

Challenging Lifestyles Session 4

Matthew 5:21-26 – How to Handle Anger

Resource: 'Challenging Lifestyles' by Nicky Gumbel, Chapter 4

Timing: 40-50 minutes, leading into ministry

Buzz groups: Suggestions are boxed, pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

Illustrations: Suggestions are noted, but your own ideas and stories are preferable

Focus: Move relatively quickly through each point so as not to get bogged down

Icebreaker: What was the last thing that made you angry and how did you respond?

Introduction

Recap last time on *How to Understand the Old Testament*, and introduce *How to Handle Anger*

Key Point: Jesus tells us and shows us how to handle anger.

Key Verse: 'You have heard that it was said... but I tell you...' (v.21-22)

A *Sunday Times* UK survey found 80% have had road rage; 64% have had office rage; 50% have reacted to computer problems by hitting it, hurling it, screaming at it or abusing work colleagues!

Rick Warren sees four different anger-types at work: Maniac (exploders); Mutes (silent simmer); Martyrs (miserable); Manipulators (get even).

Anger is a natural emotion causing physical changes: increased energy, adrenaline and testosterone, decreased appetite, and sharpened mental focus and vision.

Is it always wrong, can it be constructive? Doesn't God get angry? What does Jesus say?

1. Consider the cause (v.22 "without cause", footnote in NIV but in the text in many translations)

The Point: The test of right or wrong anger is whether it's caused by love of self or love for others.

The Bible says God is love (1 John 4:8-20), and that this is the only righteous cause of anger.

Illustrate: Tell some personal stories about anger in one or two of the following categories:

Righteous v. Unrighteous – is the issue one of justice or one of opinion and arrogance?

Rational v. Irrational – does it come out of a considered view or out of stress and fear?

Constructive v. Destructive – violent "peace protests" are self-defeating

Love of others v. Love of self – Jesus was able to forgive others not retaliate

Application: Next time you feel angry, consider the cause of it. But to do that we must learn to...

2. Press the "Pause" (v.22a)

The Point: We are to be *slow* to anger

God is '... *slow to anger*...' (Psalm 145:8) whereas 'A *fool is quick tempered*' (Proverbs 14:17)
See also Proverbs 14:7, 29; 16:32; 19:11; and Ecclesiastes 7:9

Illustrate: Tell about a time you *reacted* angrily and wish you had taken time to cool down first.

Application: Share how you do this, e.g. "Count to Ten" is cheesy, but surprisingly effective!

Pairs: Turn to your neighbour and share how you might be able in the real-world environment of your work, home or family life to “consider the cause” and “press the pause”.

3. Watch the words (v.22b)

The Point: Words are very powerful and can be damaging

Loving confrontation is good communication and leads to healthy relationships
Positive, gentle and uplifting words can break situations of anger (Proverbs 15:1)

Illustrate: Quote a celebrity gaff, or share a personal example from your own relationships.

Application: After “Counting to Ten”, “Count to Ten” again to consider what you’re going to say.

4. Master the mind (v.21-22a)

The Point: Fostering a habit of inner hatred can and sometimes does lead to physical violence.

Jesus says true interpretations of Old Testament Law don’t limit them to acts but look to the heart.
There’s an inner battle inside us over feelings of anger – a battle that love must win.

Illustrate: Again, tell a personal story about that inner struggle when you felt angry in a situation.

Application: Talking through frustrations with friends helps enormously. For specific problems of rage or physical violence, talk to the group pastor, as others at HTB can help you overcome it.

Pairs: Turn to your neighbour and share how you might be able in the real-world environment of your work, home or family life to “watch the words” and “master the mind”.

5. Count the cost (v.22b & 25 *‘will be in danger of the fire of hell... may be thrown into prison.’*)

The Point: Anger-fuelled actions often lead to dire consequences (e.g. jobs, relationships, fines)

Illustrate: Read out some newspaper reports about the dire consequences of angry actions.

Application: Stop the rot of anger by taking action (Ephesians 4:26)

6. Pursue the peace (v.24 & 25)

The Point: so far as it depends on us, we should always pursue peace (Romans 12:18).

Theologian Stanley Hauerwas says Christians are people “committed to peace in a world at war”.
v.25 On divided relationships in society, Jesus’ practical advice is to settle matters out of court.
v.24 On division in the church, Jesus says be reconciled, sort out disagreements.

Conclusion

Peacemaking is hard but transforms communities. But first we need to be transformed by Christ.
Illustrate: Tell an inspiring account of a Christian offering forgiveness in remarkable circumstances.

Ideas for Ministry

- Ask the Holy Spirit to bring to mind those who hurt or anger us. Pray the group can release the right to be angry, receive Jesus’ forgiveness and offer forgiveness to others.

- Pray in pairs for situations of anger at work or at home, for the strength to be peacemakers.