

ClearNote Men's Fall Retreat 2017
Pastor Matthew Black

Meet at the Cross Keys Inn
Friday and Saturday November 17-18
Start: Friday 5:30, Dinner 6:30
End: Saturday 3:30

Bradford Woods

Schedule:

FRIDAY

5:30 pm | Check-in

6:30 pm | Dinner

7:25 I'll make an announcement that the meeting is starting in a few minutes and ask people to move chairs.

7:30 pm | Session #1

Meeting agenda. 1) Sing two songs led by Jody Killingsworth

2) Forest goes up and welcomes everybody to the retreat.

3) Ice-breaker

4) Forest calls up Stephen Baker to introduce Pastor Matt Black. Stephen, but feel free to share what you think would be helpful.

5) Matt Black's first talk (approximately 45 minutes)

6) Sing one song led by Jody Killingsworth

7) Forest thanks Pastor Black for an excellent talk and announces the activities for the rest of the evening and our start times for Saturday. Four main things 1) Bonfire in 15-30 minutes. 2)

Dodgeball in 10-15 minutes at the sports pavilion. 3) Snacks and hanging out in the Cross Keys Inn immediately after the meeting. 4) Breakfast at 8:30 on Saturday. First session at 9:30.

8:30 pm | Bonfire and Dodgeball

SATURDAY

8:30 am | Breakfast

9:25. I'll announce that the session is starting in five minutes.

9:30 am | Session #2

Meeting agenda

1) Sing two songs led by Jody Killingsworth

2) Forest goes up and welcomes everybody to the second session.

3) Ice-breaker

4) Matt Black's second talk (approximately 45 minutes)

5) Sing one song led by Jody Killingsworth

6) Forest thanks Pastor Black for another excellent talk and announces activities between the first session and lunch. 1) Hike in 10-15 minutes (need a volunteer to lead it, maybe Josh Congrove) 2) Snacks and hanging out in the Cross Keys Inn. 3) Dodgeball or basketball depending on interest.

10:30 am | Dodgeball and Hiking

12:00 pm | Lunch

12:55 I'll announce that the session is starting in five minutes.

1:00 pm | Session #3

Meeting agenda

- 1) Sing two songs led by Jody Killingsworth
- 2) Forest goes up and welcomes everybody to the third session. No ice-breaker. The ice has sufficiently been broken by now.
- 3) **Matt Black's third talk (approximately 45 minutes)**
- 4) Sing one song led by Jody Killingsworth
- 5) Forest thanks Pastor Black for loving us and bringing the Word this weekend. Forest also takes the time to thank all of the people who helped in the kitchen (please single out Jeremy Chasteen), and he also thanks Alex Costa for the amazing work he did in putting together another practically flawless men's retreat.
- 6) Final announcement. Retreat officially ends at 3:30. We're welcome to stay and hang out.

2:00 pm | Activities



MATT BLACK, Fri, Nov 17, 2017
Clearnote Men's Retreat

SESSION **I** | 1 JOHN & SELECTED SCRIPTURES

THE FOUNDATION OF TRANSFORMATION

(& A CASE STUDY IN FREEDOM FROM CRIPPLING FEAR)

Clearnote Men's Retreat 2017
Prepared by: Matthew S. Black
Friday, November 17, 2017, 7:30PM
livinghopechurch.net/clearnote17

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.

1 JOHN 3:9 (ESV)

Introduction

1. We so appreciate your church's ministry.
2. Thanks to Alex Costa, Stephen Baker, and for Lucas Meeks organizing this retreat.
3. It was so good to have Jody Killingsworth, Philip Moyer, and Andrew Henry with us at our church in Northwest Chicago at Living Hope.
4. We love your pastoral training model and would love to emulate it
5. The chairman of our deacon team and his wife (Nathan & Erin Polderman) were wonderfully disciplined here.

6. Of course we love your shepherd, Pastor Tim Bayly, and we so appreciate his clarity and how he daily shines the powerful light of the Gospel into a culture of present evil and darkness.
7. I can also say that your church is having a constant impact on our church in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. I would say though your church has a powerful testimony of clarity, it has an even greater testimony of love. Love flows from your church. Your elect sister church in Chicago says thank you!

THEME OF THE RETREAT

The theme of our Men's Retreat is *Transformation*. I want to change. I know you want to change into the image of Jesus Christ. Change is not possible without the new birth. The puritan John Owen says in his book on *The Holy Spirit* says, "Though it was a great privilege to have known Christ when he lived on earth, yet it was going to be a much greater one to know him revealed to our hearts by the Holy Spirit." He says, If the Holy Spirit does not work in us, then God's Word and the Gospel become useless to us.¹

I want to speak from personal experience and from twenty years of pastoral work and missionary church planting and evangelism that we serve a living God who is transforming rebel sinners into the image of his Son Jesus Christ. Do you believe that?

My goal in the teaching of this retreat is that we will all be convinced that there is no area of our lives that God cannot change. I want to give you personal testimony of that, and more importantly, I want to show you from the Scriptures that this is true.

You may have come to this men's retreat and

1. WHAT IS REGENERATION?

Men if we are going to change, we need the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit to make us new. This evening we are talking about regeneration of the heart. RE means new and GENESIS means beginning. Regeneration, re-genesis is a new beginning. We must be born again, having the very life of God in us if we are to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Jn 3:3ff). Regeneration is the inner cleansing and transformation of the human nature by the Holy Spirit.² Without this transformation of our inner nature, we have no hope of change.

DEFINITION OF REGENERATION

What does it mean to be "born of God" or "born again"? Theologians call it "regeneration." Regeneration is a miraculous act of God in your heart where He imparts new spiritual life to us. John talks about those to whom Christ gave power to be-come children of God—they "were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (Jn 1:13).

There is a time and place in our lives when God wakes us up! He gives us a spiritual new birth, a new beginning, a new nature.

God's Spirit takes up residency in the human heart giving the person a new nature, a new way of thinking, a new perspective – indeed a whole new worldview.

¹ John Owen. *The Holy Spirit* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1998), 1.

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Regeneration," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1830.

John Piper says regeneration is “the spiritual transformation in a person, brought about by the Holy Spirit, that brings the individual from being spiritually dead to become a spiritually alive human being.”

METAPHORS OF REGENERATION

One important thing to note is that regeneration is solely the work of God. The words and pictures used in Scripture prove this. God says regeneration is compared to:

- **An act of creation:** He “creates us anew” (Eph. 4:24); we are the beginning of the “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17; cf 1 Pet 2:9, 2 Cor 4:6). Christians are God’s workmanship, literally his masterpiece, created anew in Christ (Eph 2:10).
- **Resurrection:** We are raised from spiritual death to life in Christ (Eph. 2:1-6; Eze. 37, i.e. “dry bones”). God brings dead sinners to life.
- **New Birth:** In the new birth (Jn. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:23) God makes a new person by conceiving faith in the sinner by the Word of God. James says of God’s own will he “fathered” us (James 1:18).
- **A New Heart:** God transforms the heart of stone into a tender heart of flesh.(Eze 36:26-27; Deut 30:6)
- **A Divine Harvest:** Some plant, some water, but God gives the supernatural growth and increase (1 Cor. 3:6).

Did you notice all the metaphors for regeneration? A new creation, resurrection, a new birth, a new heart, a divine harvest. What do these things have in common? Man is **passive**.

- Man is in **spiritual darkness** and **chaos**, but God hovers over the fallen creation and makes a new creation.
- Man is **dead** in his sins, but God commands him to live.
- Man is like a **helpless** infant in a womb, and God gives the miracle of life and birth.
- Man has the nature of a **rebel** sinner, and God gives a new nature of righteousness and holiness.
- Man is like a **dead** seed, but God gives the supernatural increase of divine life.

Again, what do these things have in common? Man is **passive**.

- I cannot **create** myself.
- I cannot **resurrect** myself if I’m dead.
- I cannot **give birth** to myself.
- I cannot **change** my nature.
- I cannot **produce the life of God** in myself; God must give a supernatural increase.

I need the omnipotent God to make me alive. This occurs through the Word of God. **God’s Word** is so powerful – it’s like a **spiritual defibrillator** – it shocks the spiritual heart back to life. “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).

A LETTER ABOUT REGENERATION

One of the most important books in the Bible defending the need for every Christian to display a life transformed by God’s touch is the book of First John. We can’t be completely sure,

but it is likely that First John was written to the church at Ephesus where St. John was the pastor. If this is true then we can say there was a **serious spiritual crisis** in the church at Ephesus.

Wolf like leaders had entered into the church at Ephesus. They called themselves the "Gnostics." These were antinomian mystics who had entered the church. The word antinomian comes from Jesus where he says in Matthew 7:23, "Depart from me you lawless people, I never knew you." Lawless is the Greek word *anomian*. *A* means "no" and *nomian* means "law." We might say "No Lord." These were people that affirmed the Lordship of Christ with their mouths, but denied his Lordship with their lives. So the main error of the Gnostics held to a compartmentalized dualism. They believed that since the flesh was unredeemable, you could do whatever you wanted in your body as long as you loved God in your spirit.

There are of course many antinomians today. But John's message is essentially, the new birth is powerful. You cannot remain lawless with the Spirit of God dwelling in you.

2. EVIDENCES OF THE NEW BIRTH (FROM 1 JN)

John writes the letter of 1 John to affirm that the new birth has power to change. He proceeds to give us at least 14 evidences of the new birth. We can't go over them tonight in detail, but I teach these to my children, including my four year old daughter almost every morning before I leave for work.

So 1 John is a letter written by the Apostle John to churches who were confused about what makes a person a Christian, or "born again." John's encouragement in the book is that people can know for certain that they truly are "born of God."

ARE YOU BORN AGAIN?

Most of you know the sweetness of being born again. The main fruit of the new birth is fellowship. John is the apostle of fellowship. We see him leaning on Jesus' breast. He records Jesus' words about being connected to the true Vine.

You may be here and realize, I can't change because I am not born again. How sweet the Lord is to bring each of us to a place where we can be born again. How can I be born again?

You need to come to God through repentant faith. The Father planned your salvation. Believe that Christ has paid for your sin on the cross. He gives his life for you and dies in your place for your hell and punishment. Let the Spirit of God enable you to believe even right now. Believe that Christ is your substitute. Surrender to him as Lord of your life, and you will be saved.

Once you are born again, you are given "every spiritual gift" in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:3). The evidences that John gives throughout his first epistle are gifts from God!

ARE THESE 14 EVIDENCES OF THE NEW BIRTH IN YOUR LIFE?

1 – I FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD | Every Christian has within the spiritual compulsion and hunger for God's holy presence. it's like food! To look into the face of Jesus through prayer and the Word is a thrill!

1 John 1:3-4, "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete."

2 – I CAN NO LONGER LIVE COMFORTABLY IN SIN | If spiritual intimacy is like a food for the Christian, then sin is like a cancer. All you want to do as a child of God is get rid of it—keep it as far away as possible.

