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Peeling Back the Layers of Anger

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For 35 years my father-in-law worked for what was a Catholic hospital but is now the county hospital in San Jose, California looking at the human heart. And he's a cardiac stenographer, and so he takes these images and these 3D and 4D images and looks at them and he actually helps diagnose issues or problems of the heart. We were talking over break over the holiday and he was sharing just some disturbing trends that he's seen over the past number of years in his field. And he was talking about how he's seen more and more people come into his office and they're coming in not because of natural aging issues, but they're coming in specifically because of life decisions. Cardiomyopathy is a disease of the heart muscle that makes it harder for your heart to pump out blood to the rest of the body. So the amount of young people he said experiencing cardiomyopathy coming into his office and they've got great arteries and they've got no congenital issues and they've got the structure is good of the heart, but the heart is failing to be able to pump blood out because of life decisions that they're making because of decisions to put toxic things into the body. And so he says, you look at them and they look completely healthy. But when you get underneath the surface and you look inward because of what they're ingesting, because of the decisions that they're making, they're dying because of the condition of their heart.

According to the CDC, there are 6 million people in the U S that experienced some level of heart disease. Now half of those people will die within five years after receiving a diagnosis. Now here's the crazy stat right here. After hearing a diagnosis, 10% of those people will actually change their lifestyle. So you sit down with a doctor, the doctor tells you, okay, your lifestyle as is your heart as is he basically tells you of your impending an imminent death that is coming. After hearing that conversation, nine out of 10 people say, ah, I think I'll continue doing what I'm doing, that seems like a good path. That just doesn't make sense, right? It makes no sense as I hear that the only hope is to be reconditioned from their rhythm, from their habits. They've been oriented their way of life. Now they need a disorientation of the heart, don't they?

As Pastor Mark framed last week, Jesus walks us through a process of disorientation in Matthew chapter five and following. And over the course of these chapters he takes us through the process of making these two statements; "You've heard it's been said, but I say to you this". And so we got a great framing last week and now we want to step in for the next six weeks.

Commentator F. F. Bruce wrote a book years ago called 'The Hard Sayings of Jesus. And he talks about each one of them, but 10% of the hard sayings are right here in this chapter, Matthew chapter five and so we're going to dive in today. So for six straight weeks, we're going to unpack each one of these statements. But today we start with a very first statement and it's found in verse 21 of Matthew chapter five and it says this...

²¹ *"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder.'"*

It's a reference to the Ten Commandments. And this is commandment number six right here that we're reading. And this is a commandment that most everyone in society can agree upon. And this is a hard thing to do, isn't it? Like if we're all gonna agree on in society in terms of a good moral rule, there's a whole lot of discussion and a whole lot of things that would be up in the air. But this is actually a commandment that I think most of us can get behind, right? Like, can we all agree you shall not murder, right? Are you with me? Yeah, and if someone's not raising their hand next to you, like go ahead and move seats or you know, go where you need to go.

The other thing about this is, you know, it's an area where most of us can feel good about ourselves, right. Now, the other of the Ten Commandments like coveting, ah, shoot, and stealing, well, I did take that one and lying, well just here and there, but murder, no, I would never murder. That's not who I am. That's bad people that murder. No, I'm over here. I'm good. So we're all good, right? When we read this, we feel better about ourselves.

Verse 21 *“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’*

Again, a statement that is true and a statement that we would agree with, but notice something here in the scriptures, the Pharisees, the scribes, they've added on, haven't they? This is the original command, the Ten Commandments, thou shall not murder. They've added something on here often was the case in Old Testament that secondary law was added to original law, so there are 613 Old Testament laws. Now we only had 10 original laws, 10 commandments, so there's over 600 secondary laws that are put into place and they're called the Tradition of the Elders. You probably do this as well with your kids. You might have certain rules, right, original laws, original rules, if you will, and an example would be don't whack your sibling, right? We can all get on board with that one. Or maybe, I should say, don't hit your sibling since it will stay away from murder, but don't hit your sibling, right? This is the primary rule in the house, but then you do something else. You create secondary rules to support the original rule, so if you hit your sibling, you're going to have to deal with a consequence. If you hit your sibling, you're going to, there will be discipline or there'll be a timeout or whatever you do in your house. You create these secondary rules to support the protection of the original rule.

