

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente

Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church
By the Rev. Capt. Dr. John S. Niles MSM CD

“Pressure Point- The Art of Indignation”

10th Sermon Series on Book of James: “Pressure Points”

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James 1:19-20

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jA_jlWNDd_Q

Anger can be confusing. We all feel it. Whether it is a slight irritation when the computer screen freezes in the middle of a zoom meeting, or the frustration our tech people must understandably feel over the computer that has a glitch in it during the Sunday service; all the way up to experiencing blind rage over a great injustice like discrimination and bigotry.

The word “anger” is used in over 256 verses in the Bible.

“Anger” is something that we can *all* identify with. That is because anger and indignation are emotions, we all experience. At one time or another, we have all gotten angry at someone or something to one degree or another. Though some people have an “anger management problem” anger itself is a normal emotion.

Which is why St. James gives us insight into handling it and St Paul explained that we could be angry if we remember to sin not.

When anger is out of control, it can cause a mess; yet, when it is controlled, it can control actually be useful. Think about all those times when anger ignited positive change. Remember Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her bus seat? She turned her anger at the racial injustice into a driving force that transformed societies. And Martin Luther King Jr. fought evil with non-violent protests, and Harvey Milk

Aristotle believed anger exists to protect us. In the never-ending battle of right and wrong, he wrote in the Nicomachean Ethics, “The one who is angry at the right things and with the right people...as they ought to be...is to be praised.”

Thomas Jefferson, in “Rules of Living” described how he thought men and women should respond when angry. “He said, “When angry, count to ten before you speak; If very angry, a hundred.” The author Mark Twain about seventy-five years later, revised Jefferson’s words. He wrote: When angry, count to four. When very angry (swear). I’d rather not say what he said. But I’m sure you can image. It was Mark Twain after all.

Those of us with a streak of honesty will have to say we’ve tried nearly everything from Jefferson’s philosophy to Twain’s, and we still can’t seem to handle our anger properly.

Jesus says, “If someone strikes you on one cheek turn the other cheek.” I remember my father reminding me of this one evening after I had a problem at school with a bully. You must remember that he was an officer in the Airforce during the war and after the war rose to the rank of office in the army. And he said, “Son, Jesus said, when someone strikes you one cheek turn the other cheek. And after that. Then you can grind him into dirt.” Somehow I don’t think our Lord would have approved.

This reminds me of the little boy who, after being reminded in Sunday School lesson that if someone is hit they are not hit back, went home and kicked his brother. His brother returned the favor and more. He ran crying into the house and explained what happened to his mother. The mother said, "Well, you shouldn't have kicked him." "But mom, the teacher said, that if I kicked him, he wasn't allowed to kick me back."

We see the problem everywhere--this problem of anger. We see it on the roads when people rage at one another. We read it in our newspapers when wives or girlfriends are beaten by their husbands and partners or when recently when wife stabs her husband to death.

Anger left unchecked can be destructive. People who have study psychology tell us there are various phases of anger. All of us have experienced some of them. Anger can begin with mild *irritation*, which is nothing more than perhaps an innocent experience of being upset, a mild feeling of discomfort brought about by someone or something. then anger can turn from irritation to *indignation*, which is a feeling that something must be answered; there must be an avenging of that which is wrong. Both of these can go unexpressed.

If fed, indignation leads to *wrath*--which never goes unexpressed. Wrath is a desire to avenge. Then, as it increases, anger becomes *fury*. The word suggests violence, even a loss of emotional control. The last phase of anger is rage. Obviously, *rage* is the most dangerous of all.

How do we best handle our anger? James gives us three suggestions.

"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for one's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

James knows human nature. He knows our tendency is to react negatively to trials—instead of seeing God at work in them. He knows we tend to want to have the best of both worlds and are therefore often double-minded. He knows our inclination to blame God for the temptations in life, even though we know they are a result of our own evil desires. James knows how we respond to all the above. So, he instructs us in a loving, caring, and affirming manner, that we should do the opposite of what comes naturally.

James encourages, exhorts, commands us, and cautions us and even pleads with us to do three things. [OBJ]

I

James says that we should firstly be **swift to listen**. Emerson has said "The ancestor of every action is thought" That is why it is so important to listen. The word translated "quick" here by the NIV is the Greek word tachus meaning "swift or speedy." It is the only time in the New Testament this exact word is ever used. The root of the word tach is used in other words which denote quickness or speed, and are more popular in Greek, but James uses the form tachus because it is fitting for his poetic nature.

James encourages us to be quick to listen. This word means "to hear" and carries with it the meaning: to attend to, consider what is or has been said, to understand, perceive the sense of what is said, to comprehend, to understand. That drives home the fullness of what it means to really listen.

Have you ever noticed how hard it really is to listen--especially in an argument. For, very often, while the other person is speaking, we are not so much listening as preparing our rebuttal. And the reason for that is we think we are right. So, we never really listen.

The closest way for me to describe what James is saying is in the military the leader of a section on patrol will stop the section by putting their right fist in the air -like we used to do when riding a bike with our left arm and hand in the air- which means to "Stop! Shut up! and Listen!".

It is about being hypervigilant and hyperaware of your surroundings so as not to make a misstep or act prematurely.

