

## “Stop the Killing Spree!” (Matthew 5:21–26)

“I hate you!” “I wish you were dead!” “You’re stupid!” “You’re worthless!” “I want a divorce!” “I wish we never had you!” “I wish you weren’t my parents!” Have you ever uttered any of these statements? If we’re honest, at one moment or another we have all spoken hurtful and hateful words. Yet, typically, most of us dismiss such comments by saying, “You really made me angry.” “I lost my temper.” “I didn’t really mean it.” Or the ever pathetic, “I was just joking.” While it is tempting to minimize our angry words, thoughts, and attitudes, the truth is there can be danger in anger. This is fitting since anger is only one letter away from danger.

In one of the old *Peanuts* comic strips, Charles Schulz shows Sally trying to locate her memory verse for Sunday School. She has forgotten it, and can’t locate it in the Bible. She is lost in her thoughts trying to remember the reference when she suddenly says, “Maybe it was something from the book of Reevaluation.”<sup>1</sup> Sally’s butchering of the book of Revelation is apropos, for the entire Bible is aimed at getting people to reevaluate their lives. In Matt 5:21–26, Jesus forces us to reevaluate our conception of anger. In these six verses, Jesus imparts two exhortations that will help us have healthy relationships. He says, “*Nurture and esteem your relationships.*”

**1. Recognize that unrighteous anger is murder (5:21–22).** Previously, in 5:20, Jesus said that our righteousness must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. Now He stops preaching and starts meddling! Seriously, Jesus could have tackled any subject but He begins the body of His sermon by dealing with anger—a sin that many of us struggle with. In 5:21 Jesus says, “**You have heard that the ancients [the Israelites] were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’**”<sup>2</sup> The opening phrase “you have heard...”<sup>3</sup> alerts us to the fact that Jesus is going to quote from the Old Testament. Here, He quotes the sixth commandment: “You shall not commit murder” (Exod 20:13).<sup>4</sup> He then reminds us of the penalty—“you shall be liable to the court.”<sup>5</sup> At this point, Jesus’ listeners must have been thinking, “Yup, we got it. We’re not supposed to murder anybody. We’ve heard that one before. And we’ve behaved. We’re not murderers. We’re not guilty. We’re good, moral, ethical people. So preach on preacher!” You’ve got to admit, it’s always more comfortable when the preacher talks about other people, right? You’ve probably heard people say, “I’m not a bad person; I mean, I’ve never killed anyone.” Even as Christians, it’s easy to be smug and think that since we haven’t physically murdered anyone this commandment doesn’t apply to us. But Jesus undoes this thinking. He presses the sixth command inward when He drops a preaching bomb.

In 5:22 Jesus declares, “**But I<sup>6</sup> say to you that everyone who is angry<sup>7</sup> with his brother<sup>8</sup> shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.**”<sup>9</sup> Jesus begins by saying, “But I say to you...” He is affirming everything in the Old Testament, but He is also fulfilling it. That is, He is “filling it full” of meaning. What was implicit in the Old Testament Law, Jesus is making explicit. He is giving insight into the original purpose of God’s Law, a purpose that had been lost among the teachers of His day.<sup>10</sup> Jesus is saying, “I’m going to the very heart of the Law to show you how you can live out its deepest meaning.”<sup>11</sup> In doing so, He moves from the fruit of murder to *the root* of murder—an evil heart attitude. Jesus insists that we are all guilty of murder because we’ve been angry in word, thought, attitude, or action. In other words, refraining from homicide does not impress God. On the contrary, since God looks upon the heart,<sup>12</sup> unrighteous anger can render one subject to God’s judgment. The terms “court” and “supreme court” refer to God’s heavenly court since no human court is competent to try a case of internal anger.<sup>13</sup> Jesus goes even further when He states that the offender is guilty enough to go to hell. Have you ever been angry with anyone in word, thought, or attitude? Jesus says, “You deserve to go to hell!”<sup>14</sup> Fortunately, Christ’s death has made salvation available to those who believe. If Jesus hadn’t paid for your sin with His death, you would spend eternity in hell, not just for murder but even for speaking insults. Thus, *nurture and esteem your relationships.*

