

**Marriage and Family Series**  
**Did You Hear What I Said? (Part 3)**  
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Well, this morning we return to our study of marriage and family. We've been taking several weeks here between a couple of studies of books in the New Testament to look at this topic in more detail. I trust you've enjoyed it, and your own heart has been challenged and encouraged, as mine has as well. I hope this week to finish our study of communication, and then next week, Lord willing, we'll look at the first few verses of Ephesians 6 about the responsibilities of children in a family, as well as the responsibilities of fathers. Seems appropriate for Father's Day. And then, Lord willing, the Sunday after that, we'll begin a new book study. I hope to begin the book of James together, if everything works out the way I've planned on the Sunday after Father's Day.

But today, we return to our study of Ephesians 4 and the issue of communication. Most of us are familiar with the famous feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys. It's kind of a by-word in American culture. You may not know that that feud began with accusations that a prize hog had been stolen. That's a reason to start a battle. The resulting battle spanned 12 years, and cost 12 lives.

But now that I'm in Texas, I now understand the saying that everything's bigger in Texas, and in keeping with that tradition, you may not know that the longest and most deadly feud in American history occurred right here in Texas. It started in the 1820s, and it ran in one form or another for 100 years until 1932. It was the famous Baker/White feud, sometimes referred to as the Clay County War. And apparently this feud started over an insult aimed at one of the family's dogs. Before a hundred years were over, the feud had claimed more than 150 lives. That's tragic, isn't it?

And yet, that same kind of tragedy is often rivaled in a different form today. Oh, no lives are taken for the most part, but battles and feuds begin over things just as trivial and continue in some cases for a lifetime and beyond. Every year, countless churches split, families feud, and thousands of Christian spouses essentially become enemy combatants in the war at home. It's often because they seem clueless about conflict; how conflict escalates, and how it's devastating destructive forces permeate a life, a relationship, a family. I've counseled Christian families and

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couples who find themselves in the middle of a conflict of historic proportions. I remember one specific incident when I was still at Grace Church of a couple who were in such battle, who were locked in such conflict, that the wife literally tried to run over her husband with a car.

But I've also counseled many others whose conflicts are much less dramatic; fights about things such as money, in-laws, the discipline of the children. And sadly, many times the source of conflict is even more trivial than that: something absolutely inane, innocuous, something that never should have been a source of conflict; but it erupts into a battle, and soon the battle is a full war. And before long, they're locked in tragic, debilitating conflict. But whether it begins with something trivial, or whether it begins with something important, the tragic results are the same: decimated families, destroyed marriages, and damaged relationships.

For every one of us who live in the world, conflict is a reality. It is an inevitable reality. While we have a new nature, we still live in what the Bible calls our flesh, and because of that we will respond in a way that breeds conflict. And especially, this is true in our marriages. So, it's crucial that we learn how to deal with conflict in a way that honors God. And Ephesians 4 is part of this extended section on communication that we've been examining over the last several weeks. The apostle Paul outlines for us a plan for dealing with conflict. Let me read this passage to you again. In Ephesians 4 beginning in verse 25 and through verse 32 Paul gives us some foundational principles about communication. Only one verse in this whole paragraph doesn't deal with this crucial issue, and that's verse 28. The rest of the section deals with communication. Let me read it to you. You follow along, verse 25.

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE *of you* WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another. BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity." ... Verse 29. "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

In those few words, the Apostle Paul lays down for us four key principles of Christian communication.

We've looked at the first three together. Let me just remind you. We've done something a little unusual with this text. Instead of dealing with it chronologically as it's written, we've taken it thematically. We began with verse 29, and there we discovered our first principle of Christian communication, and that is: choose your words carefully. God has given us the responsibility to choose what we say with great care, and our objective is to build up, to speak grace into the lives of those around us. Our mouths do not belong to us. Instead, we are to be stewards of them, to speak grace and those words that build up into the lives of the people God places in our lives.