You see that with dogs all the time. Dogs have great hearing, but you know when they are really listening because their ears perk up. Our dogs' ears stick straight out from their head when they are really listening to something. You know you have her full undivided attention with her ears in this position. There is no way our dogs ever miss you asking if they want a treat.

That is not always the case with us. Yet, James understands it is not in our nature to listen well, so he encourages us here to make the decided effort and concentrate on listening.

II

James reminds us to be swift to listen and secondly, **slow to speak**. Rev. Jones was invited for Sunday dinner. And upon entering the home, little Johnny met him at the door. He said "Rev. Jones. Come in and sit down and wait for mom to cook the dinner. Rev. Jones asked Jonny what is for dinner? "Johnny said, "Crow" Surprised the Reverend said, "How do you know." "Well, my mommy said to my daddy come home early because the old Crow is coming to dinner.

Now, there were a few people who had not yet learned how to refrain from speaking. As my mother used to say. "God created you with two ears and one mouth. So, you will listen more and speak less. So shut your mouth." The saying goes, "It is better to keep your mouth closed and be thought stupid, than open it and leave no doubt about it."

With your mouth closed, you will be more inclined to listen to what others are saying. You will be less likely to come to premature judgment. Less likely to say things that can't be taken back. Less likely to do more harm than good.

The stoic philosopher Seneca wrote that "The greatest remedy for anger is delay."

"Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26-27, NKJV).

A lady once came up to the great evangelist, Billy Sunday, and tried to rationalize her angry outbursts. "There's nothing wrong with losing my temper," she said. "I blow up, and then it's all over." "So does a shotgun," Sunday replied, "and look at the damage it leaves behind!"

Once a father wanted to illustrate to his son the difference between "anger" and "exasperation." He looked up the phone number of a pompous fellow commuter whom he knew only by name and reputation, and he dialed the number. When the man answered the call, the father asked, "Is Jim there?" "There's no Jim here. Why don't you get the right number before bothering people this hour of the night?" roared the man on the other end. "Now that," said the father as he put down the phone, "was simply annoyance. We'll wait a few minutes, and then you'll hear something." After a decent interval, the father dialed the same number and again asked, "Is Jim there?" This time the other party literally screamed into the phone, "What's the matter with you, are you crazy? I told you to look up the number and stop bothering me!" Then the receiver at the other end was slammed down. "Now that fellow was angry," said the father. "In a few minutes I will show you what I mean by exasperation compared to anger." After fifteen minutes or so, the father dialed the same number for the third time, and when the same man answered at the other end, the father said almost cheerily, "Hello, this is Jim. Have there been any messages for me during the past half hour or so?"¹ Now that, son is exasperation!

¹ Ralph L. Woods, "The Modern Handbook of Humor" (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 3-5. [34] James Merritt, "Friends, Foes, & Fools" (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 75.

We can also be slow to anger when we “*Live and let live*”. What this means is live your own life to the fullest and let others live theirs accordingly.

A young man went camping in the desert. He found a beautiful spot replete with water and set up his tent for the night. Not long after he was settled, he heard some noise and noticed that he was camped beside a group of whirling dervishes. He became very upset. He paced and fumed. Then he noticed an old man whose tent also was nearby. Fuming, the young man marched over to the old man and started complaining about the dervishes. The old man nodding his head in apparent understanding. “Well, how can you stand this noise? What do you do about it?” the young man asked. The old man responded, “I just let them whirl.”

III

James reminds us to be swift to listen, slow to speak, and finally, **slow to anger**.

The French novelist and playwright, Alexander Dumas, once had a heated quarrel with a rising young politician. The argument became so intense that a duel was inevitable. Since both men were very fast and superb shots they decided to draw lots, the loser agreeing to shoot himself. Dumas lost the drawing of lots.

So with Pistol in hand, he withdrew in silent dignity to another room, closing the door behind him. The rest of the company waited in gloomy suspense for the shot that would end his career and his life. It rang out at last.

His friends ran to the door, opened it, and found Dumas, with the smoking pistol in hand. “Gentlemen, a most regrettable thing has happened,” he announced, “I missed.” [OBJ]

Anger can be destructive, but notice, James is not saying don’t be angry; nor is he saying that there isn’t any time or place for anger, or that anger is somehow always wrong. He is saying that *how* we act when angry can be unrighteous, but not that there is no righteous anger. For as we all know, Jesus was indignant with the disciples when they tried to stop the children coming to him, and the scriptures said, “And in his indignation Jesus declared, let the little children come unto me for such belongs the kingdom of God.”

And who can forget the righteous indignation he had with the merchants and money changers for selling their goods in the Temple and threw them out (John 2:12-17)

The dictionary says that indignation is anger that is aroused by unjust, unworthy or mean situations. It is born out of a desire to protect what is of value and stand up for what is just.

We remember the indignation of Abraham Lincoln regarding slavery, and Martin Luther King Jr. was indignant about racial discrimination, Mahatma Gandhi was angry about the racial discrimination against the “untouchables” by the “high castes” in India, Nelson Mandela was angry about apartheid in South Africa. When we see a bully beating up a young kid, when we see a thief stealing an elderly woman’s purse, when we see a group of girls being catty and mean to another girl at recess, when a husband beats up his wife — the list goes on and on.

The Lord has wired us in such a way that most healthy human beings experience indignation when we see evil, and injustice being done to someone.

For as Edmund Burke wrote “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing.” You think about that. Amen

