This is the fourth message from our series that I have entitled “Destructive Emotions.” Today, we are going to deal with the most common emotions that we all experience: anger.

Frustration, irritation and anger are common to anyone of any age, race or gender. It is a natural emotional reaction to a displeasing situation or event. But it seems that anger is not only on the rise, but is out of control. Ten years ago we would not have heard about the out-burst of “road rage” that we so often hear about today. In the past when you cut in from of someone on the highway they would wave their finger at you, today they wave a 38 special at you. In fact, the local new from Charlotte recently reported that two people were shot to death on Interstate 485 – the cause, road rage.

Anger is a great, great challenge today, and many people are living angry lives. I remind you once again of this little saying: “Anger and bitterness do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored, than to the victim on which it is poured.” Ultimately, anger hurts the person who is filled with it more than anyone else. In fact, the single factor most likely to cause a heart attack in the American adult is chronic exposure to hostile interactions with other people. Death rates are four to seven times higher in people who are filled with anger.

But, the truth of the matter is that everybody gets angry at some time. The only difference is how we deal with it or the intensity we deal with it. Some people blow up, other people clam up. Some people express it, other people repress it.

Although neither of those are good alternatives, the Bible gives a third positive alternative on how to deal with anger. In Ephesians 4:26 the Bible gives us four principles on how to manage anger. In verse 26 it says, "In your anger do not sin." Literally that verse is a command, “Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you're still angry. Do not give the devil a foothold."

The first biblical principle in managing your anger is to admit it. Simply put, stop trying to deny that you are angry. The Bible says "Be angry but don't sin." In other words, God doesn't forbid anger. God says, "Go ahead and get mad." That is a pretty easy command to follow. Sometimes anger is a valid response to life. In the Old Testament, God got mad. In the New Testament, Jesus got mad. He got mad at the hypocrites. That tells me that even Jesus didn't get along with everybody. Anger is a God given emotion. It's emotional
energy. If you are never upset by anything, you had better check your pulse because you are not in touch with reality. Anger is a God-given emotion.

Some Christians get false guilt thinking, "I should never at all feel angry." That is not only unhealthy, it is unbiblical. God says, “Be angry, but when you do, just don't let it cause you to sin.”

Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to admit it when we are angry? We say things like, "I am not yelling! I am not angry! I am not mad!" and the veins are popping out! We love to deny it. Why? Because we feel guilty. But the fact is, internalizing your anger does not make you any better Christian than the person who blows up. Either way it's wrong and it's ineffective.

I believe if most people obeyed this verse, we would have a lot less depression in our society. The number one cause of depression is repressed anger. If you don't talk it out, you are going to take it out - on yourself or somebody else.

The second biblical principle in managing your anger is to understand it. Paul says, "In your anger do not sin." We need to understand that there is a difference between sinful anger and legitimate anger. There is a difference between appropriate anger and inappropriate anger. There is a difference between helpful anger and hurtful anger.

Anger is not necessarily wrong. It is not always bad. What makes it different is why you got angry and what you do with those feelings.

Ask yourself, "What am I angry about?" and “Why am I so upset? Why is this upsetting me? What is making me angry?”

Now, please listen very carefully to this statement: Anger is never the root problem. When you get angry, that is not the real cause. There is always a deeper issue. Anger is simply an emotional reaction to one of three other primary emotions, even deeper than anger. It is important that you know this because it is much easier to deal with the roots than it is to deal with anger itself. When you get angry it's either because,

1. You are hurt.
2. You are frustrated.
3. You are fearing something.

When you focus on the real cause, it is easier to control your anger.
It is a fact that we get angry when we are *hurt*. Physically hurt or emotionally hurt. For example, you are hammering a nail and you hit your thumb and you announce a few choice words like: "Boy! That was uncomfortable!" You get angry. And if you are not careful you pick up the hammer and throw it. Why do we throw the hammer? We want to hurt something in return! When we get hurt we get angry.

When you feel *rejection*, when you feel *criticism*, when you feel *injustice*, our natural tendency is to strike back at that which is hurting us, that which is causing pain in our lives.

Sometimes that source of hurt is a *memory*, something that happened a long time ago that was never resolved and every time you happen to be involved in something that triggers that memory, you get angry. You don't understand why you are so upset. But it's because it's reminding you of something that happened a long time ago that you have never really dealt with. When I find somebody that gets extremely upset over a trivial issue, it tells me that they are carrying a lot of *unresolved hurt* that has never been dealt with, never settled.