1 John 1:6, “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”

1 John 3:9, “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.”

1 John 5:18, “We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.”

3 – I OBEY GOD FROM MY HEART | Our feelings and our circumstances change. As true Christians, we choose to glorify God no matter what we feel like.

1 John 2:3, “And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.” 1 John 2:29, “If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.”

4 – I HUNGER FOR GOD'S WORD | True Christians hunger for God and his Word like a newborn baby craves milk (1 Pet 1:2-3). Before a person is saved, there may be a passing hunger, but once a person is born again, the hunger is unquenchable.

1 John 2:14, “you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”

5 – I LIVE SEPARATE FROM THE WORLD | If you are a believer, you have rendered yourself dead to this world of sin. Specifically, you do not live for, and thereby worship the world's pleasures, possessions, and pride. The world offers a false happiness. We know that true happiness is found in our holy fellowship with Christ.

1 John 2:15-17, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

1 John 5:4, “For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.”

D. L. Moody put it best: “The man that is popular with the world is not a friend of Jesus. You cannot serve two masters. The world hates Christ, and if you are a friend of the world you cannot be a friend of His. You may be sure that something is wrong with you when everybody is your friend.”³

6 – I CONFESS CHRIST TO THE WORLD | True Christians openly confess that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. A true believer not only believes that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Ancient of Days come in human flesh to redeem guilty sinners, but each believer has the deep desire to confess the Person of Jesus Christ boldly.

³ D. L. Moody. *The Greatest Sermons Ever Preached* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 180.

1 John 2:23, "No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also."

Jesus essentially said the same thing, "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 10:32-33).

7 – I LONG FOR JESUS TO COME AGAIN | The genuine child of God knows that one day, we shall be like Jesus! Our unsaved neighbors are looking for the next great thing in fashion or among the celebrities or the movies or games or technology or the next great job opportunity. As Christians, we want to use all that God gives us for the glory of God (including our technology, how we dress, our job, our family), but our great focus is the return of Christ. The focus is so consuming that it will actually purify the one who hopes in His return. We are very soon going to see Jesus, our great God and Savior, face to face.

1 John 3:1-3, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are... Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."

8 – I SUFFER REJECTION BECAUSE OF MY FAITH | Every true Christian should expect that his new pattern of life will be rejected in some way by the world. The apostle John says we should not be surprised.

1 John 3:13, "Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you." Jesus said, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you" (cf Jn 15:18).

9 – I LOVE FELLOW CHRISTIANS | Christ Himself had said earlier to the apostle John and the other eleven disciples, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). There are over 35 commands in the New Testament for Christians to live life together and serve "one another."

1 John 4:7, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God."

1 John 5:1, "Everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him." 1 John 1:6, "if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin."

10 – GOD ANSWERS MY PRAYERS | One who is genuinely born again has such a union and closeness with the Lord that he is constantly breathing out prayers to God and seeing those prayers answered on a continual basis. It is God's indwelling Spirit, the Comforter, who compels the Christian to pray instead of fret in times of great trial.

We should remind ourselves often of Philippians 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

1 John 3:21-22, "We have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him."

11 – I DISCERN TRUTH BY THE BIBLE | True believers have the God-given discernment capability to tell when someone is teaching falsely especially when it comes to who Jesus is and what He has done on the Cross. The Bible – not feelings, trends, or what is “cool” – determines the standard of truth and practice. A person without God's indwelling presence cannot discern the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:14) and is often drawn into error.

1 John 4:6, “We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”

12 – I EXPERIENCE THE COMFORT & CONVICTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT | “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit” (1 Jn 4:13).

It is through the Spirit of God that we can believe and repent. He gives us a new heart and a new spirit by His Spirit (Eze 36:26-27). Through the Spirit, Christ's presence is within me, and He says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb 13:5). What comfort this is for the true Christian.

13 – I TRUST JESUS AS MY KING | Believing Jesus means to trust Him your King to direct your every thought and action. Belief is more than intellectual understanding, but actually surrendering to Him as Christ (“the Anointed One”). To be anointed as Christ in the Bible is to be the Almighty King. As born-again people, we trust Christ as King to control and direct us.

1 John 5:1a, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.”

14 – I PERSEVERE IN VICTORY OVER THE WORLD | A Christian will persevere in the love of God and holiness because of the Holy Spirit living in him or her. A justified person may fall, but they keep getting up by the grace of God. “For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.” (1 Jn 5:4).

These Fingerprints Don't Save Us

These marks of God in our life do not make us God's children, they show that we are God's children. The children of a mom and dad did nothing to gain the family likeness. Being “born” is a gift. And being “born again” into God's family is a gift from God.

St. Paul explains this in

Ephesians 2:8-10, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (cf Titus 2:4-7).

KEEP YOURSELF FROM IDOLS

St. John gives us a hint in the last verse of his first epistle as to the fantastic and supernatural power of regeneration. He says, “Little children, keep yourself from idols” (1 Jn 5:21). There are many idols we could talk about at this retreat. I thought tonight we could talk about freedom from the idol of **crippling fear**. Tomorrow we will touch on freedom from **lust and pornography**. Then in the afternoon, we will talk about freedom from **sinful anger**.

3. A CASE STUDY IN CRIPPLING FEAR

Normally, I would want to give you three case studies in the transforming power of Christ in regeneration: a look at purity, anger, and fear. Tonight, we will attempt to look at **crippling fear**, though it is not exhaustive. I will post these notes on our website at: livinghopechurch.net/clearnote17/. Tomorrow morning, we will look at freedom from **lust and porn**, and then in the afternoon we will look at freedom from **sinful anger**.

Fear is an emotion given to us about, so when we talk about crippling fear, we are not talking about the sort of fear that keeps you from falling over the edge of a cliff or that helps you obey that sign at the zoo: "Keep Your Hands Away From The Lions' Cages." No, God gave us the capacity to fear for a good purpose, just as He gave us every emotion for a proper use, helpful to us and honoring to Him. Because of fear we are able to escape injury and dangers that otherwise would destroy most of us before we reached maturity. It is those irrational fears that come and go, and the fears, rational enough in themselves, that overpower and dominate that we must consider tonight. Often you cannot shake them and sometimes you may find yourself doing all sorts of things that you do not want to do to try and keep the fear at bay. Indeed fear may get such a tight grip upon you that at times it may seem to be some powerful force from the outside that takes you captive.

- **Fear** is a strong emotional reaction to a perceived imminent danger characterized by a fight, flight, or freeze response.
- **Fear** can be real or imagined, rational or irrational, normal or abnormal.
- **Fear** acts as a protective reaction, placed in us by our Creator to activate all of our physical defense systems when we face real danger. Fear triggers the release of adrenaline in the body that both prepares and propels us to action often called "fight or flight."
- **Fear** is a natural emotion designed by God. However, *fearfulness* is not designed by God, for fearfulness suggests living in a *state of fear*.

Fear can be good

- **Fear** can motivate us and leads to increased efficiency.
- **Fear** forces us out of our "comfort zone."
- **Fear** helps us avoid dangerous situations.
- **Fear** can cause us to live dependently on the Lord.⁴

Notice that the psalmist, who put these words to music, turned his focus to the Lord. "When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul" (Psa 94:19, NIV).⁵

THE BACKGROUND OF MY CRIPPLING FEAR

I'm going to share my testimony of salvation tomorrow morning's session, but when I was a child, my parents divorced when I was eight years old. I grew up in Chicago, and we moved 800 miles south to the north side of New Orleans in Louisiana.

⁴ Jay E. Adams. "What Do You Do When Fear Overcomes You?" (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, nd), pamphlet, available online: http://www.end-time-message.org/images/stories/asorted_pdf/Jay_E_Adams/What_Do_You_Do_When_Fear_Overcomes_You.pdf

⁵ June Hunt, *Biblical Counseling Keys on Fear: No Longer Afraid* (Dallas, TX: Hope For The Heart, 2008), 9.

As a young person, my mother worked at a video store, and she would bring home very **wicked pornographic videos** for me to watch when I was only 11 and 12 years of age. Some of those videos were not even natural.

To make things worse, I dealt everyday with the personal plague of **fatherlessness**. There is no worse plague that is destroying our nation than fatherlessness.

Beyond that because my mother fended for herself, we would **move constantly**. We moved to a new location and a new school about once a year.

All of this severe culture shock left me at age 12 in the seventh grade with what might be described as PTSD, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. For three years of my life, age 12 to 15, I was plagued with almost constant terror. What I want to consider tonight is that because of regeneration you can be free from crippling fear. It's what I call terror. There are times in life when we are controlled by crippling fear, anxiety and worry. I want to share an extreme example from my own life so that you can have hope and a **strategy to be free from fear**.

THE TERROR DEFINED

What I went through was not your ordinary anxiety, I have come to understand that I have endured PTSD most of my life. PTSD is normally thought of as something soldiers have because they keep replaying the terrors of the battlefield.

The truth is PTSD is not a disease, but simply a description of symptoms. I want to encourage us tonight that God's Word is powerful enough to help us trust in God no matter what we feel like.

Let me be clear, I am not saying that a person can always be free from the feelings of fear and anxiety. What I am saying is that no child of God ought to be controlled by them. Jesus said, we cannot have two masters. If Christ is our master, then Fear cannot be our master.

So let me describe what I have gone through most of my life so that I can give you great hope in the Gospel to transform you from a slave to fear to a slave of Jesus.

I can remember the moment my fear began. It was the 1980s. It was September 1986. I was just beginning the seventh grade. In the 1980s there was all kinds of talk about HIV and AIDS. I watched TV incessantly. My parents would use the television to babysit me my whole life.

I was very self-conscious because all my friends had dads and guns. I am the youngest in my family. I have brothers that are over a decade older than me. For my 12th birthday they bought me a 22 semi-automatic rifle with a scope.

I would go hunting with my friends, but I had an irrational fear that because I didn't have a father I would somehow turn out wrong. I began to feel such terror. I thought I would become like the people in the pornographic videos I saw. I did not have thoughts of sensuality, but terror. I later came to find out that my mother showing me those porn videos was really a form of abuse.

I was terrorized by this abuse and it led me to an even bigger problem. The fear would not go away. I was afraid of so many things.

THE TERROR DESCRIBED PHYSIOLOGICALLY

Where did the terror come from? Physiologically, this experience of terror is caused by a build up of a stress hormone called **cortisol**. This is what causes the symptoms of PTSD. In combination with that, there is another stress hormone called **adrenaline** (also known as **epinephrine**). The cortisol produces a feeling of doom, and the adrenaline is a fight or flight hormone that causes a feeling of terror.

That's the pathology of fear, but I want to tell you from a firsthand basis what I experienced for three years as a child, and I have had to learn how to cope with these things from the Word of God as a Christian.

THE TERROR DESCRIBED PERSONALLY

What began as a fear of being different, became all the more destructive as I became a slave to fear for three years. I would try to do anything to get rid of it. It led me from being an honor roll student to me failing my classes. It led me to fornication, alcohol and drugs at a very young age. I wanted to do anything to get rid of the fear.