Let's break down these insults quickly. The phrase translated "good-for-nothing" is the Aramaic term *raca*.<sup>15</sup> Take a moment and pronounce this word. It sounds wicked, doesn't it? It also sounds like you're about ready to hock a log in someone's face. YUCK! In Jesus' day, *raca* was an Aramaic insult that meant something like "You worthless son of a motherless goat." (This is not a literal translation!) The word means, "You brainless blockhead," "you empty-headed fool," "you idiot," "you imbecile." I think you get the idea. You used the colorful description *raca* when you were angry and wanted to attack a person's self-worth and dignity. The same is true of "You fool!" The word behind "fool" is the Greek noun *moros*, from which we get "moron." In Jesus' day, *moros* was used to describe a person's mental abilities; however, it was also used to describe a person's moral character. If you referred to someone as *moros* you were calling that person "a stupid liar," "a stupid cheater," or "a stupid infidel." It was an insult on someone's morals as well as their character. Although *raca* and *moros* seem to be synonymous, *raca* seems to express contempt for a man's head (his intellect), while *moros* expresses contempt for his heart (his character).<sup>16</sup>

The problem of name-calling was far more serious in Jesus' society than ours. Theirs was an honor-and-shame society. Most people had little to trade with except their honor, and to belittle other persons publicly was a serious matter. If a person were to lose his or her good reputation, it was about the same as dying. Jesus seems to say that when you treat persons as nothing by calling them names, you have in effect, already murdered them. Character assassination is just another type of murder.<sup>17</sup>

It's interesting that Jesus includes the phrase "with his brother"—"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother..." Isn't it true that our anger tends to flare up most often against those we know the best and love the most?<sup>18</sup> It's hard to get angry and stay angry at people we don't know. But let a friend or a relative do something we don't like, and suddenly we blow our top.<sup>19</sup> We tend to have little patience with our loved ones. Yet, Jesus' primary concern is our relationships with those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ. He cares about how we treat our spouse, children, siblings, and fellow believers. In Col 3:19 Paul writes, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them." Although this verse is directed to husbands, it is applicable to wives as well. We need to stop our guilt trips, fault-finding, name-calling, yelling, sarcasm, and blaming. Speaking once again to husbands, Peter says that if we don't treat our spouse with love and respect, our prayers will be hindered (1 Pet 3:7). In Eph 6:4 Paul writes, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (cf. Col 3:21). As parents, we need to make sure that we show our children God's love and compassion. In 1 Tim 2:8 Paul states, "Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension." The qualification for me to pray is to forsake ungodly anger. If we are angry, our fellowship with God is adversely affected, which means we lack power. The next time you become angry at your spouse, children, or fellow believer, think long and hard before cursing them. Don't be lulled into thinking that it's no big deal if you shout at your spouse or kids. It is a big deal.

So does this mean that every expression of anger is sin? No! Jesus and Paul both called people "fools."<sup>20</sup> But this was not flippant name-calling. Jesus and Paul labeled people "fools" because they were blindly allowing their religious practices to distort their lives with God. They were simply making statements of fact. Moreover, Jesus did get angry in the Gospels. He was angry when He cleared the temple (John 2:13–22). He was angry with those who assailed Him for healing on the Sabbath (Mark 3:5). Yet, His anger was not a personal attack. When Jesus was angry, it was because of injustice and sin. Jesus exercised *righteous* anger.<sup>21</sup> Like Jesus, we should exercise a righteous anger (Eph 4:26). We should be angry with abortionists, drug peddlers, pornographers, racists, and vicious world dictators. When others pervert and destroy God's purposes, we should have a sense of righteous indignation. Unfortunately, most Christians don't struggle with righteous anger; we tend to struggle with unrighteous anger.

So how can you get a grip on your anger? Consider the following suggestions.

- ***Admit to yourself and God that you have an anger problem.*** Don't make excuses for yourself. Don't pawn your sin off on your family of origin. Just own it. After you have confessed your sin, ask God to change you from the inside out. Be patient with God's work in your life. Typically, change is not overnight. It may take years to sense God's victory. Anger may remain your besetting sin until you meet Jesus face to face.<sup>22</sup> But this just means you need to pray for self-control and plenty of grace from God and others. One of the verses I pray regularly is Jas 1:19: "But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." Perhaps you could write this verse out on a 3x5 card and put it on the steering wheel of your car or your bathroom mirror. I would suggest memorizing this verse and then meditating on it throughout your day.
- ***Recognize the consequences of angry outbursts.*** As implied above, there are some words we are not free to utter. "I want a divorce." "You're fat." "You're ugly." "You're stupid." "I hate you." When words like these escape your grill, the consequences are severe. We've been told, "Stick and stones can break our bones, but words can never hurt us." That's a lie! Whoever came up with that line should receive a tongue-lashing! (Just kidding.) We must daily rehearse the relational damage of angry words. Words are hard to forget. Perhaps you still remember angry words that were spoken to you many years ago? I do. Hold off on sending critical e-mails. If you have something good to say, you should put it in writing. But if you have something bad to say, you should tell the person to his or her face. Deal with issues of anger privately. Christians often assume that they need someone to talk to about their anger directed toward another person. This is just an excuse for gossip and slander. It is even justified under the spiritual guise of prayer. There are consequences for angry words. We must also recognize that we will one day stand before Christ and have to offer an explanation for all of the words we've spoken. Later in Matthew's gospel, Jesus goes so far as to say that we will have to give an account for every *careless* word we speak (Matt 12:36).