Now, what's the primary goal of the original rule? The primary goal is right relationship, right? We're seeking good relationships. So listen, if you hit your brother, if you hit your sister, number one, that's going to hurt them, number two, you're creating distrust. And this family thing is a really big deal. God has given us as gifts to one another to grow in relationship and so when you miss that. But here's the thing as parents, if I'm not careful as a parent, I can now allow the secondary rule to become the primary goal. And it's a reduction of the heart of the primary rule. This is what happens by the Pharisees addition in the scripture. It had reduced murder to an act that would be punished by a local magistrate. It had stripped it of its morality. It had stripped God out of the very equation of seeking God and being responsible unto God and had made it just local punitive damage. It lost the interpretation of the heart of the law. So Jesus, in his disorientation, he's saying this, he saying it's not just about the letter of the law. It's about the spirit of the law and the spirit that that is behind the law.

Verse 21 *"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'* ²² *But I tell you (This is this disorientation, right) that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.*

And the Pharisees understanding of the law; 'We're doing good. We're looking good. Yeah, I haven't done that. I've refrained from doing that and so I'm good under the letter of the law.' But Jesus says, no, you have reduced and confined the law in a way that has pulled the purpose out of it. Is it possible that we have a tendency to interpret scripture in a way that makes scripture conform to our external actions instead of our internal wanderings conforming to what the scripture teaches? Can we evaluate that? Jesus is saying just because you haven't arrived at the final destination of murder doesn't mean that you aren't on the road. It's the same seed that is used to build up murder, that same seed you have allowed in your own heart. It's a seed of anger. It's a seed of hatred that we allow to kind of grow up.

So the first level of understanding of the scripture is not to commit murder. The next level, the underneath level is to not commit murder in your heart, to not give into hatred within your own heart. Jesus goes on to give an example at heart level anger in verse 22.

²² *But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court.*

The word Raca means idiot or stupid or blockhead. It's demeaning to another person. It's taking away the value of another person. And anyone who says you fool, which is the Greek word, morai, we get the word moron from.

"'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."

When we react in such anger, we're killing with our words, aren't we? And some of us are really good at it, right? We actually might, some of us might have a profession because we are so good at using our words to cut or to slice or to filet and our goal, it's not reconciliation. Our goal is not growth of another person, if we're honest. Our goal is to tear down. Our goal is to make them look bad, to make us look good. Our goal is purely selfish. But the scripture say in Proverbs 18:21, it says your tongue has the power to what? To give life and death. Evaluate your words, your thoughts. What are you adding to the cultural conversation right now? What are you adding to your neighborhood conversation? What are you adding? What do you bring into your..., are you adding to death and darkness that is being advanced? Are you pouring life and light and goodness and the love of Christ and to those around you?

Hatred or anger is often born out of an unmet need or expectation. You've worked your rear off for that promotion, but you didn't get it. I mean, your parents are you kidding me? After so many years you're still doing that thing. Why do you do that? You know I can't stand that. Or your spouse, you've talked him 70 times about if you could just do this. It's really important. After a while it just becomes so upsetting, like why don't you get it? Is this intentionally hurtful towards me and this is out of my control. What is happening? And we put ourselves in a certain position at this point, don't we? That ignored expectation has gone from disappointment to frustration to

anger and then what do we do? We get comfortable in our hot reactions, don't we? We react hot every time cause we got something to say and here's what you've done over and over and I'm going to put you in your place. And then it starts a cycle because then it happens again, they do it again and I get hotter and it happens again and we get hot and we go through this, then we reconcile and then we go through the cycle again. It goes over and over and over again. Sinclair Ferguson said to kill with a knife or engage in character assassination is in part and parcel of the same spiritual sickness. Listen to your anger. Listen to it. What's it telling you? It's usually a distress signal for something on a much deeper level.

