

# Coming Free From the Darkness of Anger

by Stewart Ruch

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*The sermon addresses the nature of anger, its consequences, and the path to healing through reconciliation and Jesus' teachings.*

**Duration:** 33:26

**Scripture:** Exodus 20:13, Matthew 5:21-23, Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 4:26-27, James 1:19-20, James 1:26

**Topics:** "Anger"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker delves into the topic of sinful anger and its profound impact on our lives. He emphasizes that understanding the cruelty and depth of sinful anger is crucial for those who want to follow Jesus and live in the life of God. The speaker acknowledges his own struggles with sinful anger and how it affects his relationships with his wife and children. He highlights that anger is often the door through which other sins enter, and that receiving a deeper work from the Lord is necessary to address and overcome anger. The sermon also references the teaching of James on receiving the implanted word, which has the power to save our souls.

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## Transcript

Let us pray. Father in heaven, I ask now that you would send your Holy Spirit. Lord, I pray that you would send your Holy Spirit upon me that I may preach and teach your word rightly in accordance with the revelation given to us, Lord.

And I pray that for my brothers and sisters, you would send the Holy Spirit upon them, that they could receive the implanted word meekly, that all of us, Lord, might know the salvation and the power of Jesus. And we pray this, Jesus, in your name. Amen.

You may be seated. I had the incredible experience when I was a college student at a college just a few minutes east of here at Wheaton College to be part for four years of the theater company there. And in my freshman year, I auditioned for a couple of plays and I got into the spring play and I was just extraordinarily excited.

This is my first time to be a part of a play in this theater company. And the play was called The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs, a pretty obscure play. This was the spring of 1986 at the peak of the apartheid calamitous kind of crisis that was going on in South Africa.

And the play itself was about South Africa and about a white man, Albie Sachs, who was standing up against the injustice of apartheid. My role was that of Lieutenant Wagenar. And Lieutenant Wagenar was a white Afrikaner who was filled with anger and rage at people like Albie Sachs, who was seeking to overthrow the system of apartheid.

And as I read the play and then as I was directed, I began to work on my character, Wagenar, a character seething with anger at the potential of having his whole life, you know, overthrown. And I would take it so seriously. Every night, late at night, I'd leave campus.

I'd walk around downtown Wheaton in character as Lieutenant Wagenar, stalking the streets of Wheaton, yelling at Wheaton Bible Church or yelling at Adams Park at the fountain and kind of seeing myself just kind of being filled with rage and anger. I would just time again and time again and time again until it got to opening night when I was like a spring, just ready to just burst forth in what I thought would be a moment of theatrical brilliance. I was directed actually in this play, it's kind of a guerrilla theater concept that should be out there in the parking lot, kind of lurking among the cars.

And when people were coming in, they kind of jump out. There were people who were planted in the audience and I was willing to pull them out of the audience and I was to throw them into jail and I would do so and everyone would be shocked and amazed. One night I was especially just sort of riding the wave of fury and I pulled them out of the audience, I threw them into jail.

I stepped back and I spat on them, walked away, wiped my chin. That was the night the play was being judged by an outside theater adjudicator. We were competing in an Illinois sort of college competition.

The man's name was Al Goldfarb of distinct Hebrew extraction. That's important. And he gathered all of us after the play was over and he said, Albie Sachs, the character of Albie Sachs, brilliant, nuanced, full of different vantage points of character and different characters he pulled out and mentioned their remarkable performance.

I'm sitting and I'm thinking, he has saved the best for last. And he took a pause, he put his head in his hands and he said, um, Wagenar, the young man that played Lieutenant Wagenar, son, no one is that angry. I'm Jewish and I'm not that angry.

But I actually was not just on the stage that angry. I thought about Mr. Goldfarb's words. I don't think I agree that no one's that angry.

Not many show that kind of anger. I was pretty angry in those days. Angry enough to be in a friend's car on the passenger side as we were having a conflictual conversation and take my fist and slam it into the dashboard and crack it.

Angry enough to have one of my mentors and colleagues say to me, Stuart, you spend half the time saying things you shouldn't say and the other half apologizing. How about you? Do you know what it's like to be angry or to have somebody's anger come against you? Ever spent a good hour finally choosing to just let that offense that happened to you just get released through words that you're writing in an email, read it over once, self-satisfied, press send, feel relief and then successively dread? Ever found a swear word coming out of your mouth that you didn't expect would be there? Perhaps you're disciplining a child and all of a sudden the voice pitch you started at has been accelerated. Someone does something unsafe in traffic and you can't stop laying on the horn.

