others up" (Eph. 4:29). Or, even worse, they actually believe they are building up their families by giving them the rebuke they need. Sometimes, they think that sternness is the order of the day.

"I am right, and confidently so. You are wrong, and egregiously so." Humility be damned. Other people be damned.

Try to turn the light on to the acceptable versions of anger. Otherwise, blind people will always minimize everything short of murder itself.

**Jealousy.** Other people deserve less and I deserve more. The judgment imagery is still there. The judge still looks down in anger on you. You are wrong, and you deserve punishment.

Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming,  
But who can stand before jealousy?  
Pr. 27:4)

Watch out for jealousy. It is the nastiest of them all. Jealousy seems innocent only because it is so common. You have more than I have, but I really deserve more than you. I want a lot more blessing, and the others can have more misery.

Don't just name anger, locate anger. The goal is to be increasingly appalled at anger and all its manifestations. Reveal the God-ward roots of these behaviors any time you see it. With jealousy, the spiritual motivations are overt: "I want to be God rather than serve Him. I deserve only the best. God has been His normal stingy self with me."

**Grumbling and complaining.** Grumbling and complaining are my personal specialties. I have heard all kinds of teaching on grumbling and complaining, and I have even taught about grumbling and complaining. Even so, I can always justify my own grumbling and complaining in some way. It is, after all, a true expression of the fact that we live in a fallen world, isn't it? I can easily persuade myself that I am right—though all other complainers are wrong—and that my complaint is justified. The Pharisees certainly weren't this bad. Better to describe ourselves as creative politicians, experts in the art of spin, or creative lawyers who use the law to our own advantage.

Grumbling and complaining are manifestations of anger. But complainers and grumblers are the last ones to recognize this as anger.

**Cynicism.** Teens haven't cornered the market on cynicism, but it does seem to be stylish for that age group. What is cynicism? It is sneering, insolent, self-righteousness. It looks down on what goes on politically. It looks down on the church. It looks down on sermons. Like other forms of anger, it is a posture that is always elevated above others and always confident in its judgments.

"That is stupid. Why do we have to do it that way? Who decided that? That is so stupid." Cynicism is part of the anger dimension that slips undetected under the radar.

**Indifference.** The angriest person I ever met never raised his voice and never changed

his expression. He was the judge who relished his job but was unmoved by anyone who came into his courtroom. What happened when somebody wronged him, whether real or perceived? It was water off a duck's back. He was too much above the other person to care. But he did care enough to mete out judgment.

If anger is about power, then here is the master of his craft. The indifferent person has no investment in a relationship, and whoever is less invested usually has the most power.

## 7. Pray.

When faced with the noetic effects of anger, the cleverness of human counselors comes to an end. Reason has met its match. At that point, do the most sane thing a human being could possibly do—pray.

Those who oppose Him [the Lord's servant] He must gently instruct, in the hope that God would grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:25)

You, as someone who wants to help the angry person toward sanity, must pray. Pray for mercy for the angry person; pray for mercy for yourself as you see that madness lurks in your own heart, too. Then pray *with* the angry person. Of course, in the height of anger no angry person wants to pray, that is part of the insanity. But a gentle friend will find an opportunity to ask.

"I think about you a lot, and I want the best for you. The only way for that to happen is for us to pray. How we can pray together?"

"You can pray that my wife would change."

"Absolutely, I will pray for her, but let's also consider God's calling in your own life. Whenever we face difficulties we know God is near and doing His work in us. Let's look through James 1 and let it shape the way we pray together."

This is the beginning of a transition. You lead the angry person in the first few steps of looking at himself. Help him notice that God has an

agenda in his life.

### 8. Now find anger.

Armed with the knowledge of anger's deceitfulness and how it hides under various guises, and having forged a partnership in prayer, now sniff out the anger. Put the hunting dogs on anger until everything is out in the open. Some of these questions can help.

What have people said to you about your anger?

What is the most recent episode of anger?

What has been your worst, most destructive episode of anger?

What situations provoke your anger?

How often do you feel this anger?

Who are the targets of your anger?

What about anger in your family—parents and siblings?

What about friends and others who seem to egg you on in your anger?

What have been the consequences of your anger?

How have you tried to deal with your anger?

What hasn't worked?

Do you think you can change?

Do you have a plan for change?

During this part of counseling, your goal is for the madman to think straight, and the blind person to see. But there's a further complication.

Seeing anger is a critical step. As the scales come off, angry people begin to see fuzzy blobs in their visual field. But it is one thing to see anger; it is another to want to change.

Anger gets us in trouble and for that reason we would like to be rid of it. But anger does have perks. It is effective. People respond to it. I remember, with embarrassment, one time when I came home after a long working day of teaching and counseling with only enough time for dinner because I had to teach an evening class. I was tired, so I wanted my short break to be restful. I wanted to be the king-in-my-castle. I wanted peace, quiet, and a relaxing dinner. But then, my children came to the table and immediately started to complain. In an instant flare-up of anger I shouted, "I can't believe this. Here I work all these hours trying to earn money so you can have food on the table and this is the

thanks I get."