One of our leaders, Hannah shared some of her story with me and she was talking about how she felt consistently unseen, unheard, misunderstood in her marriage and just patterns of kind of responding in anger. And there was pattern over a longer period of time of that, but, but she could kind of control it to the point where she was okay and satisfied and then she had kids. And you can't control kids, can you, right. It's that saying that, you know, marriage reveals the selfishness in your heart. Kids reveal the anger in your heart, right. Maybe that's where it is and God help us, right. And I [inaudible] sometimes your beard gets caught on the mic. So she's sharing about this and she said and my feelings were more and more exasperated through this. But I had the right to be angry, like things were done against me. I was wronged. This was my right, but I noticed the anger getting more frequent and at the same time I felt, I started to feel controlled by this anger. Through a prayer with the Sozo prayer team, she said, I had a breakthrough. I realized these feelings were bigger than my marriage. I was dealing with a lifetime of holding on to anger that I needed to go back and name and forgive. And I realized that I had gone from experiencing anger, to seeing myself as angry by nature. She said this, "my problem had become my identity and I would speak to my loved ones out of my negative identity. Truth be told, anger is not a part of who God created me to be. When I agreed with it, it became a stronghold, but God gave me beautiful things in exchange for my anger. God gave me the gift of knowing that I am a delight. Anger now has no hold on me through an embrace of God's forgiveness and embrace and release of history. And now I'm trying to work on reconditioning my responses. I have hope. I have peace. Life is about grace, not shame. I find delight in the Lord and I live his delight towards others."

Don't you feel a little convicted? And I'll be honest this week with this message; maybe it's my own issues I was wrestling. Maybe better the Holy Spirit was wrestling in me. When I hear Hannah's testimony, I feel convicted. God forgive me for continuing a generation of my own issues and my own anger coming out. And I toggle between, I'm just riffing right now, I'm sorry, I toggle between anger and guilt, right? And Lord help me not to pass that on to my kids. But, you go from anger, which is, it's your fault to guilt to it's my fault. Anger, you owe me. To guilt I owe you. And it becomes unhealthy, doesn't it?

The Spirit of the Lord came to give freedom though. Come on, I'm gonna speak that to somebody today. He gives freedom in the midst of it. Now listen, we talked about one idea earlier and I want to take it kind of to a next level. We talked about the primary and the secondary rules, but let's also talk about the primary and the secondary emotions.

So anger is a secondary emotion to other emotions like hurts. So show me an angry person and I'll show you a hurt person. If you find anger becoming common, try to look underneath the

hood, try to see what's going on underneath. Anger is kind of the tip of the iceberg, isn't it? It's what you see. It's the most obvious thing that's showing up, but there's a whole lot happening underneath the surface that we need to work on. What's the space between anger and action for you? For instance, Jamelle thinks he has an anger problem. Whenever Crystal asks him to do something, he snaps back at her and he doesn't want to react this way, but it's just kind of a natural reaction and that's what's going to happen. And so he starts to think about his anger issues and he begins to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to him. And then he starts to reflect in the Spirit and what is revealed to him over time is that he realizes every time she asks him to do something he realizes that he feels like he's doing so much that he can't achieve more and he's going to fail himself. He's going to fail her if things are continually added on top of those things. And so he's choosing subconsciously that I would rather have an angry response than feel like a failure to myself and feel like I'm actually failing the person that I love so dearly.

And so for him to embrace his anger and invite God into that and invite the Holy Spirit to reconcile what is happening inside of him. What happens is actually they grow closer through this experience. They come closer together. Recognizing his anger led him to understand that it was a signal for a specific need a need to communicate his time and his abilities.

What's beneath the surface of your anger? What's in between anger and action? This said, is anger bad in and of itself? When we look at the scripture, we see different examples. We see in Mark chapter three verse five it says, Jesus looked around at the Pharisees in anger. And the book of John Jesus makes this whip of cords and drives out the money changer. And Ephesians chapter four scriptures say, in your anger, do not sin.