In Ps 52:2, David states that our tongues devise destruction and can be likened to a sharp razor. (Display a razor.) When a razor is too sharp it can cut you. I have sensitive skin so I always use an electric razor. However, I use a blade to shave my neck. Yet, I nearly always nick myself. When my kids were younger, they would always try to get to my razor. When my oldest son, Joshua, was a little boy, he even cut himself "shaving" like Daddy. Likewise, our words can "slice and dice" people. Therefore, we must always be cautious and sensitive to others. *Nurture and esteem your relationships.*

- ***Prepare to have your buttons pushed.*** Those who know you best and love you most know what to say to get under your skin. Expect that you're going to get ticked. When you're feeling like you're about to explode, be conscious of your facial expressions. Often our facial expressions alone can get us into a fight. Remember the expression, "Looks that kill?" Need I say more? Another provoker of anger is our tone of voice. It's been said that 90% of the friction of daily life is caused by the wrong tone of voice. Prov 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath." Watch how you speak. Also watch your gestures. When you get really angry, stick your hands in your pockets.<sup>23</sup> This will keep you from clenching your fists, waving your hands in someone's face, pushing someone, or God forbid, striking another person. Put your hands in your pockets and just try to do some damage. You really can't hurt anyone and you look foolish in the process. If you feel like you're out of control and all this is going to fail, flee the scene. Take a walk and get some exercise.

[Jesus says, "We must recognize the danger of unrighteous anger." Why is this so important? Because Jesus says that unrighteous anger is on par with murder. You are not only to reign in your own anger, but you must also...]

**2. Reconcile with those who are angry with you (5:23–26).** Jesus gives two illustrations exposing the seriousness of anger, the first in a worship context (5:23–24), and the second in a legal setting (5:25–26). In these verses, Jesus changes from “everyone” to “you,”<sup>24</sup> to ensure that every disciple applies what He says directly to himself or herself. In His first illustration, Jesus says reconciliation takes precedence over worship.<sup>25</sup> **“Therefore<sup>26</sup> if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”** Please notice the word “first.” Jesus is speaking about the priority of reconciliation. Reconciliation is important enough to interrupt worship. Harmonious relationships with people must be in place *before* any true worship can take place. The expression “presenting your offering at the altar” assumes a sacrifice being given in the temple at Jerusalem.<sup>27</sup> This saying, presumably uttered in Galilee, envisions a worshiper that has traveled some eighty miles to Jerusalem with his offering. Most likely, the offering is a sacrificial animal. The thought is that the person leaves the animal on the altar and then makes the week-long journey back to Galilee to reconcile with his brother or sister. The improbability of this scenario emphasizes Jesus’ point that we must deal with strained relations.<sup>28</sup> *Nurture and esteem your relationships.*

Notice that Jesus makes an important distinction in this verse. He says if “your brother [or sister] has something against *you*.” The phrase “something against you” probably implies a “just claim.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, the “beef” with you is legit! Jesus didn’t say “if you have something against your brother [or sister].” Why? Because if you have something against your brother or sister you need to just let it go. If someone has done something to offend you, forgive them. Settle the issue before God. If there is something about that person that causes you not to like him or her, overlook it. Prov 19:11 says, “A man’s discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.” Now, of course, if another believer has done something seriously sinful that caused harm to you or others, Matt 18:15–17 tells us how to approach the person. In this context, however, Jesus says that some believers should NOT attend church until they have pursued reconciliation. Yet, every week people sing songs, listen to sermons, take communion, give offerings, and even pray while they are harboring anger in their heart. Worship depends upon a congregation of worshipers who seek to be reconciled with each other and their neighbors.<sup>30</sup> Peaceful, harmonious relationships, particularly within the church.