Not only was this outburst wrong, it was hopelessly trite, even stupid. I am sure that at some point in my life I had vowed never to talk about the "ten miles I had to walk to school" or "how I slave away in the mines for the good of the family" that I had heard as a child. But regardless, this seemed like the right time to mention how long and hard I work. My tirade even sounded wise in the midst of my delusion. But then a new, much more serious problem emerged. Everyone at the table was suddenly quiet and even a bit nervous. No one complained. No one said a word. I got what I wanted, sort of. We ate in smoldering silence until I finally asked their forgiveness.

Angry people get something from their anger, so don't expect it to leave meekly. Think in terms of drug and alcohol abusers. Those who use drugs and alcohol say, yes, they want to change because there are consequences of the drugs and alcohol that they don't like. But, on the other hand, they *don't want* to change, because drugs and alcohol give them what they want.

### 9. Ask: Do you want to change?

Anger gives people something they want intensely. Counseling must go after the cost of change. Try these questions:

Do you want to give up self-righteousness?

Do you want to give up power and control?

Do you want to be demoted from your position of power and authority? (Angry people live in a self-exalted world, judging other people.)

Do you actually want to trust God and give up being a vigilante party of one?

Are you willing to take radical action?

Do you want to change to the point that if you ever touch a person again in anger you are willing to cut your arm off?

The next time you curse, are you willing to cut out your own tongue?

Will you choose to hate your sin?

Who wants to give up these things? These are not easy questions.

If we tell the truth, there are things we like about our anger. The nature of sin is that we sin because we like it. That is not advertised broadly

in our churches, but it's true. When we are blind and insane, the thought of changing is tantamount to giving up something we dearly love. It is a call to spend the rest of our life putting our 'darling sin' to death.

We are worse than we think, worse than we could ever imagine, and worse than we could ever admit. Yet we don't want to give that anger up. How can the lights come on in such a way that we begin to see that we are truly desperate people? Strategies such as counting to ten before speaking are not enough to lead us in to change. Techniques on tongue control are ineffective. Angry people need to understand that they *love* anger, even though it is destructive to family and friends. Angry people need to cry out to God for mercy.

"Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy." When angry people can say that, they have taken the first step in the right direction.

#### 10. Listen to anger. What does it say?

All enduring, deep change travels through confession of sin and through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any other route perpetuates the insanity. As a counselor, throughout all your appeals to angry people, you must inch them toward Christ. At this point angry people may see the wrongness of their anger and confess it. This is a good step, to be sure. But anticipate that as the delusion continues to fade, angry people will see and confess more of their sin. For example, initial confession might acknowledge that anger was wrong, and it hurt other people, but it will not yet see that anger is ultimately against God. So continue shining the light of Scripture.

What does anger say about what we worship? Consider these possibilities.

**"I WANT.** I want power, control, and anything else I want. I want to be right, and punish you because you have wronged me." Anger is insatiable, a pit of cravings and wants (cf. James 4:1-12). Anger says, "I want to win. No matter what, I must win."

A stubborn father and his equally stubborn daughter came in for counseling. During our conversation, they began to argue about an insignificant matter. Eventually, they began to run out of sensible ways to defend their positions, but that didn't deter them from their common goal. The winner, according to their

rules, was the one who had the last word. So the daughter would talk, and the father would get up and walk away. Then the father would come back and have his say, and the daughter would get up and walk away. After awhile the conversation was reduced to grunts. Who was going to have the last grunt? Anger is horrible, but in its foolishness, it is sometimes utterly hilarious.

The less hilarious versions of anger are the people who want power, want control, and if they hurt you, that's fine. You think that your tears might stop them. But the one who wants power and control gets satisfaction in your tears. They think, "I won. I broke you before you broke me." Power, control. Winning at any cost. Self-exaltation. Greed. No one is going to be higher than me!

**"I am afraid."** A church elder approaches a woman in our church after our service and gently, lovingly, pastorally, asks how he can pray for her. She looks at him and in a burst of anger, spews curses on him and runs out the door.

Irrational and bizarre, no doubt. I'd never seen her that way. It didn't make sense. It begged for the question, "What is your anger saying?"

You follow her and ask, "What happened? You just tried to vaporize a person who was being kind to you. What gives?"

She tells you her story over the course of a few hours. She tells how she was converted by a street preacher who then decided that she needed "intensive discipling," which meant that she was basically owned by this man. She became his sex slave for six months. She was never out of his sight. She had no freedom, no life of her own.

What does her anger say? We can't excuse it. What she said to the elder was wrong, and she should ask for his forgiveness. The logic of her anger, however, was "spiritual authority is dangerous and destructive. I must run away as quickly as possible." She was afraid. Although you can find her wants and unbelief in her outburst, what she needs is to hear about the God who sees injustice.

**"I am guilty."** Another expression of anger says, "I am guilty. Stop looking at me. I don't want to be seen." The best defense is a good offense. Get them before they get you.

Her husband could not do anything right. No matter how he tried to serve his wife he would just receive her wrath. He bought her an extravagant ring, which he knew she had been eyeing. When he asked her if she would put it on one day, she accused him of buying the ring for his own pleasure. It was purely selfish. It came with strings attached, and she would have none of it. Before he could respond to her, she threw the ring out the window, never to be found again.