Secondly, we discovered that: we're to always speak the truth. Verse 25, "Laying aside falsehood, speak the truth." We noticed that last week and looked at that in some detail.

The third principle of Christian communication is: "watch your attitude." verses 31 and 32.

Today, I want us to examine the fourth key principle of Christian communication, and it's this: resolve every conflict. Resolve every conflict. We find it in verses 26 and 27. "BE ANGRY, AND *yet* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity." As I said before, conflict is inevitable in all of our relationships because we are fallen human beings. Even though we have been re-created in Christ we still have the flesh. We still have our unredeemed humanness, and we will involve ourselves in conflict.

Now as we begin this morning, it would be appropriate for us to define "conflict". What exactly do I mean by that? Well, one definition puts it this way: "It is a sharp disagreement due to opposing ideas, interests, understandings, or perceptions." It is a state of disagreement and disharmony." And such a state of conflict isn't good. In fact, listen to Proverbs 20:3. "Keeping away from strife or conflict is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel." In spite of those strong words, conflict in every relationship is inevitable, and that includes our marriages. There's a popular saying that marriage was made in heaven, and so are thunder and lightning.

So where does this conflict come from that permeates our relationships; that we're tempted to embrace in relationships? Where does it come from? What's the source? Well, the Bible gives us a number of sources of the conflict. Let me just remind you of a few.

The first source of conflict is simple disagreement, a difference of opinion. Nothing wrong with that, but, left unchecked, it can build into settled conflict. You remember in Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas had a difference of opinion, a disagreement about whether or not they should take John Mark with them on a second missionary journey. Often, that's how our conflict begins. It

begins with a simple difference of opinion, sometimes about something important, and sometimes about something trivial. But that's where it starts.

There's a second source of conflict, and it's sin. We sin against one another. And that becomes a source for conflict. Proverbs 18:19 says "a brother offended," [a brother sinned against] "is harder to be won than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a citadel." Sometimes we involve ourselves in conflict by sinning against another person, and the conflict erupts as a result.

Thirdly, sometimes our conflict arises from pride. Proverbs 13:10 says, "through insolence [or through arrogance] "comes nothing but strife." Conflict. Proverbs 28:25, "an arrogant man stirs up strife." [Stirs up conflict.] Pride can lie as the source at the root of the conflict in our lives.

Sometimes it's deeply held desires. Turn to James 4. We'll be looking at this in detail in the coming months, but let me just call it to your attention now. James 4:1, James asks the key question. "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" Where does this come from? He says, "Is not the source your pleasures...?" The Greek word here is a word from which we get the word "hedonism". Is it not your desires for self-gratification? What you want? Verse 2,

You lust [or you crave] and [you] do not have; *so* you commit murder. You're envious and you cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask, and you ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend *it* on your pleasures."

What is James saying here? He's saying that beneath the quarrels, beneath the fights, often lies our desires, our cravings for something. Maybe it's a craving to be respected. She doesn't respect me the way I deserve to be respected. Maybe it's a desire or a craving to be left alone. Whatever it is, it comes from our hearts. It comes from the cravings of our hearts.

There's another source of our conflict, which is really the main source from which all conflict comes, and it's in Galatians 5:19. It says "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident." Our conflict comes from our flesh, from our unredeemed humanness. Verse 20, he describes some of the deeds of the flesh. They are "enmities, strife, [there it is] conflict, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissension, factions." Conflict comes from our fallen hearts. Those are the primary sources of conflict.

But how can we resolve the conflict that inevitably comes into our relationships? Well Paul explains for us back in Ephesians 4:26 and 27. Now notice to begin with, as I read those two verses to you, that Paul identifies the destructive element that lies behind every conflict. It is ungodly, sinful anger. Anger is how conflict starts. It's how it escalates, and ultimately, left unchecked, it's how it destroys relationships. Listen to the graphic words of Proverbs 30:33. "For the churning of milk produces butter." Now, you have to work a little harder to get the meaning of that. In an agricultural society such as these words were originally written, everyone did this, and so they understood this image. But you think in terms of the churning of milk to produce butter. It's inevitable. You churn milk, you're going to get butter. "And pressing the nose brings forth blood;" So the churning of anger produces conflict. It produces strife. You see, lying behind all conflict, ultimately, is anger.

