

WHAT LIES BENEATH

GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE
April 6, 2014



Discussion Guide

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Ephesians 4.26-27; Romans 12.17-21

Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- What makes you angry, really angry? What happens when you get angry? What is the experience of anger like for you personally?

Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Use the notes to describe the nature of anger.
- Read Ephesians 4.26-27 aloud slowly. Pause and consider the things that make you really angry. Read Ephesians 4.26-27 once more.

- What warnings does Paul provide concerning anger?
- When you consider these warnings, what issues seem to be involved in the experience of anger? Where, if at all, do you see these issues playing out around you?
- Sinning in our anger has been described as responding to the wrong we experience with another wrong in order to make things right. Would you agree or disagree with this statement? Could you elaborate?
- What might it look like to be angry and to sin out of your anger?
- Do you feel that it is easy or difficult to be angry and to avoid sin? Could you elaborate?
- What ways, if any, have you sought to control your anger so that you do not sin? How effective have these been? What has the experience of seeking to control your anger been like for you as a person?
- Read Romans 12.17-21 aloud slowly.
- What alternative responses does Paul provide to the personal experience of wrongdoing?
- Do these alternatives feel satisfactory to you? Would you elaborate?
- In what ways, if any, do these responses pave the way to be angry and not sin?
- What effect might these alternative anger responses have in our lives and relationships? What, if anything, keeps them from being the norm?
- What might this group do to encourage the response of blessing in the midst of anger?

Context and Background

Anger

Anger is the emotional response we experience when we encounter circumstances in our lives that are not as we judge they should be; that is, we grow angry when we experience displeasure with our surroundings. The emotional response of anger can range from general irritation to outright rage. As an emotional response, anger is normal, but throughout history anger has been catalogued as a vice. This trajectory is also seen in Scripture. Anger is to be avoided as it leads to quarrelling (Proverbs 27.4). Steps are to be taken to avoid stirring up anger (Proverbs 15.1). Angry people are to be avoided (Proverbs 22.24) and anger is to be put off as something that does not come from God (Galatians 5.19-21; Ephesians 4.31-32; and Colossians 3.8). The clear trajectory is that anger is dangerous. However, there is another trajectory in Scripture that considers the positive nature of anger.

Scripture is clear that God experiences the emotion of anger with both individuals and nations (Numbers 21.6 and Isaiah 10.5). God's anger seems to stem from instances in which his holy nature or desires for people are violated. His anger can bring consequences, but then his anger quickly passes (Psalm 30.5; Isaiah 26.20), usually after the situation which brought about his anger has been addressed. With God, anger is portrayed as an emotion which motivates God to move for that which is right. This type of anger has been defined as "righteous indignation" and is seen in the person and ministry of Jesus (Mark 3.5; 10.14). It is also permitted of those who follow Jesus (James 1.19 and Ephesians 4.26-27). This type of anger motivates God's people to action, particularly to actions of justice. However, anger is like dynamite. It can do much good, but must be handled with care, for it can also rage out of control (Ephesians 4.26-27). Anger is not to be quickly sought (James 1.19)

nor is it to be nursed (Ephesians 4.27). Rather, anger is an opportunity to make room for God to move, allowing his anger to bring about what is right (Romans 12.17-21).

The Text

Ephesians 4.26-27: Handling Dynamite

In Ephesians 4.17, Paul begins to describe the process of becoming one who lives in light of the personal experience of Jesus' redemptive movement (Ephesians 4.1). This process involves putting off old ways of being, being renewed at the core of one's person, followed by the intentional putting on of new ways of being modeled on God's own life (Ephesians 4.20-24). Paul then enters into a discussion of those aspects of life which must be considered in the process of putting on and putting off.

The second element Paul addresses is the issue of anger. In his letters, Paul typically labels anger as a vice (Ephesians 4.31; Galatians 5.19-21; and Colossians 3.8). However, Paul does not command that the followers of Jesus completely put off anger. Rather, he commands them to put off sin in the midst of their anger. (Interestingly, in the language of the New Testament, Paul commands believers to be angry!) Rather than a simple concession, "I suppose you will be angry," Paul seems to desire that some things stir the followers of Jesus up. (See Anger.) What is Paul forbidding here? Throughout Scripture, sin is the primary reason God becomes angry; that is, when something happens that is not the way it should be, God's emotional response is anger. . Therefore, Paul is permitting this same emotional response, probably in reaction to that which is not the way it should be. However, Paul forbids the followers of Jesus from compounding the problem by responding with further sin. Simply put, two wrongs do not make a right. Paul also warns believers to be wary of nursing their anger but to address it immediately.

Paul's statement about the sun going down is more metaphorical than literal. Some issues are so large that it is impossible to immediately cease being angry, but it is possible to immediately address the source of the anger and one's own reaction to it. To nurse one's anger is to invite the Devil into one's life, giving him a place of influence, something Paul warns against.

Romans 12.17-21: How to make things right

While anger is the appropriate response to the experience of wrong (sin), the question remains as how to address the wrong. Clearly, responding to wrong with wrong only compounds the situation (Ephesians 4.21). In Romans 12, Paul discusses the practical outworkings of a life driven by love and in this discussion turns to the experience of wrong (evil). In this experience, the temptation is to respond in a like manner. "You wronged me. Therefore, I will wrong you." This is to be avoided. One should hear echoes of "Be angry and do not sin" at this point. One is to seek peace by restraining himself thus making space for God to rectify the issue. While God moves to bring about what is right, the believer responds by seeking to bless the one who harmed him. Paul's comments seem to be addressed to the individual rather than nations and governments as he takes a different stance with how they are permitted to deal with evil (Romans 13.1-6).

Application:

Sometimes we get mad, really mad, and we should. Anger wells up inside us when we experience life as it should not be. Sometimes this anger is a gentle irritation and sometimes it springs up as a raging inferno. Anger is God's gift to us, pointing out where life has gone off the tracks: our lives, the lives of others, the world in which we live. The big question is what to do with our anger. Anger is given to us in order to drive us to action but this action cannot be to further what we have experienced. We cannot experience the misuse of power, trust, or authority and respond with force and violence of our own. When we do this we compound the sin we experience. We respond to anger by bringing blessing to the situation, seeking to return good for evil and allowing God the space necessary to fix what lies behind the experience. In so doing, we give anger its proper place and bring hope in the midst of brokenness.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at BlakeShipp.blogspot.com



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