The fear was so powerful that:

- I lost my appetite and at times vomited at the feeling of fear and terror
- I often had thoughts of suicide
- I was constantly tired. My body felt like I was beat up constantly, so I had a daily feeling of exhaustion, like someone constantly running in terror 24/7.
- The nights were the worst. For three years I was often so afraid that my clothes were soaked with sweat, and at the times of most intense terror, as a teenager I would curl up in the fetal position next to my mother.

As I said, I turned to the world for relief. I was afraid of pornography because they caused me terror, but I destroyed my life and the lives of girls through **fornication**.

I would often become **intoxicated** as a junior higher with wine that was readily available where we lived in the Bayou of Louisiana near Lake Ponchartrain.

That went on until September of 1989, when a group of evangelists from the Assemblies of God (The Power Team / Strike Force) preached the Gospel to me at a large evangelistic event. I'll share more about that tomorrow.

At that moment the entire focus of my life was radically redirected. I was born again. For many years the terror and fear I experienced in such a defeated and devastating way was now left behind. I now had heavenly joy in Christ. My sins were forgiven. I was a new creation. I was born again!

So that means all my fear and terror went away, right? No.

THE REOCCURRENCE OF THE CRIPPLING FEAR

For over a decade I was free from crippling fear. From the moment I was born again at age 15 (September 1989) until I had been one year on the mission field of Spain as a missionary church planter in the Basque Region of Spain in September of 2002 I was completely free from crippling fear.

One day while I was in Sunday School in Spain, enjoying the teaching, all the feelings of terror and crippling fear came back. There was no trigger, but there were physiological reasons it all returned. Physically, because of culture shock and the intense pressure of living in a new culture and learning a new language, the cortisol in my body built up to a crisis level which released a rush of adrenaline in me, that gave me a feeling of terror and put me in "fight or flight" mode.

Because of the adrenaline I could not sleep. I called my pastor in the United States. He told me to cling to Christ, which I tried to do. Days went by with very little sleep. I kept getting worse. My wife was getting very worried about me.

Imagine being terrorized ... your life continually threatened ... your heart gripped with fear. Imagine every day ... waking to the thought: what if this fear never goes away? It's terrifying. That's what I was experiencing.

4. A STRATEGY TO OVERCOME CRIPPLING FEAR & ANXIETY

It wasn't until I called a Biblical Counselor by the name of Dr. Bob Smith from Faith Church in Lafayette that I finally got some relief. What he taught me in about 30 minutes changed my life. I want to share that with you because it will help you in dealing with fear, and anxiety.

He gave me several anchors to hold on to. I have to be brief, but I'm telling you these principles of truth have restored joy to my soul. I still at times struggle with crippling fear that usually comes as a result of stress. But now I know what causes it and how to refuse to be enslaved by fear.

Keep Yourself Healthy

Something to remember is that sometimes fear, depression and anxiety can be caused by a physical disorder, like a problem with your thyroid, or a vitamin deficiency.

It's also very important to remember that irrational fear and anxiety can often be caused because of stress. You can have a panic attack just because of stress. It's nothing to worry about. Often the overwhelming feelings of fear can be helped by getting proper sleep and removing yourself from prolonged stressful situations.

Another thing that is very important is having a proper amount of fun and relaxation in life. Wise King Solomon has told us to enjoy God's gifts in the midst of life's pains, "For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? 23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity. 24 There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?" (Ecc 2:22-25). Real enjoyment comes when we celebrate God in the midst of his gifts. Are you able to have fun with friends and family for the glory of God?

Keep Your Heart and Mind Healthy

Often though, fear, depression and anxiety can become paralyzing. What if you are trying to keep your body healthy, but the unrelenting fear won't go away? Unrelenting fear characterized as PTSD is almost always caused by stress which overloads your body with the stress hormones of cortisol and adrenaline. How do you destress your mind with the Word of God?

In these times of stress, depression and being completely overloaded, fear, depression and serious anxiety takes place. What can you do when fear overwhelms you? Let me give you three anchors that will keep you close to Christ.

ANCHOR 1: YOU ARE NOT ALONE

The prophets and Apostles and Jesus were crushed and overwhelmed at times

Dr. Bob Smith, who I spoke with for 30 minutes on the phone one day in Spain in September 2002 told me that the feeling of helplessness and fear is common to man and that many godly people in the Bible were at times overcome, but persevered to victory.

Paul and the other apostles. 2 Corinthians 7:5-6, “For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. 6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus...” The point is Paul and his companions likely experienced these emotions of crippling fear, but they did not let it cripple them.

Jesus. Hebrews 5:7, “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.”

“He [Jesus] began to be sorrowful and troubled – [literally “horrified]” (Mt 26:37). Jesus is peering into the cup of God's wrath. Through prayer he is gaining the strength to be obedient to the Father's will. Then we read “Being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Mt 26:44).

Jesus was in severe shock: “Blood can come out of your pores when you're sweating if you're experiencing a severe shock. So you see, something came down on Jesus Christ that utterly astonished him, sent him into incredible horror and agony.”⁶

Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane empowered him for obedience. “Not my will, but yours be done” was Jesus' prayer. And we who would follow Jesus must understand that the power to obey God comes through prayer.

Job. “Terrors overwhelm me; my dignity is driven away as by the wind, my safety vanishes like a cloud” (**Job 30:15**, NIV).

David. Often David was in fear and terror and his soul was disquieted. David gives us the pathway to freedom from paralyzing fear. **Psalm 43:5**, “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”

Another Psalm that has delivered me over and over is Psalm 3. In fact I have listened to *My Soul Among Lions* version of it probably a hundred times. Sometimes when I have no strength to even read God's word because of my soul's terrors, I can listen to the Psalms. Thank you brothers for you ministry!

Dear brothers if you feel paralyzing fear and are overwhelmed at times, you are in the line of a great cloud of witnesses, including our Lord. We have not been called to a bed of roses, but to a battle and a spiritual war till Jesus comes. We are called to persevere through the demonic darkness.

ANCHOR 2: JESUS ALONE IS YOUR MASTER

A Christian Cannot Serve Two Masters

Matthew 6:24, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” You cannot serve God and fear. When I got off the phone with Bob Smith, I realized that this life is a war, a competition in which Jesus, and those who trust in Jesus are guaranteed the victory.

One of the marks that I am a true believer is that fear or money or sex or any other idol will not be my master.

Listen, I sometimes cannot control the feelings of overwhelming fear or anxiety, but I can choose who is my master.

⁶ Timothy J. Keller. *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013), notes on Mt. 26:36ff, “The Dark Garden.”

So people who are being controlled by fear, anxiety or depression will often let fear control them.

- I need to stay in bed. I can't get up to go to work because I'm so depressed.
- I can't perform at work like I used to. I'm just giving up on work.
- I can't wear that shirt because it reminds me of the trauma and fear
- I can't go down that elevator, can't go that way to work, can't.... etc.
- I will do anything to get rid of this fear (drink, fornicate, porn, etc)

We as Christians cannot think this way. We have one Lord. We cannot be slaves to fear. We have to have the mentality: "I am going to serve Jesus however he leads me no matter what I feel like." Jesus alone is my master. Fear is not my master. Choose to do what Christ commands you no matter what you feel like.

ANCHOR 3: RENEW YOUR MIND AND REFOCUS ON CHRIST

A Christian is Called to Constant Mind Renewal

We are called to wash our minds in the water of the Word. Here we go, this is the ammunition you need for freedom from crippling fear.

Focus on the Truth

So much of what we fear never comes to pass. We need to remember **Philippians 4:8-9**, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."

I believe there are 365 occurrences in God's Word when he says, "Don't be afraid. Don't fear." It must be because we need to hear it.

Focus on the Lord

It's a moment by moment trusting in God. God says to us in **Isaiah 26:3**, "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you."

Again in **Isaiah 41:10**, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

You can do this through prayer. **Philippians 4:6-7**, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Focus on the Perseverance

All that we have is found in Christ. In the new birth we have "every spiritual blessing" because of Christ. One of those gifts is perseverance. You've got to choose to face your fear with faith through the Scriptures ... David said, "I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears" (Psa 34:4).

As you refocus on what God has for you to do, the fear slowly goes away. Find things you can do that you were made to do. Pray with people. Help them. Serve them. Use what God has

given you to get busy and serve others. Listen to others. Bear their burdens. As you try to encourage others, you will find that your fears and anxieties disappear.

ANCHOR 4: REPLACE SINFUL FEAR WITH GODLY FEAR

A Christian is Called to Fear the Lord

If we are to overcome sinful paralyzing fear, we must begin with a healthy fear (awe) of God. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” (Pro 1:7). You have to fear God more than you fear living with fear or anxiety or worry.

- Believe that God created you because he loves you.
- Believe that God has a future and a hope for your life.
- Believe that God (not fear) has the right to be your **Master**
- Believe that God wants you to entrust your life entirely to him.
- Believe that God has the power to change you.
- Believe that God will keep you safe as you trust in him.

Conclusion

If you are filled with fear, let me encourage you, this **will not last forever**. God has a purpose for your pain. There is coming a day when God will wipe away every tear. You are not alone. This life is a war. God will preserve you. The most important thing is not to get rid of your fear. Your goal has to be to please God and glorify him regardless of what you feel like. That is a life of walking by faith and not by our feelings.

For me, my fear has been a pain that has kept me humble and compassionate. For that reason my fear may never fully go away in this life. I remember the weakness of my flesh may be what drives me to Christ. Remember that Paul had a “thorn in his flesh” in order to keep him humble and close to Christ, experiencing the power of Christ.

“So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:7-10).

SOLI DEO GLORIA



MATT BLACK, Sat, Nov 18, 2017
Clearnote Men's Retreat

SESSION **2** | 2 SAMUEL 11:1-27

FREEDOM FROM LUST & PORN

Clearnote Men's Retreat 2017
Prepared by: Matthew S. Black
Saturday, November 18, 2017, 9:30AM
livinghopechurch.net/clearnote17

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

PSALM 51:10-12 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION

The theme of our Men's Retreat is *Transformation*. I want to change. I know you want to change into the image of Jesus Christ. Change is not possible without the new birth. A huge area of transformation is purity. Pornography is a serious problem in our land, and it has seriously affected Christ's church. Someone said, "The first sexual thought in the universe was God's, not man's." Sex is God's idea, not man's. Sex is meant for marriage, and anything outside of the marriage covenant is not only sin, it is abuse.

This morning I'm going to introduce you to how David, a man after God's own heart fell into the clutches of pornography and adultery, and we are going to talk about how God delivered him.

MY TESTIMONY

Let me begin with my testimony. I was exposed to terrible images as a young man. I was enslaved to those images and then to fornication by the time I was 14.

My freedom began with the new birth. Let me begin with my first birth. The helicopter flew quickly from St. Francis Hospital near the south side of Chicago with two tiny premature twin babies. God is real. I know for a fact because He gave me life. My twin sister and I were born (May 22, 1974) two and a half months premature and weighed only 2 and a half pounds each. We should not have lived! We were flown in the helicopter at the age of one hour old to Ignatius Loyola University Medical Center where our lives were saved. By the time I was four years old I made several trips to the hospital, including open heart surgery. Certainly my life was spared in each of these events, but why? I believe it is because God had ordained a plan for my life!