But Paul doesn't leave us with a diagnosis. He also provides the cure. Notice in this short little paragraph, verses 26 and 27, Paul outlines for us two practical solutions to help deal with the anger that breeds conflict. Anger is the issue, and left unchecked it breeds conflict. And so, you go to the source and deal with the anger.

The first practical solution that Paul gives us here is don't allow sinful anger to begin. Don't allow sinful anger to begin. Notice the first part of verse 26. "BE ANGRY AND *yet* DO NOT SIN" Now don't misunderstand Paul here. This is not a command to be angry. It's a command not to sin in anger. We could paraphrase it like this. If you become angry, don't sin. Don't allow sinful anger in your heart. Now, as I say that, you're probably thinking, that's an interesting way to say it, sinful anger. You see, not all anger is sinful.

God is often characterized by anger. We saw that in Psalm 2 this morning. In Romans 1:18, Paul speaks of the wrath or anger of God being revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. But we can praise God that He is slow to anger. It takes God a long time to get hot. But anger, in and of itself, is not sinful. God is angry. Christ was angry. In Mark 3:5 you can read of His anger against those who didn't believe in Him.

Even human beings can demonstrate a Godly anger. In Exodus 11 you remember after Moses told Pharaoh of the last plague that was going to come on the land of Egypt. It says he left Pharaoh's presence in hot anger. Moses, again, in Exodus 32, when he came down from the mountain and discovered that Aaron had facilitated the making of that golden calf that the people were worshipping, he became angry with Aaron. In Nehemiah 5:6 Nehemiah became angry with the people of Israel for their sin. So, all anger is not sinful.

However, this is very important. Most human anger is sinful. Most human anger is sinful. Turn to James 1. We'll look at this, again, in some detail here in just a few weeks, but let me bring your attention to verse 19 of James 1. James says "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Why, verse 20 "because the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." Most of the anger in our lives--almost all of it with very few exceptions is sinful anger. Therefore, when Paul writes Ephesians 4, he says no sinful anger should be tolerated. You remember last time we looked at Ephesians 4:31. "Let all wrath and anger be put away from you." Don't tolerate any of it. Don't tolerate any sinful anger in your life.

Now, maybe you're one of those people sitting there this morning thinking, you know, I'm glad he's dealing with the issue of anger because this is not a problem with which I struggle. Maybe you're thinking, you know, I just don't believe I ever get angry. That's probably because we're all tempted to redefine our anger in socially and unbiblical terms. Have you ever found yourself saying: I'm not angry, I'm frustrated; or I'm not angry, I'm irritated; or I'm not angry, I'm just stressed out? Well let me encourage you to do something. Break out your Strong's concordance this afternoon and try to find those words in the Bible used in that sense. You see, the Bible has a word for the way we use those words, and it's the word "anger". Now, understand as well, that anger always involves your mind. It may be such a habit, and it may happen so quickly in your case that it seems beyond your control, but anger always grows out of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Anger grows out of your mind.

Usually, anger happens as a result of my believing that my rights have in some way been violated, that what I believe I deserve has been violated. Let me just choose an innocuous sort of anger. You're on the freeway on your way to work one morning, and you're dutifully in line, like everyone else should be in line, sitting in the traffic, and all of a sudden someone breaks past you in the emergency lane, waiting 'til the last possible moment to merge over, and nosing his way in between a car just in front of you. What's your response? It's anger. Why? I have a right to have my place in line and for that guy to live by the rules.

This is the way it always works in our lives. We become angry when we believe our rights have in some way been violated. Now, when disagreements come in our relationships, how do we keep them from developing into anger and ultimately into conflict? Very simply, Paul says, don't let sinful anger begin.