It is also a fact that we get angry when we are *frustrated*. Frustration leads to anger. Sometimes it just seems like nothing works, like nothing seems to turn out right. *And the more we try to more things seem to go wrong, until we get frustrated.* And that frustration very quickly turns into anger.

For example, have you ever been in a hurry and in the shortest line at *Wal-Mart*? And after standing there for five, six, seven minutes you suddenly realize that the line isn’t moving. You look around, and all the longer lines are moving much quicker. *And then you realize there is a lady, two people in front of you, who has picked up the only item of its kind with no price tag and/or bar code on it.* And so, now you are waiting for some department clerk to come from the other side of the store. *What happens?* You get frustrated and, if you are not careful, that *frustration turns to anger*!

When you are angry and it is caused by frustration, you need to ask yourself two questions:

First, is my getting angry going to change the situation? If you are angry over something that has already happened, forget it because you can't erase the past. *And if you can't change the situation, why get angry about it.* For example, if your car doesn’t start, it won’t do you any good to get out and kick the thing! Why are you so angry? You are frustrated and that frustration turns to anger.
Second, is it really worth being upset over? People, especially Americans, have a tremendous ability to exaggerate irritations. We get upset over little tiny, tiny things. You are getting ready to mow the yard and you realize that your lawn mower is out of gas and you have forgotten to fill your gas cans. Granted, that's an annoyance, but there's no reason to have a nuclear explosion over it. You miss your favorite television program - it's not the end of the world. You go home and your kid doesn't eat his dinner - maybe two or three cents worth of food and you turn it into a national crisis. We get so upset over little things.

Someone has right said, “You can determine the size of a man's character by what it takes to upset him.”

The question you need to ask yourself is what you are afraid of. When we feel frightened, threatened, or insecure we very often get angry. When your self-esteem is low, you get defensive.

Insecurity always makes us misinterpret other people's motives. When we are insecure, when we have a low self-esteem, our judgment is out of focus. You see every conversation and/or correction as condemnation. For example, if somebody at church doesn't notice you, you go home thinking they intentionally avoided you. Then, in your mind, you start blowing it all out of proportion, and you get upset.

Why has that happened? Because of your fear of being rejected, or your fear of being overlooked, or your fear of not being appreciated, or your fear of not being accepted. And that fear and hurt has led to your anger.

Listen to the advice found in Proverbs 12:16, "A fool shows his annoyance at once but a prudent man overlooks an insult." Proverbs 19:11 says, "A man's wisdom gives him patience. It is his glory to overlook an offense." Don’t allow your fear and/or low self-esteem cause you to live an angry life!

The third biblical principle in managing your anger is to deal with it immediately. The fact is, we can't eliminate hurt and frustration and misunderstanding from our lives. It is inevitable. It is going to happen. You are going to be hurt. You are going to be frustrated. There are times when you're going to be misunderstood and you misunderstand others. And when that happens, you need to deal with it immediately!

The Bible says, "Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." Do you know what that means? It means that your anger is a choice! You are mad because you have chosen to be mad. So God says, “Get over it!” God says, “Don't put it off. Don't prolong it. If you are angry, don't draw it out.” Why is God so
adamant about this principle? Because when you allow your anger to linger it turns into resentment, and when that happens, it automatically becomes a sin.

And that brings us to the fourth biblical principle for managing your anger, which is to control it. Verse 27 says, "And do not give the devil a foothold." The Bible says that uncontrolled anger gives the devil a foothold in your life. Why? Because when anger is uncontrolled you develop a habit and your anger becomes a habitual way of responding to life and anything that ticks you off, you blow up. Pretty soon, your anger controls you instead of you controlling your anger. Therefore, God says, “Control your anger.”

The problem is, when we get angry our life gets out of focus and the only thing we can see is ourselves. We don’t see anything else. We don’t act in a logical way. Anger is really kind of a form of madness. When you are mad you are mad! And when you do not control your anger, you don't think straight.

Let me close with this statement: if you have anger in your life deal with it immediately. You need to get it over with. Don't let it turn to resentment.

If you have never been saved, why not today?

Everyone please stand for prayer.

Father,

In the name of Jesus, I ask You to take away my hurts and fill me with Your love. Take away my frustrations and fill me with Your peace. Take away my fears and insecurity and fill me with Your confidence. I want You to help me overcome my temper. Help me to be angry but not sin. In Jesus’ name. Amen.