Pastor Jenni Clayville said it this way. We all are going to get angry, but what we do with anger is really what matters. She gave me permission to share some of her story, it's pretty intense. As a child, Jenni's mom would curse her, would physically hurt her, would tell her that she wished she would have aborted her. She would abuse her physically, emotionally, even spiritually, she would abuse her. And as she got older, Jenni struggled with the lies in her head because of her childhood, that she was a mistake, that she was worthless, that she had no value in life. And initially she thought in order to be right with God, she just had to kind of be okay and be right with things and kind of gloss over it. Okay, all right, I'm done with that and that's in the past and she thought she had to let go, but she found actually she needed to do the opposite. She needed to learn to grieve and to be angry. And listen to what she said, she said this, "I was grieving that my childhood had been taken from me. As I allowed God to speak to me and my anger I found that in a weird way, I was angry at myself that I let it happen or didn't say what needed to say or I shouldn't have said that. Embracing God and my anger allowed me to somehow forgive, to forgive myself, to forgive my mom. Anger is a part of our path to recovery, but it becomes a crossroads. I either would decide to let anger slowly take over all the real estate in my head or I would embrace forgiveness and move towards healing. I've forgiven my mom, but I'm still forgiving my mom. In other words, I still struggle. But I have to re-choose forgiveness over and over again. Forgiveness is not overnight, but somehow my deep experience of hurt, embrace of anger, embrace of forgiveness has allowed me to give greater grace and minister more beautifully to others in my life.

We're all going to get angry, but what we do with anger is what really matters. At the crossroads that Jenni was talking about, we often allow that anger to turn towards something else, don't we? It becomes bitterness. It becomes rage if we allow ourselves to fester, if we allow ourselves to live in that place and we desire retribution, don't we? We desire payback. We have been hurt so somebody else therefore needs to hurt as well, and this is what we seek. This is what we desire, but the reality is that the hurt can never be paid back. Yet, many of us spend years of our life focused on someone or something, right? Just giving our life in a stronghold and giving them power to sabotage our future, our future opportunities, our future relationships are sabotaged because we won't let go of this thing.

Paul said in Ephesians 4:31 *"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."*

Get rid of is an assumption, isn't it? It means that anger will come. Malice will come, but when it comes, you can't live in it. You can't reside it. You can't make it your address because it will begin to take over your life. So how are we supposed to do this though? How are we supposed to forgive those who have so deeply hurt us? It's not my fault my boss's incapable, my family is incorrigibly, my spouse is immovable. The blame is theirs, right? And so what do we do? We get in this victim mentality.

Now, some of us are victims. Something was done to us and that has happened and we learn and we try to deal with that. But we can't allow an occurrence or a season when we were the victim we can't allow that to begin to take over and rule our mindset. We will not have a victim mindset. We've got to take it back. We've got to go to the Lord and find him in the midst of it allowing him to bring eternity back into our heart.

Here's how Andy Stanley put it in his must read book, 'Enemies of the Heart'. He said, here's a question every angry man and woman needs to consider. How long are you going to allow people you don't even like people who are no longer in your life, maybe even people who aren't even alive anymore to control your life? *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."* Paul spoke these words not as the great apostle. He spoke them as a victim. He spoke them after being thrown in prison, unjustly accused. And it was about a year before he even got a trial. That's when he speaks these words and here's what he says next and here's what if we say it, we choose not to be the victim and verse 32 *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*

Remember what Jenni said? She said, I've forgiven and I continue to forgive. Forgiveness is a decision to not live in resentment. Forgiveness is not forgetting. It's not accepting somebody else's sin or encouraging that to continue on as a pattern, but forgiveness can have boundaries, right? Forgiveness is letting go of resentment though. It's releasing that and the truth is that we don't heal in order to forgive, do we? No, we forgive in order to heal. The forgiveness actually comes first and then it ignites healing in our pathway, but we have to start there.