I was raised in Oak Forest Illinois where I heard the Gospel from the youth pastor at the church there. They picked me up on a bus as a kid. When I was 8 years old, my mom divorced my dad. I moved about 800 miles away from my dad, with my twin sister, Tammie, and my mom. My mother was working most of the time, so my sister and I had very little supervision. By the time I was 14 I had been arrested on several occasions for drinking alcohol as a minor, stealing a car, and doing drugs. I had run away from home, and was in a rock band singing and playing the guitar. I was smoking two packs of cigarettes a day when I had the money to buy them.

At that time I thought I had everything. I could feel good anytime with a drink, and I had fun playing music with my band. But the real truth is that I was empty on the inside. I tried to keep myself busy so I wouldn't have to think about reality. I caused a lot of problems for my family by running away and living in a rebellious way.

Then, on September 12, 1989, as a sophomore in high school, I was invited to a meeting. There were thousands of young people there. It was at a large college auditorium, and the place was packed! A man (Pastor Keith Craft, keithcraft.org/) got up and spoke to us that night. "No matter what your situation in life, you need God," he said, "– you need Jesus Christ." He said that we all have sinned, lied, and done wrong things in our life, and that no person on earth deserves to go to heaven. That night I knew why God had spared my life so many times. The speaker said that Christ died personally for me, – that if I was the only sinner on earth He would have gladly died for me. That night, I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ for my eternal salvation. My sin was placed on Jesus and His righteousness was given to me. I turned from my sin in a radical way. I began attending an Assemblies of God church and going to Bible studies. Later I moved to Chicago where I was eventually grounded in the Reformed faith. I became a missionary to Spain where we planted two churches, and then twelve years ago, I became the pastor of what is now called Living Hope Bible Church, about 20 minutes from Chicago.

You might ask, Matt, has God given you victory over the images implanted in your mind when you were a young teen? My answer is yes. I have not looked at porn since before my conversion. But God had to teach me how to take hold of his presence for victory. It is an ongoing war on this earth, but we are promised victory.

SIN WILL TAKE YOU FARTHER

There's an old saying that goes. "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you'll ever want to pay!" This morning we come to the saddest chapter in King David's life—his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, and his murder of Uriah.

No one starts out planning for moral failure. Yet it is so prevalent in our churches today. We have seen a Corinthian culture infect Christ's beloved church. Sensuality is available and being accessed by God's people, and we as a church – each of us as followers of Christ need a strategy for purity. Purity is an issue for both men and women. At any time we could be drawn away into the bondage of lust. We cannot serve two masters. Either we are going to serve Jesus Christ or not, but He will not share the throne of your heart with any other master.

Forgetfulness of God: Bonhoeffer

Every servant of God will be tempted to sin in lust and immorality. It is a forgetfulness we are subject to if we are not careful to walk with God.

The beloved German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: "At that moment when lust takes control of your heart, God loses all reality. Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God." We are all going to give an account before God. So I want to read this account from the life of David.

Reading of Holy Scripture

2 Samuel 11:1-27, "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

2 It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. 3 And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" 4 So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. 5 And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

6 So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. 7 When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab was doing and how the people were doing and how the war was going. 8 Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." And Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. 9 But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. 10 When they told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?" 11 Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah dwell in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing." 12 Then David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. 13 And David invited him, and he ate in his presence and drank, so that he made him drunk. And in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. 15 In the letter he wrote, "Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die." 16 And as Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant men. 17 And the men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died. 18 Then Joab sent and told David all the news about the fighting. 19 And he instructed the messenger, "When you have finished telling all the news about the fighting to the king, 20 then, if the king's anger rises, and if he says to you, 'Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from the wall? 21 Who killed Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman cast an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so near the wall?' then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.'"

22 So the messenger went and came and told David all that Joab had sent him to tell. 23 The messenger said to David, "The men gained an advantage over us and came out against us in the field, but we drove them back to the entrance of the gate. 24 Then the archers shot at your servants from the wall. Some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also."

25 David said to the messenger, "Thus shall you say to Joab, 'Do not let this matter displease you, for the sword devours now one and now another. Strengthen your attack against the city and overthrow it.' And encourage him."

26 When the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she lamented over her husband. 27 And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

1. THE PREVALENCE OF MORAL FAILURE

David, a Man after God's Own Heart

David was a man after God's own heart. He had over 20 years of success before all of this mess happened. Be warned older men and women. Just because you have had great spiritual success in life, does not mean you are immune for the sin of lust and immorality. We are all susceptible.

It was not a passionate youth who deliberately walked into this sin, but a man of God who had now reached middle age.⁷ David wrote one-half of the Psalms. It seems he was for most of his ministry as King and prophet a man of exemplary character and purity.

But then one day it happened. It shows that moral failure is possible with the best of God's saints. We want to be warned today that moral failure is spreading like a disease in the church today. It ought not to be, but the rate that it happens is alarming. We see if it can happen in David's life, the temptation is fierce for every one of us.

It Happened!

And so we come to a very telling verse in Scripture. **2 Sam. 11:1-2**, "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. 2 **It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing...**"

It happened late one afternoon. We wonder how did this happen? We are going to find out in detail in a moment. But know this it does happen. It is prevalent in the church.

The Prevalence of moral failure in the Church

Dear saints, there is a great prevalence of moral failure in the church. I bring it to you because I want you to consider what it will do if we do not kill it and nail it to the cross. We are at war.

Recently Leadership Magazine commissioned a poll of a thousand pastors. The pastors indicated that

- 12 percent of them had committed adultery while in the ministry — one out of eight pastors! — and
- 23 percent had done something they considered sexually inappropriate such as view pornography.

⁷ Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (2 Sa 11:1-4). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Christianity Today surveyed a thousand of its subscribers both men and women and found the figure to be nearly double, with

- 23 percent saying they had had extramarital intercourse and
- 45 percent indicating they had done something they themselves deemed sexually inappropriate like viewing pornography.

One in four Christians are unfaithful, and nearly one half have behaved unbecomingly! Shocking statistics! Especially when we remember that Christianity Today readers tend to be college-educated church leaders, elders, deacons, Ladies' ministry leaders, Sunday school superintendents, and teachers. If this is so for the Church's leadership, how much more for the average member of the congregation? Only God knows!

This leads us to an inescapable conclusion: The contemporary evangelical Church, broadly considered, is "Corinthian" to the core. It is no wonder...

- No wonder the Church has lost its grip on holiness.
- No wonder it is so slow to discipline its members.
- No wonder it is dismissed by the world as irrelevant.
- No wonder so many of its children reject it.
- No wonder it has lost its power in many places

The seventh commandment is about keeping your promise through sexual purity both in your mind and in your body. God's wants us to be holy in our hearts and imaginations.

Jesus made it clear that the scope of the seventh commandment includes our thoughts, words, and actions: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt. 5:27-28).⁸

Where are we to turn for help? The most instructive example in all of God's Word is the experience of King David as it is told in 2 Samuel 11.

2. THE PATHWAY OF MORAL FAILURE

David had an exemplary sanguine personality brimming with joy, enthusiasm, and confidence and overflowing with irresistible charisma. He was the poet — the sweet Psalmist of Israel — so in touch with God and himself that his Psalms pluck the heartstrings of man even today, writing half or more of the Psalter. Under his leadership all Israel had been united. David hardly seemed a candidate for moral disaster. But the king was vulnerable, for there were definite flaws in his conduct which left him open to tragedy.⁹ In 2 Samuel 11, we see David's pathway to moral failure, and it is a warning to every sincere believer in Jesus Christ today.

R. Kent Hughes' gives several steps to moral failure in his book *Disciplines of a Godly Man*: (1) Pride, (2) Desensitization, (3) Relaxation, (4) Fixation, (5) Rationalization, (6) Degeneration.

⁸ Smith, Colin S. (2006-02-01). *The 10 Greatest Struggles of Your Life* (Kindle Locations 1334-1336). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

⁹ R. Kent Hughes. *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (p. 20ff). Kindle Edition.

1. PRIDE

Pride is the first step in the pathway to moral failure. David was not always proud. He was mostly humble. But Satan just needs you to think you are a mature and that you are special and stronger in your spiritual life than most people. You can handle it!

Remember Samuel said of David, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). God liked what He saw. God liked David's heart! David was a man after God's own heart.

David had a brave heart. He was not afraid of the great Philistine giant Goliath. He stood courageously against God's enemies and smote Goliath with a sling and a stone. And then David stood over the fallen giant and cut off his head (1 Sam. 17:45–49).

But we read in **verse 1**, "In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem." It was the season when kings go to war, but David was satisfied with his victories. We might call that spiritual pride. That's where it all begins.

When we come to this story we all say, "David should have known better". He was 50 years old. There is a temptation to think that as saints of God mature spiritually, that they become immune to temptation. This morning's message is hopefully going to be a wakeup call and a warning to us all. There is no one at any stage of his spiritual life that is beyond even grievous sin.

2. DESENSITIZATION

2 Samuel 5, which records David's initial assumption of power in Jerusalem, mentions almost as an aside that "after he left Hebron, David took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem" (v. 13). We must note, and note well, that David's taking additional wives was sin!

Deuteronomy 17, which set down the standards for Hebrew kings, commanded that they refrain from three things:

- 1) acquiring many horses,
- 2) taking many wives, and
- 3) accumulating much silver and gold (cf. vv. 14–17).

David did fine on one and three, but he completely failed on number two by willfully collecting a considerable harem.

Seeking Pleasure Outside God's Order

We must understand that a progressive desensitization to sin and an inner fall from a sincere pursuit of God had taken root in David's life and left him vulnerable to seek pleasure outside of God and God's order. God has ordered in creation that two should be one flesh. A third party is never acceptable in God's order.

Hebrews 13:4, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous."

David's collection of wives, though it was "legal" and not considered adultery in the culture of the day, was nevertheless sin. King David's sensual indulgence desensitized him to God's holy calling in his life. These things were socially permitted, but spiritually deadly.

Culturally Acceptable Indulgences

Men, it is the "legal" sensualities, the culturally acceptable indulgences, which will take us down. The long hours of indiscriminate TV watching, which is not only culturally cachet but is

expected of the American male, is a massive culprit of desensitization. The expected male talk — double entendre, coarse humor, laughter at things which ought to make us blush — is another deadly agent. Acceptable sensualities have insidiously softened Christian men, as statistics well attest. A man who succumbs to desensitization of the “legal” sensualities is primed for a fall.

3. RELAXATION

Another step in David's pathway to moral failure was his relaxation from the rigors and discipline which had been part of his active life. David was at midlife, about fifty years old, and his military campaigns had been so successful, it was not necessary for him to personally go off to war. He rightly gave the “mopping up” job to his capable general, Joab — and then relaxed. The problem was, his relaxation extended to his moral life. It is hard to maintain inner discipline when you are relaxing in this way. David was imminently vulnerable.