You say, well that's not real helpful. I understand I shouldn't be. How can I keep that from happening? Well, in Proverbs 15, let's turn there. I want you to see these proverbs in their context. Proverbs 15. I want you to read them with your own eyes here, because these are so foundational. Proverbs 15:1, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word" [literally a painful word, a word chosen to inflict pain] "stirs up anger." Now skip down to verse 18. "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife," [or conflict] "But the slow to anger calms a dispute."

Here's the key to not allowing anger to begin in your relationship. When your spouse speaks in anger, when something happens, and conflict begins to erupt? Rather than responding in kind, or choosing a harsh word, (that is a word designed to inflict pain on the other person) instead speak with gentleness, a gentle answer. Be slow to anger, and you will calm the dispute. Speak gently and humbly, and say something like this: honey, we need to sit down and talk about this. We love each other too much to let this come between us. We need to work it out together. Bring reason and gentleness and calmness to the situation, and it will cause the anger to begin to dispel.

But what if you find that you are already angry. How do you prevent conflict from building? Well, Paul's second practical solution is this. Not only don't allow sinful anger to begin, but secondly, don't allow sinful anger to grow. Notice the second half of verse 26. "Do not let the sun go down on your anger."

Now, it's important for you to understand that the Bible identifies two paths ungodly anger takes. One of those paths is blowing up, and the other is clamming up. We looked at those last time in Ephesians 4. You remember down in verse 31 the first word there, wrath, is a word which describes the blowup of anger, an outburst of anger, an eruption of Vesuvius. You know, there are people who live their lives like this. You can just sort of follow them around and see the destruction left in their wake. Everywhere they go they blow up.

Other people respond differently. They clam up. They think they're dealing with it. But instead, they internalize the anger, and it becomes this sort of slow burn. That's our second word in Ephesians 4:31. Anger, that's the word anger. It's the Greek word that speaks of that slow burn beneath the surface. That festering anger. But if you respond in either of those ways, then you are not resolving conflict. And let me assure you of something. Unresolved conflict will grow.

Let me just describe for you the course of conflict. It usually runs like this. It begins with a difference of opinion. And that difference of opinion over something important, something

trivial, it doesn't matter, can lead to a confrontation. One spouse confronts the other. And that confrontation then produces defensiveness and anger. Pretty soon what began as a difference of opinion becomes an argument; a full-fledged argument, which leads then to division. Now they're not one anymore. They are two, at battle. And that leads to retaliation. Something is said that the other spouse feels they need to retaliate. We're now in a tit for tat battle. And ultimately, the argument develops into an intense, settled anger, which leads to rejection, a desire for dominance, to win at all costs. And finally, over a period of time, what began as a difference of opinion becomes what I call confirmed hostility. And there's isolation and alienation. When you reach this stage, the man and the wife may still be living in the same home under the same roof, but they're strangers, at war, at settled conflict with each other.

You see, leaving one conflict unresolved is like placing a brick between you and your spouse. You may look at that brick and say, hey, it's not a big deal. It's just one brick. Just one little thing between us. But if you never resolve conflict, then you are creating a brick factory. I'll never forget. It's been more than 15 years ago now. Sheila and I were teaching on this issue of communication and conflict resolution to a group of couples out at Grace Church, and we finished talking about this issue, and I used this illustration of the brick. And this dear little lady came up afterwards, a short little lady, and she said to me. With tears in her eyes, she said, you know that illustration you used of the brick? That's what my husband and I do. We've done it our entire marriage. And she held her hand up as tall as she could hold it, and she said, we now have a wall this high. That's exactly what happens. If you don't resolve conflict, the bricks stay. They never go away, and you build a wall.