The second illustration stresses the importance of making things right *quickly*. Jesus urges us to have a sense of urgency when it comes to reconciling with an opponent, most likely someone outside of the church.<sup>31</sup> In 5:25–26 Jesus says, **“Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you will not<sup>32</sup> come out of there until you have paid up the last cent.”<sup>33</sup>** This illustration assumes that you owe your accuser a debt of some kind, and to collect on it he is taking you to small claims court. Jesus is saying: Don’t wait until you get to court to work out some kind of deal; settle out of court. Beware of Judge Judy! Because if the court has to decide the matter, you will be thrown into debtor’s prison and won’t get out until every last cent<sup>34</sup> is paid. Remaining imprisoned until a debt is repaid down to the last penny elicits a sense of impossibility (cf. Matt 18:34), since the debtor had no chance to work to create funds. So if you have offended someone, it’s your responsibility to quickly do what you can to make it right. That means you approach that person and say, “I was rude to you, and I was wrong, and I am sorry. I took advantage of your kindness, and I am sorry. I borrowed money and didn’t pay it back, but here’s a small payment and I’ll pay the rest when I can. I made a promise to you that I didn’t keep, and I was wrong, please forgive me.” If there are people out there whom you have sinned against, it is your job to reconcile.

It is interesting that Jesus stated a practical reason to reconcile with one’s enemies—to avoid being thrown into prison. In other words, don’t wait until it’s too late—till tomorrow, till next year, or till kingdom come—to make peace with others.<sup>35</sup> This will hurt you and will hurt the one that is angry with you. A root of bitterness can creep in and overtake you or your opponent (Heb 12:15).

In both of these illustrations, it is worth noting that Jesus seems to expect conflict. The point is not so much to eliminate conflict, but to resolve it. Jesus doesn't say, "If you're being sued, shame on you." Or "If your brother has something against you, shame on you." Conflicts are inevitable. The focus is on resolution. *Nurture and esteem your relationships.*

Perhaps you're thinking, "I have tried to reconcile, but my opponent is unwilling." If you have done everything in your supernatural power to reconcile, you have honored God. Rom 12:18 says, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." The willingness to reconcile must be shared by the other party. Don't beat yourself up over this. But make sure that you have made right what you need to, and that your anger and insult and self-righteousness about it have been replaced by humility and a willingness to reconcile. Sometimes we have hurt someone deeply and it is fully our fault, but when we go to humble ourselves and seek forgiveness we are snubbed. We may be snubbed, but we must still go and seek reconciliation.

Again, I must ask you: Have you done what you can to be at peace with your antagonists, your in-laws, your ex, your parents, your children, your spouse, your coworker, your friend, your neighbor? If you were going to die soon and had only one phone call you could make, who would you call and what would you say? And why are you waiting? God calls you to *nurture and esteem your relationships.*

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### **Scripture References**

Matthew 5:21–26

Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17

James 3:1–12

Hebrews 12:14–15

Romans 12:17–18

Proverbs 25:8–10

Luke 12:57–59

### **Study Questions**

1. How can someone tell when I am angry (5:20–21)? When was the last time I was really angry? What made me so angry? How did I respond inappropriately? If I could have this situation over again, what would I do differently? Read Proverbs 14:29; 29:22; Galatians 5:20; Colossians 3:8; and James 1:19.
2. Have I made excuses for my unrighteous anger? If so, what justifications have I used? Today, will I acknowledge MY unrighteous anger as sin? Will I confess my murderous words and actions to those that I have sinned against? Meditate daily on Psalms 66:18 and 139:23–24.
3. Why does reconciliation with a fellow believer take precedence over worshiping God (5:23–24)? Am I willing to postpone worship in order to make things right with a brother or sister? When have I taken the first step toward reconciliation with a believer I have offended? How did the person I sinned against respond? After taking this step of obedience, how did I feel about my fellowship with God?
4. Is there a relationship with an unbeliever that I feel imprisoned by (5:26)? What can I do to avoid the consequences that God will bring for refusing to quickly make things right with the person that I have sinned against? Read Ephesians 4:26. How can I make sure that the sun does not go down on my anger? How will I seek to practically fulfill this principle?
5. In those situations where I know someone is angry with me, have I done what I can to be at peace? Read Romans 12:18. Have I done my part to be at peace with my antagonists, my in-laws, my ex, my parents, my children, my spouse, my coworker, my friend, my neighbor? If not, what will I do to pursue reconciliation with these individuals?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Doug McIntosh, “The King Interprets His Decrees, PT. 1” (Matt 5:21–32):

<http://www.cornerstonebibch.org/html/Sermons/Matthew/Matt15.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Eaton correctly explains why Jesus is referring to the OT Law and not the misuse of the Law. See Michael Eaton, *The Way that Leads to Life* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999), 71–72. See also Charles H. Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount: Character Formation and Ethical Decision Making in Matthew 5–7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 68–69. See also “Jesus versus Moses or Jesus versus the Pharisees” in David L. Turner, *Matthew*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 166–67.