No one Says, “I'll Commit Adultery Today”

David did not suspect anything unusual was going to happen on that fatal spring day. He did not get up and say, “My, what a beautiful day. I think I will commit adultery today!” May this lesson not be wasted on us, men. Just when we think we are the safest, when we feel no need to keep our guard up, to work on our inner integrity, to discipline ourselves for godliness — temptation will come!

4. FIXATION

“In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. 2 It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and **the woman was very beautiful.** 3 And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, “Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” (2 Sam. 11:1–3)

It had been a warm day, and evening was falling. The king strode out on the rooftop for some cool air and a look at his city at dusk. As he gazed, his eye caught the form of an unusually beautiful woman who was bathing without modesty. As to how beautiful she was, the Hebrew is explicit: the woman was “*beautiful of appearance, very*” (v. 2).

David Continued to Look: Sinful Stare

She was young, in the flower of life, and the evening shadows made her even more enticing. The king looked at her, and **this is where he fell** – he **continued** to look at her form. After the first glance David should have turned **ran** the other way and retired to his chamber, but he did **not**. His look became a **sinful stare** and then a burning, piercing leer. In that moment David, who had been a man after God's own heart, became a dirty, leering, defiled old man. A lustful fixation overcame him, and David decided he would not be denied.

Bonhoeffer Quote

The beloved German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: “At that moment when lust takes control of your heart, God loses all reality. Satan does not fill us with hatred of God, but with forgetfulness of God.”

Lust Numbs Us

Lust numbs us so powerfully and dangerously that we forget God.

When we are in the grip of lust, the reality of God's presence fades. We become "practical atheists." The longer King David leered, the less real God became to him. David also lost awareness everything God made him to be: his holy calling as king, a mighty warrior for God. David also forgot he was a frail sinner and he forgot the disastrous consequences of sin. This is what lust does! It has done it millions of times. God disappears to lust-glazed eyes.

Brothers and sisters, the truth demands some serious questions: Has God faded you're your view? Did you once see Him in bright hues, but now His memory is blurred like an old faded photograph? Do you have an illicit fixation which has become all you can see? Is the most real thing in your life your desire? If so, you are in deep trouble. Some decisive steps are necessary, as we will see.

5. RATIONALIZATION

From deadly fixation, King David descended to the next level down, which is rationalization. When his intent became apparent to his servants, one tried to dissuade him, saying, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" (vs. 3). But David would not be rebuffed. Some massive rationalization took place in David's mind, perhaps he said something like this:

Uriah's can't be much of a husband or lover – he's so old!

He'll be away for a long time.

I'm the king. It's so hard being the king. This is a special situation. I deserve a break.

God knows how hard it is to be king.

Then David says to the servant, "Bring her to me."

The mind controlled by lust has an infinite capacity for rationalization.

- "How can something that has brought such enjoyment be wrong?"
- "God's will for me is to be happy; certainly He would not deny me anything which is essential to my happiness."
- "The question here is one of love — I'm acting in love, not lust."
- "My marriage was never God's will in the first place."
- "You Christians and your narrow judgmental attitudes make me sick. You are judging me. You are a greater sinner than I'll ever be!"

6. DEGENERATION

2 Sam. 11:4-5, "So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she had been purifying herself from her uncleanness.) Then she returned to her house. 5 And the woman conceived, and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

David was unaware he had stepped off the precipice and was falling, and that reality would soon arrive — the bottom was coming up fast.

Before he knew it he was going from a man who was lukewarm, to a man who was cold and calculated. David went from being a man after God's own heart to an adulterer, a liar, and finally a murderer.

3. THE STRATEGY FOR PURITY

A. EXPERIENCE GOD'S GRACE

Consider Psalm 51. David wrote a whole Psalm of repentance. He didn't make excuses. He received God's grace, but God's grace isn't cheap.

He asked for and got cleansing.

Psalm 51:1-2, "Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!"

He acknowledged that His sin was not just horizontal in the human realm, but that his sin was ultimately against Almighty God. David says in **verse 4**, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."

Verse 11, says he wanted to stop grieving the Holy Spirit and be restored to the Spirit's fellowship.

Allusion to Christ

Verse 7, he asked to be cleansed with hisop and then he would be clean and "whiter than snow." This is an allusion to Christ. When the Israelites left Egypt they had to put the blood of the lamb on the door posts with a hisop branch.

If the blood was on the door then the angel of death who brought God's justice and wrath would "pass over" that home.

Dear child of God, there is forgiveness for sins of lust like David sinned, but it's not cheap grace. Jesus paid it all. Jesus poured out His life's blood for this sin. Hallelujah.

He will restore your joy!

Restore the Years the Locusts Have Eaten

Remember **Joel 2:25**, "I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten," God's grace is amazing.

B. FIND YOUR SATISFACTION IN CHRIST

This should be first. Getting married will not solve your lust problem. You will just bring it into marriage.

Your Spouse is Not Your Messiah

Paul Tripp recently wrote: "I am never going to have paradise in my marriage. Paradise is to come. I am never married to a perfect person. That person will never be my Messiah. The person I am married to has no capacity whatsoever to change my heart. That person I am married to has no capacity whatsoever to bring satisfaction and contentment to my heart. They have no ability whatsoever to deliver me from my sin. They just have no ability to do any of that."

You need to realize that a spouse can never be your savior. There is one Savior, and His name is Jesus.

David had to pray Psalm 51 and have the “joy of his salvation” restored. O, dear saint. This battle is tough, but it is not impossible. You will fail, but Christ is merciful.

Jolted with Joy!

Colonial Missionary to the Indians, David Brainerd said, “O how much better than life is the presence of God.”¹⁰ In Psalm 63, King David is jolted with joy while he is praying. He lifts up his hands to heaven, as if to touch and embrace God.

Psalm 63:3-5, “Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.”

C. PRACTICE RADICAL AMPUTATION

We cannot serve two masters. Jesus must be our master. Sometimes we have to blind ourselves to the old masters through radical amputation.

Listen to the words of Jesus in **Matthew 5:28-30**, “But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.”

The solution is not mutilation of the body, but *mortification* of sin. We call it “radical amputation”. John Owen said, “Be killing sin or sin will be killing you”.

1.) **Kill What You See** – “If your eye offends you, rip it out” that is if **what you see** causes you to sin, pluck your eye out – that is, cut off access to your eyes so your heart is not tempted to sin. **Blind yourself to the things that cause you to sin.** There are times when all I can do is look at my shoes. Behave as if you’ve plucked your eyes out – mortify your sin. You may need to change the route that you go home because of a billboard. You may need to cut off internet access for a while.

Television fills our living rooms with sex-filled advertisements for toothpaste (“give your mouth sex appeal”), shaving cream (“take it off; take it all off”). Whether it’s beer, basketball, or Windex, everything is sold with sex. We have to **blind ourselves** to those things that tempt us. Don’t give your eyes access to tempt your heart.

2.) **Kill What You Do** – “If your hand offends you, cut it off”, that is **what you do**. You may need to not pick up certain literature.

3.) **Kill Where You Go** – “If your foot offends you, cut it off,” (Mt. 18:8) that is **where you go**. If there are places your feet carry you that cause you to sin, DON’T GO!

Movie Theater Illustration – I can remember getting to the door of a movie theater, sneaking into a movie, and I had to “act as if I was lame”. I had to cut off my foot! I told my friends, “I can’t do this, I’m a Christian”. That’s mortification.

D. SEE PEOPLE AS GOD’S IMAGE BEARERS

Another strategy to defeat lust and to live in purity is to view things through God's eyes. Genesis 1:27 says we are made in God’s image. Romans 8:29 says God is restoring that image again in man by conforming us to Jesus. You should look woman someone made in the image of

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards. *Memoirs of the Rev. David Brainerd* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK, 1818), 207.

God not as an object. One woman is portrayed as a piece of merchandise there ought to be an anger that rises up within us.

That person you are looking at is God's image bearer. That's someone's **daughter**. That girl has a mother and brothers. Look at her as your **sister** or your **daughter** or your **mother**. You ought to see them as someone who should be your brother or sister in Christ. You ought to pray for the people plastered naked on the billboards and in the commercials to come to Christ.

E. FIGHT WITH GOD'S SWORD (THE BIBLE)

In human warfare, there is no flawless weapon with 100% success. But there is one in spiritual warfare. The Bible is sufficient to win the battle for purity. You can win! Christ has already won. You just have to use Christ's all-powerful sword, the Bible.

Satan is constantly hurling lies at us. What, then, should you do when tempted? Unsheathe your sword and go on the offensive, rejecting lies and rehearsing truth. When it comes to our temptations with lust, we must reject the lies and tell the truth to ourselves:

- God is not stingy, but good (Deut. 10:12-13).
- Sinful pleasures are not filling, but fleeting, leaving you empty (Heb. 11:24-26).
- People are not objects, but image bearers (Gen. 1:27).
- This is not private, but in the sight of a holy God (Psalm 51:4).
- God forgives us of sin in order to free us from sin, not to give us a license to sin (Rom. 6:1-2).
- Sexual sin isn't harmless, but defrauding – it hurts everyone around us (1 Thess. 4:3-6).
- It will not be easy to turn back, as you are already hardening your heart (Heb. 3:13).
- This sin of lust is not inevitable, since God provides a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13).
- Your past does not define you, Christ's blood does (1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 1).

Are you embracing lies, or exchanging them for the truth? Are you glorifying the body, or are you glorifying God with your body? When seductive speech calls out, remember, "all her slain are a mighty throng" (Proverbs 7:26).

F. GET ACCOUNTABILITY

Coming to Christ means coming out of hiding to be exposed by the light and covered with Christ's blood. As Christians, the best thing to do, of course, is just stay in the light. But the best thing to do when we wander into the shadows is to run back. Confession is where that starts.

So, are you hiding? Confess your sins to God. He forgives! But don't stop there. "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another" (Jas 5:16). That's what Christian friends are for.

You also need to have **accountability software** on every electronic device in your home. We use **Covenant Eyes** at our church. They offer a fantastic rate after the \$8.95 flat fee a month, it's just two dollars for each additional person. You can't afford not to have something like Covenant Eyes on all your devices. You can do that for \$2 a month. It sends any questionable sites to your accountability partner, which for me, is my wife. Also, each of our children have it on their computers and devices. It also measures the time you spend on each app and how much overall time you spend online as well as your Google searches.

THE SAD STORY OF MY MOTHER

Some of you have been deeply wounded by the sins of others because of lust. Some of you were in homes that neglected you and did not protect your eyes, and you became enslaved at an early age to this filth and wickedness.

When I was a child, my mother divorced my dad. She was truly the “strange woman” the immoral woman of Proverbs 5. She worked at a video store. She brought home the most wicked videos and magazines to me because she thought without a father that would make me a man.

How devastating this was to my view of women. But I want you to know something. God can cleanse and transform our minds. I remember as a new Christian, sitting in church with **pornographic images** *haunting* my mind. I prayed, “God set me free!” He did. It took time, but through renewing my mind daily with the Word and surrendering my mind, will, and body to him, I can truly say, Jesus Christ has set me free, and he can set you free as well!