A lot of us are angry and a lot of us have been really hurt by anger. I've come a long way from those years. I'm still, I'm still struggling with sinful anger.

I'm still not out of those sin woods. I'm much better. I still get angry at Catherine, my wife.

I still get angry at my children. I still cycle angry thoughts that become vindictive thoughts. Jesus is giving a teaching which is sort of his message from the mountain.

He's begun to gather men and women who say, I want to follow Jesus. I want to know who Jesus is. And there were many who were saying, I think I want to give my life to this movement that he calls the kingdom of God.

This movement of God's reign and God's life on the earth. And he just goes to a mountain and he teaches on a mountain. And what he's doing in this section that we're looking at in Matthew five is he's actually reviewing a teaching that also came from a mountain.

It came from a teacher named Moses, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years prior to the moment that Jesus is teaching in. And it was a message. It was also from a mountain.

And Jesus is saying that message you've heard it said, or you've heard it said of old. And then he says what was taught then. And he's saying that still stands, but let me take you inside of that teaching that you've heard of old.

Let me take you not in terms of the behavior that that teaching spoke to. You shall not murder, but let me take you inside the reality of murder. Let me introduce you to the heart of what happens when somebody is murderous or experiences something murderous.

And in the very beginning of this teaching, when his followers are very attentive and listening, he goes right to the question and the reality of sinful anger. If you want to follow Jesus, if you want to live in the life of God on this earth, then understanding the profundity and the cruelty of sinful anger is essential. I want to look at sinful anger with you versus twenty one to twenty two there in your in your bulletin.

And then the sinful anger can be cured. What is sinful anger and how can we be relieved? How can we be healed? It's nothing less than a healing. Of our sinful anger, you have heard it said to those of old, you shall not murder.

But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother or his sister could be translated will be liable to judgment. Jesus is going to describe sinful anger. Before I talk about that, it's important to be clear in the teachings of the Bible that not all anger is sinful.

When is anger not sinful? Well, it's not sinful when Jesus is angry, really. That's when it's not simple when he's when he's angry. We know it's not simple because the Bible teaches the astounding truth that Jesus is without sin.

There are other places, though, where humanity can also enter into a righteous anger. The injustices that make God angry can also make a person angry and rightfully so. It's not wrong to be angry at injustice.

That's kind of beyond the scope of my teaching this morning. But there are places where there's righteous anger. But it's really important to note.

That nearly every time the anger is taught upon, remarked upon, listed, commented, it has to do with the reality of sinful anger, most often human anger, most often is sinful anger. As a matter of fact, Jesus connects it to the reality of murder because to enter into anger. There's a book called Proverbs in the Old Testament, and one of the Proverbs, Proverbs 27, says that anger is a cruelty.

That's how I can understand anger. Anger is a cruelty that we understand is sinful. Anger is that there was a kind of emotional cruelty that deadens our own hearts or deadens the hearts of those who have received our anger.

There's a deadening reality to anger and it's cruel. If you have known your own anger and you can be real about it in this moment as I'm teaching, you know there's been cruelty there or you've experienced anger. I remember once a mentor, not from this area, this community being so angry with me and I felt literally after his anger at me that I, it's like I had no breath.

It's like I, I didn't, I was just bewildered. I didn't know what to say. It's like something died in me in that interchange that was shocking and, and honestly traumatizing.

It took me years to get over that moment. Jesus teaches to understand the scope of murder and the reality of murder is to internally understand sinful anger, sinful anger against a brother or a sister. As a matter of fact, Paul, who will write and minister after Jesus, will list in four different lists.

He had a different list of sins or vices that plague us in our lives. Every single of those four lists includes anger. Jerome is an early Christian thinker in the early centuries of the church.

Jerome said this, like this is really a helpful insight to how our souls work. He said, anger is the door by which other sins enter. Anger is the door by which other sins enter.

What could he mean by that? I think in part, part of what he means is when we get angry, when we've been offended or we, we perceive that we've been offended or we're, we're angry at someone else. We have a kind of justified posture then. And we sort of set ourselves in there and we say, now that wasn't right.

Now that was wrong. Now I will never treat it that way again. And we have a kind of justified posture.