<sup>3</sup> Jesus repeats this introductory phrase in Matt 5:27, 31, 33, 38, and 43.

<sup>4</sup> This is an exact quotation from Exod 20:13 of the LXX. Cf. Deut 5:17. Wilkins writes, “Although Hebrew possesses seven words for killing, the verb used in Exodus 20:13 makes “murder” (*rasah*) a more accurate rendering than “kill.” It denotes premeditation and deliberateness. This does not apply to killing animals (Gen. 9:3), defending one’s home (Ex. 22:2), accidental killings (Deut. 19:5), the execution of murderers by the state (Gen. 9:6), or involvement with one’s nation in certain types of war. It does apply, however, to self–murder (i.e., suicide), accessory to murder (2 Sam. 12:9), or those who have responsibility to punish known murderers but fail to do so (1 Kings 21:19). Penalty for murder was death; it was not reducible to any lesser sentence (Num. 35:31).” Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 241–42.

<sup>5</sup> The expression “and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment” is not a direct statement of the OT but is a common understanding based on a number of OT passages that require judgment for murder (see Deut 17:8–13 the process of “judgment” in cases of bloodshed). The fact that men and women have been created in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27; 9:6) lies behind this prohibition. This penalty was already in force before the Sinaitic law in the decrees to Noah (Gen 9:6). BDAG s.v. *krisis* 2: “board of judges, *court*, specif. *a local court* (s). It should be noted though that the word *krisis* is not used anywhere else with this meaning.

<sup>6</sup> The “I” (*ego*) is emphatic.

<sup>7</sup> Present tense participle: “everyone who is angry in an ongoing way.” David S. Dockery & David E. Garland, *Seeking the Kingdom* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1992), 49; Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount*, 74. The NEB translates the verb “everyone who nurses anger in his heart.” The present tense participle suggests one who holds on to his or her anger and expresses it in sinful ways. Anger is not the sin. It is a natural human reaction. The problem is how we handle the anger. Anger becomes dangerous when it is nurtured, justified, and encouraged. Unfortunately, anger is frequently mishandled. Sometimes, instead of expressing our anger directly and appropriately, we engage in cold–war tactics and refuse to talk about the issues. Or we employ hit–and–run guerrilla warfare. We take potshots at another in public, and that person does not know where the fire is coming from or why. The greatest danger is when the anger is allowed to well up inside until it explodes. This can lead to homicide.

<sup>8</sup> The NKJV and KJV include the insertion of the Greek word *eike* (“without cause”). After a lengthy textual discussion, the NET study notes conclude, “While ‘without cause’ makes good practical sense in this context, and must surely be a true interpretation of Jesus’ meaning (cf. Mark 3:5), it does not commend itself as original.”

<sup>9</sup> Matthew recorded eleven references to the Greek word *gehenna*. Carson writes, “The expression ‘fire of hell’ (*geenna tou pyros*, lit., ‘gehenna of fire’) comes from the Hebrew *gehinnom* (‘Valley of Hinnom,’ a ravine south of Jerusalem once associated with the pagan god Moloch and his disgusting rites [2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6; Jer 7:31; Ezek 16:20; 23:37], prohibited by God [Lev 18:21, 20:2–5]). When Josiah abolished the practices, he defiled the valley by making it a dumping ground for filth and the corpses of criminals (2 Kings 23:10). Late traditions suggest that in the first century it may still have been used as a rubbish pit, complete with smoldering fires. The valley came to symbolize the place of eschatological punishment (cf. 1 Enoch 54:12; 2Bar 85:13; cf. Matt 10:28; 23:15, 33, and 18:9 for the longer expression ‘gehenna of fire’). Donald A. Carson, “Matthew.” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelein and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), Electronic ed.

<sup>10</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*. Preaching the Word Series (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), Electronic ed.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Long, *Matthew*. Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1997), 55.