CONCLUSION

Your transformation is guaranteed to take place. It may be a slow process, but the Lord has promised to conform you to Christ's image. I want to close by sharing the story of Cedric Andrews.

Cedric Andrews was a womanizer. He and his wife were heroin addicts. Six years ago God put them in my path and we started a study of Ephesians.

As we studied Ephesians two, we read, that Cedric and his wife Nicole were dead in their sins. They were slaves to their flesh, slaves to the world, and slaves to the devil. I read Ephesians 2:4-5, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.” As I read that, Cedric said, “Pastor, I gotta pray.” Nicole, his Italian Catholic wife said, “Cedric, don't interrupt the priest!” I told Nicole, this is the new birth, and you can't control the timing of a birth. Cedric burst into prayer and confessed his sin and the Lordship of Jesus Christ over his life and his belief that the blood of Christ was cleansing his sin. Nicole followed right after.

Today Cedric is free from his womanizing life. In fact he was just ordained a deacon in our church and his wife is our church secretary.

God Promises to Sanctify You

What I'm saying is the new birth has the power to set you free. You have a new nature, a new heart. You are a new creation. There is no sin where God will not sanctify you.

Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus Christ is not only the “*Author*” of the Christian's faith, but He is also the “*Finisher*.” As Paul tells us in **Philippians 1:6**, “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Christ conquered death to make us holy like Himself. This pursuit of holiness is the *fruit* of the new heart.

Jude says, “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” (**Jude 24-25**).

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (**1 Thess. 5:24**).



MATT BLACK, Sat, Nov 18, 2017
Clearnote Men's Retreat

SESSION **3** | SELECTED SCRIPTURES

FREEDOM FROM SINFUL ANGER

Clearnote Men's Retreat 2017
Prepared by: Matthew S. Black
Saturday, November 18, 2017, 1PM
livinghopechurch.net/clearnote17

Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

GALATIANS 5:26 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION

The theme of our Men's Retreat is *Transformation*. One area we all need to grow in is self control. We need to put off sinful anger and put on self-control and gentleness.

When I was first married, I thought I was quite far along in my Christian walk. At that time I had been a Christian then for eight years. I had read through the Bible quite aggressively, and I sincerely wanted to please the Lord. Then something truly awful happened. I realized I was living with a monster. And the monster was me! I had no idea how very selfish I could be when I didn't get my way. I found out that when I really wanted my way, I could give my dear wife 100 reasons from the Bible why I was right. I would "prosecute" my case, and I almost never lost. I thought I was leading my wife and being the head of my home, but I was really doing damage to my wife. I found soon enough that I wasn't comfortable just talking about the Bible with her. I didn't have the spiritual connection I had with her before we were married. After about ten years of marriage, while I was reading my Bible one day, the light came on. The Scripture was opened to James 3:13-18. This is what I read:

"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Immediately I realized that James was talking about two very different ways of living. There was the life of humble wisdom in contrast to the life of "disorder and every vile practice."

I was pretty sure which one I fit into. What also struck me were the roots of such behavior: bitterness and selfishness. In all of my discussions with my wife, I felt like I was right, and to top it off I was using the Bible. Many times I would be bitter that my wife just didn't see things the same way I did. I used to think the problem was her. It wasn't her at all. It was me. What really brought me to a deep conviction of my own sin was the declaration from James that using the Bible in a selfish, unloving, and at times bitter way was "earthly, unspiritual, and demonic". Wow. I was doing the devil's work.

The Roots of Demonic Wisdom

Satan masquerades as an angel of light. His greatest tool to keep us from true holiness and humility is to use the truths of the Bible, but to apply them in a selfish way. The roots of the tree of demonic wisdom are selfishness and bitterness. To make things clearer, one way selfishness is manifested is through a sour, pouty attitude. This pouty attitude is focused on "me" and "my hurt". It also turns very bitter and is manifested by a mean spirit. James says this attitude is earthly (self-centered), unspiritual (grieves the Holy Spirit), and demonic (Jas 3:15).

Getting My Way, No Matter What

The goal of demonic wisdom is to get my way and protect my hurt no matter what. How do you know if you have been taken captive by this demonic wisdom? James says you will not be living a life of humble wisdom, but one that reflects "disorder and every vile practice." I think this life of disorder is also described by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:31 as "bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice." When we are playing the hurt over and over again in our minds (bitterness) and filled with a building rage or fury (wrath), we will clam up (anger, the Greek word from which we get our word *thermos*) and then blow up (clamor), which results in more insults (slander) and a settled hostility toward the other person (malice). This is no way to live. So how does one stop this "crazy cycle" of anger? Christian men, what are we to do with anger?

1. HUMAN ANGER

HUMAN ANGER IS OFTEN FOOLISH

Solomon said, "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control" (**Pro 29:11**). "Anger is expressed in a wide range of behaviors, from red-hot rage to icy-blue rejection."¹¹ It can be expressed passively as indifference, sarcasm, annoyance, irritation, withdrawal, hurt, rejection or aggressively as grumpiness, self-righteousness, criticism, fight-picking crankiness, shouting, words of hatred, cursing, threatening, and even physical violence. Anger is expressed in these and innumerable other ways.

¹¹ Robert D. Jones. *Uprooting Anger* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2005), 15.

HUMAN ANGER IS COMMON TO MANKIND

All human beings are made in the image of God and therefore we all experience anger. The problem is that the heart of every person has been twisted and focused on self instead of God (Jer 17:9). The vast majority of anger experienced by fallen humans is sinful. It can be used for the glory of God, but most of the time it needs to be brought under control through humble submission to God. When Adam and Eve experienced the fall through sin, their entire worldview, and the worldview of every person born from them, was twisted with self exalted and God forgotten. Because of our sinful, selfish propensity, we need to be extremely careful with our anger. Anger is not just an emotion that proceeds from the thoughts, but brings forth an actual physical reaction.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF ANGER

Anger is so powerful that it has a physical effect on us. David Powlison in his book *Good and Angry* describes it:

“Anger involves physiology and anatomy. It has a marked bodily component, especially obvious in the more dramatic forms of anger. A general nervous tension pervades your body. Your adrenaline surges. The muscles in your face and chest—maybe your fists too!—clench. Your stomach churns. The sympathetic nervous system fires up. You actually feel hot, as blood rushes to your muscles preparing you for action. Your face gets red. Your eyes glitter—you’ve heard of a person having ‘fire in his eyes’! Your brow and mouth tighten into a disapproving scowl and frown. You’re in a state of high alert with alarm bells clanging. The limbic system of your brain lights up the MRI scan with anger’s distinctive neuro-electrical pattern.... Our English word *ang-er* comes from a word that captures the distress of a person who feels contorted with intense pain and trouble: *ang-uish* and *ang-st*. You feel all twisted up inside when you are mad; you are literally ‘bent out of shape.’”¹²

Indeed, anger affects every part of us.

- When anger impacts our **emotions**, we *feel* hot displeasure. Our body is agitated. Our heart rate goes up.
- When anger impacts our **thoughts**, “an intense emotional conversation takes place inside. You watch the video replay in the inner theater of your graphic imagination. Anger involves pointed articulate attitudes and judgments that express the criteria by which you evaluate something as acceptable or unacceptable.... Whether or not you are doing anything outwardly, when angry you furiously think, and what you think makes a judgment. *You idiot! That’s not fair. I can’t believe she did that to me!*”¹³
- When anger impacts our **actions**, “it breaks out into *behavior*. And that behavior—whether words or deeds—is about conflict and combat. Anger goes into action as a military operation. It’s about winning or losing, identifying enemies and allies, attacking and defending. Anger is fight-or-flight arousal in the body, the attack-and-

¹² David Powlison. *Good and Angry* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 47-78.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 50.

defend emotion, the administration of battlefield justice.”¹⁴ Some anger can even turn into physically aggressive behavior. One in three women in the U.S. have been victims of some form of physical violence by an intimate partner within their lifetime.¹⁵ According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, every nine seconds in the U.S. a woman is assaulted or beaten. While these statistics are national, domestic abuse is an ongoing problem even in the homes of professing Christians.

WARNINGS AGAINST SINFUL ANGER

Consider the devastating effects of sinful anger, and see how we be done with it. Hear the Scriptures' warnings against sinful anger. “The way of transgressors is hard” (Prov 13:15, KJV). If we choose sinful anger, we must be ready to accept its hard consequences. The book of Proverbs has a great many verses that warn us about the dangers of sinful anger.

First, sinful anger is **foolish**. “A man of quick temper acts foolishly” (Prov 14:17). “Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly” (Prov 14:29). Wise Solomon warned, “Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools” (Eccl 7:9).

Second, sinful anger causes great **disorder** for your life. James says, “If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. 15 This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice” (Jas 3:14-16). “A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls” (Pro 25:28). Paul warns: “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (Gal 5:26). Unguided and unrestrained anger is sin. A person with an anger problem is constantly causing disorder in people's lives.

Third, the heart of fallen anger is truly **murderous** (Mt 5 :21-26; Jas 4:1-2). If we call our brother worthless (*raca*) then we are guilty of murder and we have are worthy of hell fire, according to Jesus. James talks to the Jerusalem church, “You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel” (Jas 4:2). He calls fighting “murder” because that's at the heart of anger. Anger and fighting is akin to murder because it devalues the person.

THE BLESSINGS OF SELF-CONTROL

The Bible speaks of the blessing of self-control. “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov 15:1). “Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city” (Prov 16:32).

Anger is not always sinful. Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:26, “Be angry and do not sin.” We'll get to more of this in a moment, but first let's look at Sovereign anger.

¹⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹⁵ The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2010 Summary Report.

2. SOVEREIGN ANGER

CHRIST WAS ANGRY

Before we condemn all anger, let's remember that not all anger is wrong. **Christ** was often angry and grieved when his Father's glory was slighted or diminished, but when it came to personal offences, it is said of him, "as a lamb before her shearers is silent so he opened not his mouth" (Isa 53). When He was reviled, He reviled not again. He taught us when violated to "turn the other cheek" on personal wrongs. There is no place for self in anger. Christianity is a total death to self.

There is righteous, godly anger. Remember Jesus was deeply angry and **cleaned out the Temple** from the thieves and money changers (Jn 2:14-15). God's anger is an outflow of his goodness, love, holiness and justice. Because God is good, he must hate what is not good. Because God is love, he must hate that which opposes his love. Because God is holy and just, he must bring just consequences to lawlessness.

In the book of Revelation, chapter 6, we see one of the visions of Christ's coming at the opening of the sixth seal. "When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, 13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. 14 The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. 15 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, 16 calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"" (**Rev 6:12-17**).

Your "Hiding Place" song is a powerful reminder of the wrath of the Lamb.

*Day of wrath! A certain and dreadful day
When earth and sky are burned away
The sun will dim,
And with it the moon decay
To greet His fierce return...
Yet there's one voice can save the race
//O Jesus, be my hiding place//*

We "wait for God's Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (**1 Thess 1:10**).