You see, whatever path your anger takes, whether you're prone to blow up or whether you're prone to clam up, don't let it continue in your heart. Instead, you must deal with the conflict. You must deal with the anger. And you must do it right away. Notice what Paul says. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Now, that expression is taken from Psalm 4:4, from the Septuagint translation, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. Psalm 4 was an evening prayer. It was a psalm intended to be sung or recited in the evening, before bed. And he says don't let the sun go down on your anger. You see, the Jewish day, in the Jewish mind, the day ended at sunset and a new day began. So, Paul is saying this. Before the end of one day and the beginning of another, deal with the conflict and with the anger that caused it. It's crucial that you not allow sinful anger to fester, to continue either to blow up or to clam up.

Now, there're some very popular unbiblical ways to resolve conflict. Maybe you practice one of these in your relationships, in your marriage. Here are some unbiblical ways to handle conflict.

Number 1. And some of you men love this one. Win at all costs. There's conflict? Whatever it takes, you've got to win. Listen, you take that approach, nobody wins. The only time it's appropriate to take "winning at all costs" as a solution to conflict is when an undeniable biblical issue is at stake. And even then, you have to watch your spirit and your attitude in your approach.

There's a second wrong way to deal with conflict, and it's to withdraw. And now, you can withdraw either physically: this is the person who storms out of the room or storms out of the house and drives off in the car, or you can withdraw mentally. Maybe you've seen the picture or maybe you've experienced it in your home, where there's an argument and in the middle of it one of the partners decides, I'm going to read the sports section, sits down in the chair, reads the paper while the wife stands there continuing the discussion (at some volume) to communicate to the husband. The husband has withdrawn. That's not a proper way to handle conflict.

A third wrong way to handle conflict is to just pretend it never happened. A lot of people take this approach. Yeah, I know we had this terrible disagreement, this terrible conflict, a few minutes ago, but let's just pretend it never happened. Go on in our lives.

Number four. Some people yield for the sake of peace. Out of fear of long-term negative impact on their relationship, they simply choose to yield. They always find themselves saying, yeah, I'm sorry, I was wrong, you're right. The danger with that is the anger goes internal. It becomes that slow burn. It develops into bitterness. And then one day, this mild-mannered person in the relationship blows up and the spouse is wondering, who are you, and what did you do with my spouse? Because it was all there, building and growing.

There's a fifth wrong way to deal with conflict, and it's compromise. You give in some, your spouse gives in some, nobody's really happy, but at least we worked it out. Now, this is okay with preferences. I mean if you're talking about the color of the carpet it's alright. Guys, you can give in. And so much of what conflict is really about is insignificant issues. But these are all wrong. These are wrong ways to deal with the conflict that comes into our lives in relationships and marriages.

So, what's the right way to resolve conflicts? There's only one. True complete resolution. Or to use the biblical expression, coming to be of one mind. You remember when we studied the book of Philippians, that there was a conflict in Philippi between two Godly women who had been laborers with Paul while he was there in Philippi. In fact, turn to Philippians 4. These two

women apparently disagreed over something that wasn't a clear doctrinal issue. It was a matter of preference that probably started as a difference of opinion. And it's now grown into settled conflict. And notice what Paul urges them to do. Listen to the solution Paul urges.

Philippians 4:2, I urge Euodia, and I urge Syntyche to win at all costs, to have nothing to do with each other, to yield for the sake of peace, to compromise. Just get along, ladies. No, none of those are acceptable solutions to conflict. Notice what Paul says. He says, "live in harmony in the Lord" Literally the Greek text says this. I urge them to think the same, to be of one mind, to come to complete resolution. That's the goal. The question is, how can you and I come to one mindedness with our spouse when we find ourselves locked in conflict?

Well, if you were the person who was personally offended, you may choose to overlook a wrong suffered, and to exercise a forgiving spirit if it's not going to continue to bother you. If it's going to continue to bother you, if it's going to grow into bitterness, then you need to go deal with it. But you may choose if you can let it go, and you were personally offended, to exercise a forgiving spirit and to move on.