And all of a sudden other sins can be justified as well. I had so many things taken from me as a child that for me to take a little bit from the federal government, it's justified. So thieving is justified.

I was so mistreated by this gender or that gender that my lusts or my angry thoughts or my fantasies, well, that they're justified. I was hurt. And that door to, to lying and to falsehood, to lusts, it just gets wide open, broken wide open.

But the hard thing about sinful anger is that for a vast majority of us, we are in denial about how angry we can sometimes be. It's embarrassing to get angry. I'm ashamed after I get angry and it's not all bad shame.

Some of it's good shame. There are hidden anger spots that exist throughout our community right here. Anger that you've displayed toward a coworker.

Anger that's in your marriage that no one has any idea about. Anger towards your children. Anger among siblings.

Anger among those who are working in ministry together here. It's everywhere and there are hot spots, but we all want to put that down. We all want to say, no, no, no, no, no, no.

I am not angry. Anything but angry. There was a story in the Tribune several years ago of a research doctor, psychiatrist at the University of Chicago who was working to develop a drug for a condition called intermittent explosive disorder.

It was, it's an anger disorder and they actually developed a drug. They worked with Abbott laboratories in the area to get that drug put together. And to his absolute shock, when it came to the experimental phase where he would put out feelers to say, who would like to experiment with this drug to be relieved of your anger? Hardly anyone, if no one volunteered.

And when he would ask, they would say, I don't have an issue with anger. He looked at a whole sample of the nation that had no issue with anger whatsoever. And he was somehow convinced that somehow he just hadn't gotten the wrong sample.

In the middle of this whole kind of pondering, he was driving with a friend and he looked up at the sun visor that would usually be on the passenger side. He said, oh, where's your sun visor? And the friend, totally nonplussed, said, oh, my wife tore it off. Being a psychiatrist, he couldn't help but ask why.

To which the friend said she was angry. Kind of like she went in to get a carton of milk at the Jewel. Like, what's the big deal? Like, it doesn't really matter.

Like denial of anger. We work so hard to cover up our anger. I have.

I'm so thankful that there's extremely good news about sinful anger. And that's extremely good news is that while there may be medications, there may be other things that can help. There's something very, very deep and very, very profound in Jesus Christ that can heal you and heal me of sinful anger.

As a matter of fact, he exposes the disease in verses twenty one and twenty two. But then look at that beautiful first word in verse twenty three. It's the word.

So it's the word that says, I am empowered by the father and I have come to earth to die on the cross. So you will not have to live with your sinful anger. As a matter of fact, I have come to bring you life and life abundance and anger deadens life and anger puts life away.

But I have come that you may know joy and you may know power and you may know freedom. So, so. And there are two at least two ways that we can get this cure from simple anger.

The first is in our text here, which is the way of reconciliation. The second is in the James text that was read as well this morning, and you have that in your bulletin. It was James teaches that another way to be free from sinful anger is receiving the power of God.

Reconcile and receive. So if you are offering verse twenty three, Matthew five, your gift at the altar. OK, so the context is of worship and worship in the Israelites way as worship today had an altar there and it symbolized the presence of God.

And you would come and bring an offering. It might be two pigeons or two doves would be an offering to say to God, I want to give something up that I have for the sake of coming close to you. Sacrifice has connotations in the language to draw near, to draw close.

So I want to draw close to you and close to your altar and bring my gift to the altar. So it's a context of worship at the context of closeness and communion with God. And in that context, Jesus says, if you come in that context and you remember.

And you remember that your brother or your sister has something against you, so you come to worship, you come with the people of God, you're there, you are close to God and God says to draw close to me as you are close to your brothers and sisters, you cannot be spiritually close to me and not reconciled emotionally, spiritually close to your brothers and sisters. So God says it is critical. Not only as he teaches in Matthew 18, which is if you if somebody has offended you, you go to them as Matthew 18 and directly have a conversation and say, I was offended by what you did.

I was hurt by what you said that that email came off this way. Did you mean it that way? Not only do you go to somebody. If that's happened, but you actually go to somebody, if you think you've offended them, not even if they've offended you, this is actually another step even beyond that direct confrontation.

That's hard enough. Matthew 18. How many Christians actually do Matthew 18? How many Christians actually are offended by somebody and they go to them? Extremely rare.

I hardly ever hear about it. When I hear about it, I rejoice as a pastor. This is even another step.