We need to realize as Paul says in **2 Thess 1:8-10**, "the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed."

Listen people are going to be fleeing from the wrath of the Lamb, but who shall stand? I'll tell you who will stand. St. John says in **Revelation 7:4**, "I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel." Then in **7:9**, he sees the Abrahamic covenant fulfilled. In Abraham all the nations of the world will be blessed: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands." Palm branches mean victory! Only those who have Jesus as their hiding place will stand in the day of the Lamb's wrath.

GOD IS ANGRY

As Christians, we need to realize that God is righteous in his anger. Paul speaks to Jews who were religious but lost in **Romans 2:5**, and he says to them: "Because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed."

Anger is a holy and perfect attribute of God—it is part of His justice. Indeed, "God judges the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psa 7:11). "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (Jn 3:36).

We should not be shocked that God is angry with sinners. A **good God** cannot be truly good unless he hates that which opposes his goodness. He will meticulously mete out judgment upon sin. "If I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand takes hold on judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and will repay those who hate me" (Deut 2:41). "He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath" (Psa 2:4-5).

The Bible describes the frightening scene on the last day when Jesus Christ descends from heaven "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 1:8). The mouths that right now are blaspheming God will be eternally stopped. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. After Christ comes, we will all face him, and he will be sitting on an awesome radiant throne of judgment, and it says he is the one "from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away" (Rev 20:11).

GOD'S ANGER WILL SOON BE Poured OUT

Any time man ventures outside of God's control and sovereign Lordship, we call that sin. 1 John 3:4, "sin is the transgression of the law." When we venture outside of God's rule over us, we have betrayed God's Lordship and usurped His throne. When sin occurs in the universe, God meticulously demands justices. The fury of His holiness and goodness boils against sin.

David says in **Psalms 7:11ff**, "God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready. He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts" (Psa 7:11-13, NKJV). The bow of God's wrath is pulled back and ready to strike against all sin. Judgment is ready to fall on sin. God will judge all sin.

You may not think God is angry right now, but He is. Actually, God is patiently waiting for one final day when He will bring justice to every injustice, and he will thrust in His harvesting sickle into the earth, and gather all men to Him. One day He will give the command: "Gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe" and "cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God" (Rev 14:18-19). God has allowed sin and rebellion to rule the earth for a little while, but His anger will one day bring perfect order and holiness to the earth again.

3. RIGHTEOUS (SUBMITTED) ANGER

ANGER CAN BE RIGHTEOUS IF IT IS SUBMITTED TO GOD

There is such a thing as righteous human anger. Paul says "be angry and do not sin" (Eph 4:26). Paul demonstrates that Christians are able to control their anger and use it for a good cause, but he gives strong warning. He says: "Be angry and do not sin" but he also gives strong warning: be **quick** to reconcile ("do not let the sun go down on your anger") and be **careful** to reconcile ("give no opportunity to the devil," Eph 4:26-27).

Some people blow up with their anger! Some people clam up with their anger. God's people are to harness their anger to solve the problem to God's glory.

RIGHTEOUS ANGER LEAVES VENGEANCE TO GOD

Anger should lead us to guard and protect the relationship we have with our spouse and with all Christians. Anger should lead us to protect our relationship with God and to trust that God in his own time and in his own way will settle all disputes.

The imprecatory Psalms¹⁶ are filled with language that shows a deep trust in God to bring justice. David was able to take the wrongs done to him and bring them to the Lord. He says things like: "Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out, for they have rebelled against you" (Psa 5:10). Notice, the focus of David's anger was God-centered, not self-focused. He also realizes that justice deferred is not justice denied. In other words, he can leave his anger with God. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" (Gen 18:25).

RIGHTEOUS ANGER PROTECTS LOVE FOR GOD AND OUR NEIGHBOR

Sin is the transgression of God's law to love God and your neighbor (1 Jn 3:4; 4:20). Anger is given to us to protect the vulnerable neighbors all around us. Righteous anger as Scripture talks about it is evoked when people greatly dishonor **God or His Name** or when someone tramples on those who are **powerless** or **needy**. In other words, righteous anger often comes from our strong conviction to be faithful to the great commandment to **love God** with all our heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Lk 10:27).

If our anger is stirred by my selfish desire to have my way, then I'm in sin. Godly anger is stirred when God's glory is blasphemed and insulted or when my neighbor is oppressed or harmed.

¹⁶ Psalms 5, 6, 11, 12, 35, 37, 40, 52, 54, 56, 58, 69, 79, 83, 137, 139, and 143

The Christian is rightly stirred to anger in many situations. In fact, **a person who never gets angry in a godly manner is not a biblical Christian.**

“Holy anger is concerned with defending and building up others rather than protecting what I want. It is God and others-centered, not self-centered. Righteous anger is used as a tool for construction rather than a weapon for destruction. Holy anger is always mixed with a loving concern for people, including people who have hurt us or others.”¹⁷

RIGHTEOUS ANGER IS CONTROLLED BY GOD'S SPIRIT

For the true child of God, there is a submitted, godly, righteous anger controlled by the Holy Spirit— a right kind of anger that you should have as a Christian. Now that we are saved, a new, godly anger should characterize our lives.

Paul's command is that in our anger we, as Christ followers, should not succumb to sin (Eph 4:26). We are not to be controlled by anything in this world (be it wine, anger, lust, etc.) but “be filled [controlled] with the Holy Spirit” (Eph 5:19). Our whole hearts, including our anger, are submitted to the Lord's control and committed to a righteous, godly outcome.

Anger: the Ligament of the Soul. “This kind of anger shows inner strength and self-restraint. Thomas Fuller, a famous Puritan preacher, once described [godly] anger as one of ligament of the soul. Anger that is controlled by God and directed toward his cause will make you a stronger person and give you the courage to stretch like a ligament and do what is right.”¹⁸

Righteous anger in marriage or otherwise is possible only with a surrender of my heart and mind to the lordship of Jesus. Without the Lord Jesus guiding my heart in my marriage, I can do nothing godly with anything, including my anger (Jn 15:5). Yet with Christ, I can harness the energy of my anger to benefit my marriage, to protect and encourage my spouse, and to grow with my spouse on my hardest, most irritating days. I can see Christ's holy anger toward sin that drove him to give up his life and be crucified on the cross for his bride. I want to use my anger in that kind of redemptive way for my spouse. God help me use my anger in *that* way.

EXAMPLES OF RIGHTEOUS ANGER

The Example of Christ

Clearly, the perfect example of submitted anger is our Lord. Christ “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). That means his anger led him always to glorify God and never to sin.

Christ was never married, yet he lived his life in order to pursue and redeem his bride (Eph 5:25). He laid aside his glory and took on humanity in order to rescue us from the iron claws of death, and we are to imitate that humility by counting others “more significant” than ourselves (Phil 1:1-11). Do not think Christ as God in human flesh was always only meek and mild. He was those things, but at times, Christ was perfectly angry, and we are to “walk in his steps” (1 Pet 2:21).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Wiersbe, *Angry People*, 13.

We need to remember that Christ used his anger to magnify the glory of God. Christ was angry at the **hardness of people's hearts** (Mk 3:1-5).

The Lord was angry when he **cleansed the Temple**. Righteous anger ate the Lord up when He saw that instead of worship going on in the house of God, the leaders were taking advantage of God's people and **shucking** them for every penny (Lk 13:13-17).

Christ was **angry** when little children were being kept from the Gospel.

Yet, when it came to **defending himself**, after Peter cut off the ear of **Malchus**, the high priest's servant, he said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another world." And he healed Malchus' ear.

Yet, when he was "wounded for our transgressions" and personally attacked and crucified, "like a lamb before her shearers he was silent, and he opened not his mouth." He cried out "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

The Example of John the Baptist

Another example of submitted, righteous anger is John the Baptist. John called for people to repent and to show their repentance by being baptized. There were many Jewish leaders of the Pharisees and Sadducees that were making a mockery of it, and coming hypocritically just for show. He spoke to them with righteous anger, saying: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Mt 3:7-8).

What a way to evangelize! John the Baptist is willing to confront even religious hypocrites with the demands of the Gospel. He says if you are really repentant your life will surely show it. Here was a man concerned not with himself, but for the purity and clarity of the Gospel.

Anger ought to arise in marriage when we see things that are not as they should be. Sometimes hard things need to be said at times. Have you ever considered that you God gives you anger to solve issues and set a right course in your marriage for his honor and glory? Don't misunderstand – just because John the Baptist had a creative name ("generation of vipers") for his audience to awaken them doesn't mean it is wise to use the same method in our marriage. John was a prophet and the forerunner of the Messiah. Nevertheless, we ought to imitate his zealous heart in desiring each person to understand their true standing before God.

And yet, most of our anger in marriage is not focused on pleasing God but the idolatry of pleasing self. I would say in a great percentage of the anger in my life personally has emanated from an unsubmitted heart looking to guard idols instead of guarding the glory of God. The anger in most marriages proceeds from the defensiveness and pride that guards idols. It is our goal as Christians to put of selfish anger and put on the kind of anger that John the Baptist had – an anger fueled by the glory of God.

The Example of Paul Confronting Peter

Consider Paul's example of righteous anger that is submitted to the Lord that leads to confrontation of Peter. Paul confronted the apostle Peter in righteous anger because of Peter's racism within the church. Peter was causing disunity in the church by refusing to eat with people outside the Jewish race. Paul says: "...when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face,

because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy" (Gal 2:11-13). Paul's righteous anger led him to confront Peter before the whole crowd. Paul says, "But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?'" (Gal 2:14). Paul's righteous anger leads him to urgently confront Peter for the Gospel's sake. Peter's racism could have caused a huge rift in the church between the Jews and Gentiles, but in God's grace and plan, here is a good example of how righteous anger brought a swift conclusion to something that could have torn the early church apart.

So, in marriage, there are many things that need to be confronted urgently. We are told to "be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil" (Eph 4:26-27). Godly anger can fuel the Christian for a godly purpose – instead of to hold a grudge holding, anger can help us address a matter with urgency to swiftly lay it to rest that peace may reign again. This is especially needful in Christian marriage where we are called to serve one another more than any other relationship.

- Don't **Curse** Your Anger
- Don't **Nurse** Your Anger
- Don't **Rehearse** Your Anger
- Don't **Converse** About Your Anger
- Don't **Disperse** Your Anger
- Do **Reverse** Your Anger

4. HOW TO DETHRONE SINFUL ANGER

(1) DON'T CURSE YOUR ANGER

Anger is also an emotion God has given to all humanity as a tool to maintain a passion for holiness and righteousness. We all have anger in our lives. It is something that exists because things are not right in the universe. Let your anger drive you to a solution for the problem.

Anger is a powerful weapon, and the misuse and abuse of it is at the blazing center of hurting and wounded marriages, church members, family members, etc. That gives us the temptation to curse our anger and be passive in life. Don't do that. Ephesians 4:26 says, "Be angry and sin not." Use anger to motivate you with strength to do God's will. Let godly anger motivate you to have courage to do what is right. Don't curse your anger, bless God for it and funnel it toward godly purposes. Be angry at bad theology and let it motivate you to work toward promoting good theology. Be angry at the depravity of our culture and let it give you to love people enough to tell them the truth in love. Be angry at fatherlessness and what that does to vulnerable single mothers and those children who have been left as orphans. Be angry! Be good and angry. But do not sin. Control your anger, don't curse it.