If not, then you must go to the person. In fact, let me put it differently. God says that when there is conflict, both parties are responsible to go to the other. In Matthew 5, if your brother has something against you, in other words you have sinned against your brother, you're to go to your brother. Matthew 18, if your brother has sinned against you, you're still to go to your brother. What's the point? It's never right to say, well, I'm not going to him. I'm waiting 'til he comes to me, or until he brings it up. You see, from God's perspective, the best scenario is that both people, the one who sinned and the one who was sinned against, both run into each other on the way to resolve the conflict. That's the Godly scenario. That's the right way to handle conflict.

Let me give you just some practical stuff, to resolve conflict, to make sure the sun doesn't go down on your anger. You've come together now. You're going to try to deal with it. How do you do that? These are not inspired. They certainly grow out of biblical principles, but these were principles that were shared with Sheila and me early in our marriage, that have been such a help. And I share them with you for your encouragement. What do you do?

Number 1. One partner must be humble enough to calmly bring the focus back to the importance of the relationship and of honoring God in how the problem is addressed. Somebody has to say, wait a minute. There's something more important here than the issue. You and I love each other dearly. Our relationship matters. Our relationship pictures Jesus Christ and the church. We're

to honor God by how we deal with this problem, with this disagreement. Bring it back to the importance of working through the disagreement. There'll be times when it's one spouse and times when it's another, if our experience bears true. But somebody's got to say, wait a minute. The issue isn't as important as the relationship and as honoring Christ in how we interact with each other.

Number 2. Seek to truly understand what the other person is saying and why. Seek to truly understand what the other person is saying and why. You know, most of the time, conflict comes, when it comes, we're too busy getting our point across. We're too busy making sure the other person understands just how upset we are and just how grieved we are and, just what our mind has to think about this issue. Resolution begins when we begin to truly seek to understand the other person and why they think the way they do. We stop trying to make our point.

Number 3. This is key. Focus on your own contribution to the problem and on your partner's perspective until you come to one-mindedness. Very important to keep this mindset. Stop thinking about your partner's problems. Think about your problem and how you have contributed to this mess, and think about your partner's perspective until you really come to one-mindedness. And let me tell you, this is hard work. This involves a lot of time and conversation and work.

Number 4. Ask your spouse for forgiveness. In the midst of this conflict, there's been anger, and there's been ungodly anger. You need to confess it to your partner and ask their forgiveness. Ask your spouse to forgive you.

Number 5. Then pray together and seek God's forgiveness for slandering the name of Christ in how you responded to each other.

Number 6. Never bring that conflict up again. Forgive, just as you have been forgiven.

Paul says, Don't allow sinful anger to develop. But if it develops in your heart, and conflict begins, then don't allow sinful anger to continue. Don't let a day end without having dealt with the anger and resolved the conflict. In our context we put it this way. Don't go to bed without dealing with your anger and defusing the conflict.

Sheila and I, before we were married, made this commitment to each other. We determined that we would never go to bed mad. We'd never go to bed until we'd really arrived at a place, not of

compromise, but of one-mindedness, where neither of us felt cheated in the result, but we both agreed with the conclusion. I can tell you that early on, it meant some long discussions. Hours, three, four hours. It meant some short nights of sleep. But it was worth it. There were times when I just wanted to give up and go to bed. It's not worth it.

Now, most of the time, it doesn't take very long at all. But whether it's a few minutes or a few hours, the payoff is worth it. And the cost of not pursuing resolution is way too high. Maybe you don't think it's that important. Paul does. Notice what he writes in verse 27. Listen to the reason it's so important to deal with your anger and the resulting conflict. "Do not give the devil an opportunity." Maybe you've never thought of that verse in reference to anger and conflict before, but that's exactly the context in which it appears. You see, if we don't resolve the conflict, if we don't deal with our anger, it provides an opening for the devil to destroy us, to destroy our very lives through bitterness, or through personal revenge.

Have you ever responded to a conflict by becoming bitter at the person against whom, with whom you had the conflict, or responding with a desire to get even? You're giving the devil an opportunity. Listen to William Hendrickson, the great commentator. He says,

The devil will quickly seize the opportunity of changing our indignation, whether righteous or unrighteous, into a grievance, a grudge, a nursing of wrath, an unwillingness to forgive. He must not be given any opportunity to take advantage of our anger for his own sinister purpose.