<sup>12</sup> “People look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam 16:7b NET).

<sup>13</sup> John R.W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1978), 85; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*. Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 114. The NIV transliterates the Greek word *sunedrion* as “Sanhedrin,” the Jewish Sanhedrin of Jesus’ day. But this is most likely incorrect.

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<sup>14</sup> Jas 2:10 states, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.”

<sup>15</sup> English versions such as NIV and NJKV/KJV include this rendering.

<sup>16</sup> Morris, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 115 quotes A.B. Bruce.

<sup>17</sup> Dockery & Garland, *Seeking the Kingdom*, 50.

<sup>18</sup> Ed Young provides least four ways we express anger:

- **The Toxic Waste Approach.** Some people handle anger as if they are dealing with toxic waste. They bury it deep within themselves and present an A-OK outward appearance. But over the years, the anger begins to leak out and contaminate them. It enters the stream of their thoughts and causes them to be sick. Unresolved anger can impact their attitudes, relationships, and ultimately their faith. Are you harboring any toxic waste of anger inside you?
- **The Volcano Approach.** Some deal with anger like a volcano. Volcanic people can rumble and rumble for days, weeks, and even years. Then the day comes when they say to themselves, “I’ve been taking this for five years, and I’m not going to take it anymore. I’m going to give that person who made me angry a piece of my mind. And they spew the hot lava and burning ash of their anger all over another person, leaving behind only the charred remains of a relationship. Volcanic people rarely apologize for being angry—which is one reason they are like volcanoes.
- **The Snow Cone Approach.** Others express anger like a snow cone. When they become upset, they immediately turn on the big chill. They give the person who wronged them an ice-cold shoulder, and the icicles virtually drip off the eaves of their words: “No, nothing is wrong. No. Nothing. Really.”
- **The Microwave Approach.** Finally, some people express anger like a microwave oven. They confront a situation that angers them with a near instantaneous response. It’s almost as if you can hear the ten-second time-cook button go beep...beep...beep...BAM! They explode. Those who have a short fuse are often set off by things that others find minor in nature. Their anger is just below the surface at all times. How do you express your anger?

See Ed Young, *Fatal Distractions* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 31–33.

<sup>19</sup> Remember the words of the Apostle John: “Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer” (1 John 3:15). And the reference in that context is to Cain who hated Abel before he killed him.

<sup>20</sup> During His final fateful week in Jerusalem, Jesus referred to the teachers of the law and Pharisees as “blind fools” (Matt 23:17), using a related term to what He prohibits in 5:22. See also Luke 11:40; 12:20; 1 Cor 15:36; Gal 3:1.

<sup>21</sup> In Jesus’ parables, God displays anger and wrath (Matt 18:34; 22:7).

<sup>22</sup> Heb 12:1 refers to “the sin which so easily entangles us.” Although this may refer to the specific sin of unbelief, in principle this points to that sin which renders us spiritually ineffective.

<sup>23</sup> Preaching Today citation: From *Life’s Little Instruction Book, Volume II* (Rutledge Hill Press, 1994). Christian Reader, Vol. 32, no. 6.

<sup>24</sup> This is a shift from the second-person plural to the second-person singular.

<sup>25</sup> The principle from 1 Sam 15:22 applies here: “Samuel said, ‘Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.’”

<sup>26</sup> “Therefore” (*oun*) connects the illustration with the explanation of the root problem of anger in relationships.

<sup>27</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 243.

<sup>28</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 203.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*. New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1972), 122; Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*. New American Commentary series (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 108.

<sup>30</sup> Long, *Matthew*, 57.

<sup>31</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 170; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 203. The last contrast in Matt 5:38–48 where disciples are enjoined to love their enemies should be read alongside Matt 5:25–26.

<sup>32</sup> The Greek double negative *ou me* is used for emphasis.

<sup>33</sup> Hagner writes, “It is a mistake to allegorize the details and identify the adversary or the judge with God. At the same time, however, since God’s judgment is in view in vv 21–22, it is impossible to avoid at least the suggestion of the same in the present passage (cf. 18:34–35; cf. too the context of the passage in Luke 12:57–59). Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*. Word Biblical Commentary series (Dallas: Word, 1993), 118.

<sup>34</sup> The “cent” (*kodrantēs*) is the Roman bronze/copper coin *quadrans*, the smallest Roman coin.

<sup>35</sup> Long, *Matthew*, 57.