Now we're fully into the full blown sort of radical life of Jesus. If you think that you've offended somebody, there's something between you and it's your responsibility to go to them. What my responsibility is that codependent? No, that's Christian.

It's Christian. It's deeply, deeply Christian. Why? Why do we hardly ever go to somebody who we think we may have offended? Well, number one, I don't think we think that Christian unity and Christian solidarity matters that much.

I don't think we think it matters that much. I think we can pretty much live our lives as Christians and be fractured with other Christians and it'll be OK. God won't be grieved.

It won't affect our relationship with Jesus. Two, I'm not sure that we think other Christians are worth it. Honestly, I've been there.

I'm not sure we think that that person filled with the Holy Spirit, saved by Jesus Christ, ennobled by a calling of the father, that that person really matters that much so that it matters deeply. And I actually have a kind of interconnectivity to the degree that if I think I've offended them, I want to get it right to the degree that I will do anything. I will do absolutely anything for the worship of the living God when I'm in the worst of the living God to make sure that I'm right with everyone else, that there's a there's a profound interconnectedness between worship and reconciliation between brother and sister.

And you can't have one without the other. And we deceive ourselves and we fool ourselves that we haven't angered somebody else or that I'm angry with somebody else that can come to church and it can all be great. And you have to start wondering, is that one reason why we haven't seen a fuller break out of the ministry of the Holy Spirit throughout our country? That we're an incredibly angry country and Christians aren't even dealing with each other with their anger.

And it agrees, God. Jesus says, go, go right then and there, leave your gift at the altar, because the fact of the matter is things aren't right at the altar already. It's symptomatic of what's already going on.

Things aren't right at the altar because they're not right with you and a brother or a sister, or they may not be right with you and a brother and sister. Go and find out. Go and find out and then come back, come back and offer your gift, because now we're connected.

You may need to go this morning before you receive Holy Communion. You may have somebody here at Rez. You don't know why or you don't know what it is, but you think you might have offended them.

You're not sure. You may need to go and ask them, or it may be that when the service is over, you need to go to them after the service is over. We have to be legalistic and rigid, but we have to be obedient to God's word.

I had to do this a couple of years ago. It was really hard, and I wrestled with this very verse, because there's some people that I thought I might have offended. I've been a ministry for 20 years.

That means I work with people. That means people hurt me and I hurt people. It's really hard.

And I thought there's some people I think I've offended, and I had an idea who they might be, and I've been in a couple of meetings with them, and it was funky, and it was awkward. I didn't know for sure, so I made a list. I made a list of all the people I thought that I'd offended.

I just started calling and saying, can we have lunch? Can we have coffee? Have I offended you? I sat down with one leader in the area across the table, and I said, did I offend you? He said, you did. He said, but here's what happened. I have thought you arrogant and aloof, and I said, well, sometimes I can be usually when I'm exhausted.

I'm guilty of that. He said, but when you called me, the anger that I carried for years, I couldn't carry it any longer. I couldn't hold it any longer.

I think he was a little frustrated, and I understand the feeling. I lost my justification. Forgive me, I said.

Forgive me, he said. It's more important to be reconciled than justified in our own minds. It's also important, though, and it may be, and I want you to hear this, that to be able to do that work, you need to receive from the Lord a deeper work.

I'm not letting you off the hook, and I'm letting myself off the hook, but pastorally, it could be that there's a soul ministry that has to happen in regard to anger before you can go to somebody else, and I want you to hear this. As a matter of fact, that's what I think James is teaching about, this receiving of the implanted word. What does that mean? What does it mean when James says this? He teaches in light of a teaching on the reality of anger.

James says, receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls. What's the implanted word? That is the word of the cross. That is the word that Jesus has come to save us from our sinful anger and so much more.

We receive it meekly. What is meekness? Meekness is a kind of courageous conviction that no one or no thing can save you or help you or deliver you, but God himself. Blessed are the meek, because they have stopped trying to inherit the world, and God gives them the world.

Blessed are those who live in a kind of utter dependency, radical conviction of courage that only God can rescue me, that only God can save me, and so a posture of meekness is coming before the living God and

saying, only you, Lord, only you can rescue me from this. Only you can save me from my anger, please, Lord. And it's coming into a place of receiving.

Let me explain that to you. This is what it looks like. There's literally a way to do this, and it's very important as a Christian that you learn how to do this.