Later she “offered” him a divorce. She said, “I want you to be free so you can find someone better.” Apparently, his godly acts of service make her own wrongness more pronounced in her own mind.

**“I am angry, but it isn’t you.”** Sometimes anger is so out of place that it obviously has nothing to do with the person who allegedly provoked the anger. Although humility leads the alleged provoker to ask what he or she did, there are times when you should ask, “With

of the goodness of the land. The Israelites grumbled against Moses and wished for a leader who would take them back to Egypt. They even contemplated stoning the spies who gave the good report about the Promised Land. The Lord then asked Moses, “How long will the people treat Me with contempt?” (Num. 14:1-1). The people were not complaining about God; they were grumbling against Moses. But their relationship with Moses is revelatory of their relationship with God, just as our relationships with others reflect our relationship with God.

Jonathan Edwards says this,

Men in general will own that they are sinners. There are few, if any, whose consciences are so blinded as to not be sensible that they have been guilty of sin. So they will own that they don’t love God as much as they should; that they are not so thankful as they ought to be for mercies; and that in many things they fail. Yet few of them are sensible that they are God’s

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## Look at your worst relationship and you will see your relationship with Jesus.

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whom are you really angry? I certainly am not perfect, but we both know that your response to me was over the top. Are you angry with someone else? Am I reminding you of someone?”

This doesn’t excuse anger, but it at least can give the person who was thought to be the cause of anger an opportunity to become an ally in bringing sanity.

### **11. Show how anger is against God.**

Look at your worst relationship and you will see your relationship with Jesus. Am I having warm, fuzzy relationships with all kinds of folks, but there is one person out there I can’t stand and want to avoid at all costs? If you only hate one other person, you hate God.

Numbers 14 is the classic Scripture related to anger towards God that is attributed to a person. God told Moses to send twelve spies to explore the Promised Land. When the spies returned to the Israelite community, ten warned of dangers in the Promised Land, but two spoke

enemies. They do not see how they can be truly so called for they are not sensible [that is, sin blinds them and they are unaware] that they wish God any harm or endeavor to do Him any hurt.

In our blindness we don’t see that our anger is against God. We do not want God Himself above us. Instead we stand in judgment of God. We decide that we will operate in a parallel universe, and God should just leave us alone.

Anger is about allegiances: my kingdom or God’s; Satan’s kingdom or God’s. It is about which lord we will imitate.

Can you see how this is so? As an angry person grasps this, the delusion continues to fade. Confession and repentance bring sanity. Now the angry person can seek out new ‘colleagues’. In self-righteous anger, he aligned with the Pharisees, now he can join the tax collectors.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: "God I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get."

But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:10-13)

The Pharisee is insane. His self-righteousness is anger waiting to happen, and that anger explodes against Jesus for pointing out the problem. He is blind to his own anger and thinks only of himself. But the tax collector is the sane one; he sees things as they are. He knows he needs God's mercy.

## **12. Rejoice that sanity is fully restored when we know Jesus.**

The book of John tells the story of Jesus, in part, from the perspective of Jesus as the Creator and Re-creator. Through Jesus all things were made. He is the pattern for "let there be light." He performs mighty acts of healing. He has power of the subhuman creation. He has power to give life—to Adam, Lazarus, and all who call Him Lord. Jesus is the Creator Lord. Therefore, when He introduces Himself, He says,

He who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it. (Isa. 42:5)

Address the Lord that way and sanity will be restored.

There is a humility-sanity nexus built into humanity. As creatures, humility is our proper posture. As children who have rebelled but have received mercy and grace, anything other than humility is truly bizarre. Consider Nebuchadnezzar. "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" (Dan. 4:30). The connection with the heart of anger was unmistakable. Self-exaltation, parallel universes, our own kingdom of our own making,

Absurd. "The One enthroned in heaven laughs" (Ps. 2:4). Nebuchadnezzar wasn't so much cursed by God by living as a beast for seven years as he was experiencing the logical consequences of his sin. Act like something other than a human being, become something other than a human being. As we might predict, only when he acted human did he become human. "At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored" (Dan. 4:34).

Jesus Christ is the only one who shatters delusions. Look to Him and see. Madmen can be liberated from their self-generated madness. In Jesus you see the King and Creator who is to be worshipped. You see in Him that true humanness is self-giving, taking the lesser place, even washing feet.

God's question to Jonah comes to us once again. "Do you have a right to be angry?" At first we still think, "Yes, I have a right to be angry." Then we see Jesus who proclaims that He is...

The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished. (Ex. 34:6-7).

He comes again and asks, "Do you have a right to be angry?" And sanity creeps in.

Jesus, God Himself, took a place lower than us and humbled Himself by His death on the cross. Now He is exalted and at His name every knee should bow and tongue confess that He, indeed, is the Lord (Phil. 2:8-11). He asks again, "Do you have a right to be angry?" And with that, the angry person is undone, weak, and wonderfully sane.