Now I want to give just a few things, maybe you could jot these down. I'll go really quickly here, but I want you to jot these down and think through them. Pray through them this week or today if you can.

- Number one, how do we forgive? Name the offense; be real with the deep hurts that you've experienced. Don't just gloss over them. If you generically forgive, you'll have generic freedom right. No, go in and be specific about those things. So name the offense.
- Number two, name the emotion. My mother's words cut so deep. It made me feel as though I was worthless and unloved and had nothing to offer. Be specific. As you name these things, it's hard to truly forgive from the heart if we're not aware of what's really going on in our heart. So name the offense, name the emotion.
- And then three, release your pain. After you've fully embraced your hurts and your pain and the past and what has happened, you got to let go. Maybe it means writing them down on a piece of paper then burning that paper, or throwing it away, or talking to a counselor and releasing or talking to a friend and then letting go and prayer. But, say the words you forgive. Say those words. Pray those words to God. God, I forgive for this what specifically happened? I forgive this person. I release them right now. And I release myself and I receive your forgiveness and I forgive that person that you have placed in my life.
- Number four, choose forgiveness. I guarantee something will trigger your memory that will bring that thing back into play after you've forgiven, it will come back up. A situation will happen that was like an old situation, oh here we go again and you'll be pulled back into the cycle. So two ways that we usually deal with it, we either just go ahead and enter back into the equation or we just try to get rid of it, no, don't think about it and let it go; avoid, avoid, avoid. Don't do either. No, allow the emotions to come in. Allow yourself to remember. But then do something. Make the same decision that you made in prayer to forgive. I'm feeling this, I'm frustrated by this experience but I chose to forgive and I let go again. And every time you do that you will get a little bit stronger in the process of forgiveness. Release, they don't owe me. It's done.

What are you going to do with your anger? Tim Keller said, and its uncorrupted origin, anger is actually a form of love. Verse 23 *"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."*

First level understanding of this scripture, do not murder. Second level, do not murder in your heart. Third level is this. Try to release anger from your own heart, but then go and help others to release murder and anger from their hearts. It's the only time in scripture that it says, go ahead and get up from church and you can leave now, right? Go ahead and leave early. And it's, it's kind of crazy the situation that they're being called into because they have traveled a long way, a pilgrimage to get to the temple. It would be like standing up from service right now remembering an offense. Going and getting in your car, going and picking up your whole family, then driving to California to take care of that offense that you remember. That's the length that is called to in this scripture. What Jesus is also doing he's turning a negative statement into a positive. Do not murder is not just about the refrain of doing a negative thing. No, it's about the pursuit of the positive towards reconciling with another person. Notice he doesn't say if you have something against your brother, but if your brother has something against you. Uh oh, this is starting to hurt a little bit now. For me to go, I'll try to forgive cause you have...but others to go and reach out and reconcile.

Our selfish impulse is to say, if they're mad at me though, I'm here, they can show up. Come on, come on and find me. No, Jesus says, no, you go. You go pursue and do what you can to pursue it. Romans 12 says, Paul says, *"As far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."* Do what's in your power.

Reverend Dr. King said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

I want to invite our worship teams to come and all locations and we're going to prepare to seek the Lord in reflection together. Dr. King was tested in this. His home was bombed not long after that and people were in tension outside of his home when he showed up. He got up; they were ready to start a riot. He got up and he started to preach a message about loving your enemies. He quelled the crowd, but he was wrestling internally. He said, I could feel the anger rising, but he said to himself, you must not allow yourself to become bitter.

Ezekiel 36:26 *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."*

How's your heart today? If a spiritual cardiac stenographer were here, what would the images show of your heart? And so we're just going to invite the Holy Spirit in and we're going to take a time right now of reflection and put some questions up on the screen. We're just gonna give you a few moments with yourself and with the spirit to dig underneath the surface of the iceberg.

Psalms 139:23 says, *"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

Let's seek the Lord together.