It's not just praying, but it's actually transacting with Jesus on the cross, the ministry of salvation. It's getting quiet. It's coming to a sacred place, if you can, or getting on a walk, but being in a place where it's quiet, you may have somebody else with you, maybe two or three other people with you.

Maybe you're by yourself and you then bring yourself before the cross of Jesus, perhaps literally with a cross or a crucifix in your hand, perhaps in the sanctuary or in our All Saints Chapel right over there, perhaps in your imagination. You just see the Lord there before you on the cross, but you bring yourself there. You bring your person there.

Your hands are wide open and then you say, Lord, I'm angry. I'm so angry. I've been so hurt by this person's anger and you literally bring it up and out and you can begin to take that polluted bacterial sort of poison that is anger, that is sinful anger, and you literally give it up to the Lord.

You may physically do this before the Lord. Take my anger on the cross. Take my angry words.

Take my consistent cursing. Take the way that I throw things against the wall. Take the way that I don't understand, but all of a sudden I just flash.

Take it, Lord. Help me. I'm so grieved.

I'm so depressed. I'm so angry. Lord, you've got to break open this bottle next time I can finally get free.

You do that with the Lord. And once you learn how to do that, you receive the implanted word meekly all the time. I was angry on Friday about something.

I was angry. I had to get with the Lord. I was so glad I learned this.

I got with the Lord and I just said, I'm angry about this and I'm angry about that. There were two things I was angry about. I just I just you've got to take this.

You've got to take this from me. And he did. That's that's the power of the cross.

You can transact and engage Jesus in the cross. And he forgave my anger. He helped me forgive somebody who had offended me.

I was better. I was freer. Some of you are ready for a healing today.

You're ready to be healed of sinful anger in your own heart today. Others of you are ready to take a step. Some of you may need to move into a Christian counseling relationship because there's so many layers.

We'll help you. We'll connect you. Others of you just feel nothing.

It's OK. It's OK. It may be that you're not ready to feel anything, but some of you are very, very ready for a healing of your sinful anger.

And those around you are ready for you to receive it and to get real about it. So I want to give us a time of quiet and Justin and Bonnie, if you'd come up and lead us in some time, I want to just have some music, some worship played unto the Lord. And it was kind of a canopy here of healing and a canopy of reality, a canopy of confession.

We will go into the confession. But before that, I would like you to have time to be with the Lord. So just be in your space and just kind of close your eyes.

Or maybe you need to look at the cross, open your eyes and focus on the Holy Cross and the altar. It may be that you are realizing I have some reconciliation work to do. And I want to ask you to determine to do that and to love your brother or sister enough to do it.

For others of you, it is like a lid is finally coming off and you have not had hope that your anger could be cured. You didn't even know what it was. You didn't know how to understand it.

You had no hope that this could be cured. You thought, this is what I live with for my life. And what I pray now for any over there has been like a bottleneck.

And below that bottleneck is this large jar of just pain and grief and profound life disappointments. There are mentors, parents, teachers, coaches that have deeply disappointed you. And that has created an incredible anger.

There are betrayals. There are abandonments that are all kind of jarred up there. And they come out to a bottleneck of just straight anger, fury, cursing, throwing.

And what I see the Lord doing with a beautiful precision is he takes that bottleneck that's been anger and he just breaks the glass of that bottleneck. And he opens up that jar. He takes all of those different things right into his body on the cross.

He calls you into being crucified with him, as Paul said in Galatians 2. That you may no longer live, but that Christ might live in you. And I pray now, Lord, for the releasing of whatever a brother or sister has to give unto you and your cross and the receiving, Lord, as they release the receiving of the word of healing, the word of restoration, the word of peace, where there has only been an anger. Come, O Holy Spirit, come.

Lord, for our men who have been fueled by anger, ashamed by their anger, trying to hide their anger, Lord, I just pray that the brothers here would just have a freedom to weep. I just pray they'd have a freedom to release. I pray they'd have a freedom, O Lord, to say, Yes, Lord, I want to be me.

Pray for our sisters, that which you have created in me. For the service we have a specialty you're about to make. That, Lord, apart from our feelings and our particular thoughts, Lord, we can now confess to you all our sin, including, O Lord, our sinful anger, and be assured, based on the teaching of the Bible, that you will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, including our unrighteousness.

Brothers and sisters, come now before the Lord to confess your sins. You may remain seated, you may stand, you may kneel, whatever posture you want to get before the Lord, as we confess our sins as one people in need of the saving power of Jesus Christ.

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