Listen, anger can absolutely destroy your life. It will eat you up. We've read everything from the tragic to the humorous about this. Several years ago, there was a story about a man who was so angry with his ex-wife, the wife that he had recently divorced, that he sent all of his alimony payments to her in nickels. Every payment was 160 pounds of nickels. That's a lot of work. That's a lot of effort. But you see, anger was eating him up. It was destroying his life and even his reputation. I mean, it was posted all over the papers.

Or maybe you read this week the news report about the Oscar winning actor, Russell Crowe's arrest, for apparently assaulting a hotel employee (here you go) for being unhelpful. Now, if you and I had assaulted every hotel employee who was unhelpful, we would be heavyweight champions of the world by now. Here's a man with a problem with anger. It's eating him up. It's destroying his life. It's destroying his reputation. He carries it around with him everywhere

he goes. They're explosions. The danger of growing anger is even greater than its destroying our lives here. The devil can use our out-of-control anger to destroy our souls.

In Galatians 5:20 Paul says that a person whose life is characterized by anger will not inherit the kingdom of God. You know what that means? It means it's impossible to practice anger as a habit of life and at the same time be a Christian. Jesus said a person who says to someone "you good for nothing" shall be guilty before the supreme court, but whoever says "you fool" (and the idea is, in anger) shall be guilty enough to go into fiery hell. Satan can use anger to destroy your soul.

When I was in high school, occasionally I went out on visitation, which was popular in the churches I attended. We'd go out and visit those who had visited the church. And I'll never forget one visit. We went to a poor section of town, and my partner and I were absolutely shocked when we went inside. There were only small trails between the piles of stuff. The lady of the house had to move several large stacks of stuff off the couch for us to have a place to sit. And we sat down on the couch, and I was facing her, and behind her was the kitchen. And I looked into the kitchen, and there were more piles of dishes, occupying every square inch of counter than most restaurant kitchens have in them. And those dishes were all dirty. Some of them still had food on them. And everywhere there weren't stacks, there were piles of dirty laundry and trash.

Now, if you can picture that scene in your mind for a moment, you have a graphic picture of the result of allowing conflicts to remain unresolved. Because every time you and your spouse have a strong disagreement and fail to resolve it, you've failed to come to be of one mind, it's as if you are throwing a piece of trash down in your house. You are throwing a piece of laundry down in your house. At first, it's still relatively easy to live. You know, you just walk around it or over it. But as the years go by, it becomes impossible to live there. There may be some of you here today who need to go home and start by picking up the clutter of 5 or 10 or 15 or 20 or 30 years of unresolved conflict.

Maybe you need to go home and get a fresh start by sitting down with your spouse and confessing your sin and seeking her or his forgiveness, and then together crying out to the Lord for His forgiveness. And then commit yourself, with the Lord's help, never to allow sinful anger. And when it does come, commit to deal with it and to resolve that conflict before that day is done. Paul writes, "Be angry and yet do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. And do not give the devil an opportunity."

Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for Your Word. Lord I pray for those here today who have handled their anger and conflict in sinful ways. Lord, all of us have done that from time to time. I pray for those who've never recognized it, never dealt with it. I pray that today would be the day they would acknowledge their sin before You and begin to practice what You've laid down in this passage.

I pray for those couples who need to go home and clear away the clutter of many many years. I pray You would give them the grace to do that. And Lord, I pray for the person here today who is still overcome with anger, who has a habit of life, who practices anger, creates conflict wherever he or she goes. Lord, help them to see that they're not in Christ. Help them to see that they will not inherit the kingdom of God, and help today to be the day that they cry out for forgiveness. That they repent and turn and believe in Christ. Give them a new heart, a heart of flesh in place of their heart of stone, and cause them to walk in Your ways.

We pray it to the glory of Jesus Christ, and in His name, Amen.