As I said, **anger is a powerful weapon**. That's why we need come to the subject of righteous anger with care, like a team of weapons inspectors disarming a powerful bomb in the middle of a bustling village. The bomb is meant to protect the village, not destroy it. It is meant to be outside the village, not within it. It is to be used against the enemy, not against our families. How can we use godly anger for the purposes God intended?

Anger is used to protect our love relationship with God and with our spouse. We as men are called to use our strength to protect our wife, not aim our anger at her. Anger is not meant to destroy your relationship with God or your spouse, but to protect those relationships.

(2) DON'T NURSE YOUR ANGER

Ephesians 4:26 (ESV), "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger," Use Your Anger to Solve Problems Biblically.

Don't Blow up! Don't Clam up! Don't Spiral Down! Bridle Your Anger! Use it to become more productive. Make sure you don't Nurse your anger!

Hebrews 12:15 (ESV), "See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled"

Living with a Monster

When I was first married, I thought I was quite far along in my Christian walk. At that time I had been a Christian then for eight years. I had read through the Bible quite aggressively, and I sincerely wanted to please the Lord. Then something truly awful happened. I realized I was living with a **monster**. And **the monster was me!** I was **nursing** anger, but I thought I was being righteous.

I had no idea how very selfish I could be when I didn't get my way. I found out that when I really wanted my way, I could give my dear wife 100 reasons from the Bible why I was right. I would "prosecute" my case, and I almost never lost. I thought I was leading my wife and being the head of my home, but I was really doing damage to my wife. I found soon enough that I wasn't comfortable just talking about the Bible with her. I didn't have the spiritual connection I had with her before we were married. After about ten years of marriage, while I was reading my Bible one day, the light came on. The Scripture was opened to James 3:13-18. This is what I read:

"Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

Immediately I realized that James was talking about two very different ways of living. There was the life of humble wisdom in contrast to the life of "**disorder and every vile practice**." I was pretty sure which one I fit into. What also struck me were the roots of such behavior: bitterness and selfishness. In all of my discussions with my wife, I felt like I was right, and to

top it off I was using the Bible. Many times I would be bitter that my wife just didn't see things the same way I did. I used to think the problem was her. It wasn't her at all. It was me. What really brought me to a deep conviction of my own sin was the declaration from James that using the Bible in a selfish, unloving, and at times bitter way was "earthly, unspiritual, and demonic". Wow. I was doing the devil's work. I knew the Word, but I wasn't allowing the life of the Spirit to lead me.

Sinful anger has the potential to derail your growth in Christ. Sinful anger must be dethroned. But how do we do it?

(3) DON'T REHEARSE YOUR ANGER

Ephesians 4:26–27, "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil." If you let the sun go down on your anger, you are going to be getting counseling from the devil. You will be giving him a place in your home to counsel you. He is the accuser of the brethren.

A healthy Christian life will never be devoid of anger, and it is not meant to be. Anger is an important part of our sanctification. Disagreements, disappointments, and even at times despair are to lead us to trust more and more in Christ. Often anger flashes in us when our expectations are not met, and we need to realize, my spouse is not my savior. My job, my church, my pastor, my brothers and sisters in Christ are not my savior. Christ alone is my Savior. Don't rehearse your anger. Get it right before the sun goes down.

Focus your fight on the **proper enemy**. "Give no opportunity to the devil" (**Eph 4:27**). We need to solve problems biblically or we will be taken captive by the devil (Like Christian in doubting castle).

For the Christian there is a real battle – we have a warfare mentality. "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (**Eph 6:11-12**).

Our anger ought not to be against our spouse, a brother in Christ, our co-workers but against sin, self, the devil and the world system that opposes our life of holiness. We need to bring the fight to the right place. I need to realize that the world, the flesh and the devil are fighting against my marriage. I need to put the flesh and the world's satanic thoughts to death. And I need to love my neighbor, not hate my neighbor.

I truly believe Clearnote Church is a good example of funneling your anger in the right direction. This congregation stands as lights in a dark world. I see very clear teaching going forth from the pulpit and the blogosphere. I see attacks against the enemy and deep love for sinners. The love from this place is overwhelming. But with the enemy, you all are ruthless! Amen! That's the proper way to funnel your anger.

(4) DON'T CONVERSE ABOUT YOUR ANGER

Ephesians 4:29-30, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

Proverbs 15:1, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

(5) DON'T DISPURSE YOUR ANGER

Ephesians 4:31, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”

God says take out the trash of bitterness and wrath and anger, etc. Put it away from you like the trash of the soul.

Wise Solomon said, **Proverbs 19:11**, “Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.”

God will disperse his anger. Leave it to him. Indeed, God “has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him [Jesus Christ] from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

It is for our benefit that we should find Jesus as our hiding place and “kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him” (Psa 2:12).

You can rest in the fact that God is angry, and ***you don't have to do his job for him.*** He promises to set everything straight in the Day of his wrath.

My anger is often my desire for personal vengeance. That needs to die. Anger is a daily reality because of the unredeemed part of me, in which dwells no good thing. There is a selfish part of me that needs to die. May God give us grace to live by the truth of Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

This is clearly the fruit of the new birth. You cannot surrender your anger to God and do good to your enemy without a new nature, a new heart. But you have the power to do this in Christ!

Paul clearly instructs us what to do with our anger: “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ 20 To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:19-21). We are called to go beyond overlooking evil, and return good when evil is done to us. Some Bible scholars have traced the metaphor to an Egyptian practice of carrying a tray of burning coals on one's head as a sign of contrition.¹⁹ The

¹⁹ Moo, D. J. (1996). *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

“coals of fire” then, refer perhaps to the feeling of shame our enemies will experience when we return good for evil. The hope is to lead them to God's grace.²⁰

It takes a supernatural power from God to love your enemy. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:44-48**, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

You may say “Well, I don't feel like being good when evil is done to me.” I don't feel like going into the office every day, but I do. I don't feel like brushing my teeth every day, but I do. If we all did what we *felt like* doing, how frightening would that be? We obey God, not because we *feel like it*, but because we love him. “If you love me keep my commandments” (Jn 14:15).

(6) DO REVERSE YOUR ANGER

Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Romans 12:21, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Christ's selflessness is seen in three ways: through his kindness, His tenderhearted love, and through his gracious forgiveness.

When you are wronged, you need to be kind, gentle and good, like God is. This is exactly what Jesus tells us to do in **Matthew 5:44-45**, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven”. What are we to do with people who hurt us?

1. **Love** them.
2. **Bless** them.
3. Do **good** to them.
4. **Pray** for them.

Suffering injustice does hurt. When someone tries to get even with you, or slanders you, or betrays you, the injustice of it can oppress your soul. Yet the Bible clearly says we can and should bear under such suffering, for three reasons:

1. We are following the path of Jesus. He went all the way to the cross to suffer wrong. Submit to God's plan and you align yourself with the spirit of Jesus—the spirit of humble submission.

²⁰ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 556). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

2. We give God an opportunity to display his grace in our lives. And God promises that his grace is sufficient for every affliction (2 Cor 12:9).
3. We can display our hope in another world. We rest in the assurance that justice deferred one day will be justice served—when Jesus, the Righteous Judge, returns to rule).²¹

WHAT IF I KEEP FAILING?

Get Help.

What if you keep failing? Get help. Men we all need accountability. Your wife needs someone she can call when you get out of hand. You need to give her permission to text an elder who can call you and hold you accountable.

Realize God's Grace.

"The godly may trip seven times, but they will get up again. But one disaster is enough to overthrow the wicked" (Prov 24:16, NLT). You will not have total victory over sinful anger in your marriage until Jesus comes, but you as a child of God will persevere in Christlikeness because of the Spirit of God inside you preserving you depraved selfishness and conforming you in the image of Christ. "Therefore... let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:1-2).

Remember Who You Are.

Remember who you are. Read Ephesians. You are not what you once were. You are a child of God. You are no longer an angry, hateful person. You are filled with "the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" and you must persevere and that you "may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph 3:19). God told King Asa when he was so tired of cleaning out the idols from the countryside of Judah: "But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded" (2 Chron 15:7). Consider the many promises of those who refuse to give up!

"Though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand" (Psa 37:24).

Don't Trust Your Anger.

The Bible assumes that the natural wrath of man is depraved, and as we have already seen, has many warnings against it. Here are a few warnings by way of review:

"A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression" (Prov 29:22).

"Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil" (Psa 37:8-9).

"Good sense makes one slow to anger" (Prov 19:11).

So many other verses could be listed. We must be warned that anger is a very dangerous thing for anyone who has any remanence of sin still dwelling in us (Jer 17:9).

²¹ Erwin Lutzer. *When You've Been Wronged: Moving from Bitterness to Forgiveness* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2007), 108.

“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?” (Jer 17:9).

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding” (Prov 3:5). Don't trust your heart. As righteous as you think you are, you ought to doubt yourself in this area. Love thinks and believes the best of all things about people (1 Cor 13:7).

Always Judge Yourself Most Harshly.

Another warning to those who might think they are experiencing righteous anger – watch out for hypocrisy. Self-righteousness is not righteousness at all. Pride is the underlying seedbed of the self-righteousness that judges others without first admitting my own serious flaws and failures.

“First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye” (Mt. 7:5). We should be very, very hesitant to act on anything we perceive to be righteous anger. And even when we do act, it is important to bring

Make Sure You Have Gathered All the Information.

How easy it is to sit in judgment over our spouse in the moment, and then later on, we find out we didn't have all the information, and our judgment was wrong. Our anger was misdirected. “Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you” (Mt 7:1-2).

How often do we come to rash and harsh conclusions without taking the time to gather all the facts? How often are we easily offended and hurt without having all the information?

Often we sit in the seat of God as if our surface judgments are accurate! We often trust our first impressions. That's dangerous! We often have a very high view of ourselves. We believe God is on our side. We think we know the Bible. We've grown. We begin to think more highly than we ought to think. Perhaps that we are the spiritual elite. I'm right, and everyone else is wrong.

We ought never judge rashly or superficially. We ought not make snap judgments of people's hearts based on mere circumstances, or what we perceive. We can sincerely perceive a lot of things, but most of the time we are sincerely wrong. What is Jesus saying by “Do not judge”? He expresses it a different way in John 7:24, “Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”

Those who make snap, superficial judgments on others live in folly and shame according to Proverbs 18:13, “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.” The husband or wife who judges without getting all the information is foolish, negligent, and even reckless.

Conclusion

Dr. Ahmed's story. He was raised a Muslim. Raised to hate. Raised to be angry. Met Christ studying English in New Zealand. If God can change him, he can change anyone! Now he is the gentlest person I know. Used to spew hatred and now spews love. Get his book at meccatochrist.org.