

## SERMON SERIES: WILLPOWER

**ANGER**

We're beginning a sermon series called "Willpower." The idea is this: all of us have a gap between what we want to do (our will) and what we actually do (our actions). There are things we want to accomplish, but we can never get to actually accomplishing them.

For example, we want to lose weight, but we can't find the discipline to actually avoid the calories or get ourselves to the gym. So there is a gap between what is good for us, what we will to do, and what we actually do.

Another example: We want to save money, but we go on Amazon or we go to the mall, and the sales are outrageously good! The more you spend, the more you save, right? You end up spending the dollars you wanted to save. So you have a gap between what you want to do, and what you actually do.

Paul talks about this very thing in Romans 7 ...

***The desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do.***

**Romans 7:18-19** So Paul is saying that there are things he knows he should do, but there is this gap between our desire and the things we do (our actions). And he says that the things he knows he shouldn't do, that's the stuff we end up doing.

Now I want to warn you. In this series we are going to look at some tender areas where many of us struggle. We are going to talk about anger, lust, and worry. We could talk about a lot of other things. The point is, we lack the ability to solve these problems in our lives just by our own willpower. We have a will power problem. We need help!

This series is about tapping into that help! We are going to talk about the power of God's will in our lives through the Holy Spirit to take our good desires and turn them into the things we do! God has the power to do things in our lives that we desperately need to address.

Today, to start with this issue of anger, we are going to begin with a little self-assessment. It seems good to see how angry we are. We live in a culture that is epidemic with anger. There is anger everywhere you turn. People spew hatred. So let's just see how we are doing.

ANGER QUIZ: It's a scale of 1-10. One is like "It doesn't bother me at all." Ten is, "I'm going to explode like a nuclear bomb. So, give yourself a number on each of these 4 questions.

- Question 1: How angry do you get when ... **A friend cancels long-standing plans at the last minute?** You've had these plans like forever, and your friend cancels on you at the last minute, and the excuse is flimsy! And this is like the 3<sup>rd</sup> time they've done this to you! How angry do you get? Give yourself a rating 1 – 10.
- Question 2: **Your computer crashes** (*love computers: hate computers!*) **and you have a big presentation to make?** If you are a living person with a computer, there is no chance in the world this is a 1; no chance you are perfectly fine with this. So if you give yourself a 1 on this, you're lying.
- Question #3: **The person behind you is talking loudly at the movies?** You're out for an evening, trying to enjoy a movie. You've paid the going rate for tickets (have you seen the price of movie tickets lately?!) The person behind you just can't be quiet through the whole thing. You've tried to shush them, but it isn't helping. You can't even hear the dialogue. How do you rate yourself on this one?
- Question #4: **You are in *another* traffic jam ... in *another* road construction zone?** Did I say 1-10? We may need higher numbers.

So add up your 4 numbers. Where did you rate. Anyone get 1s all the way through – a score of 4? If you are a 4, there is something going on in you that is a miracle. Please step forward because you are going to preach the rest of this sermon. Most of us are up there, somewhere. And if your scores add to 40, we're going to get you an appointment with a counselor right away!

There are all kinds of things that make us angry. All kinds of things that push our buttons and trigger anger inside of us.

We are going to turn to Paul. Remember how the Holy Scriptures work. Paul writes these words, but the Holy Spirit inspires him. So these are God's words to your heart and my heart and our lives.

Where Paul begins is a mouthful! ***Do not repay anyone evil for evil.***  
*Romans 12:17* At times that seems easy because lots of silly things make us angry. But sometimes, there are serious things make us angry. Sometimes people hurt us, hurt others, hurt all of society. It makes us angry. And yet Paul says, ***“Do not repay anyone evil for evil.”***

Have you ever thought to yourself, “If I don't do something about it, they're going to get away with it.” “If I don't let them know how angry I am, they will continue to do the same thing and hurt some else.” Anybody ever have those kinds of thoughts?

We can *hear* the Scripture, but it's not so easy to *do*, is it?

Now, we have to qualify this: there is such a thing as righteous anger. There are times when anger is appropriate. We know in the Scriptures that at times God got angry. Jesus got angry. God's anger, however, is not like our anger. If we look at Jesus' righteous anger, it was not like our culture today where everybody is angry. Because when Jesus was angry, nobody else had a problem. The stuff that Jesus was angry about, nobody else was angry about it. You and I need to recognize that righteous anger is rare. Righteous anger rises up in opposition to something that God says is really a problem.

The second thing about righteous anger is that when Jesus was angry it was always about something that was destroying people's lives. Something that was tearing people away from God. But His anger wasn't directed towards people. It was directed toward sin.

Jesus didn't get angry because someone embarrassed Him. He didn't get angry because He was treated unfairly. He got angry because sin was keeping people from God. His anger was always about bringing people back. It wasn't about having a grudge. It

wasn't about getting even. It was always about repentance. Because that's the heart of our God, right? God is always focused on bringing people back to Himself through confession of sin and forgiveness of sin. Righteous anger isn't fueled by our sinful nature inside of us.

Paul gives us a better, more-effective way of fighting the evil committed against us and the evil we see in our world. In Romans 12 it says: *Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. 18 If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay, says the Lord. 20 But: If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head. 21 Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.* *Romans 12:17-21* Here we find four key things that we can do instead of getting angry when somebody wrongs us or we see something wrong. Paul shares 4 things that help us move from being people of anger to where we desire to be as people of peace.

I encourage you to write these 4 things down. See, here's the thing. Maybe anger is not a problem for you. Maybe you are one peaceful person in a world of hostility. Yet, I know that you know someone for whom anger is a problem. I don't want you to write these 4 things down and send these to them and say, "Hey, you've got an anger problem." What I want you to do is as a loving friend, write these down, and maybe you don't even talk to them about these. Instead, you take these and begin praying for that person. You begin praying for God to take these 4 and begin to work healing for their emotional struggle. Now, if this is a struggle for you, write these down because all of us who struggle with anger, we need these reminders.

Number 1: **The "Ends" don't justify the "Means."** Sometimes we try to get to an "end" we think is better than something that is wrong, even if we have to do wrong things to get there. We may think, anger may be dangerous, but if it gets us motivated to solve something, it's okay. It's not!

Think of Robin Hood. He stole from the rich, to give to the poor. And he was a hero! But he was still a thief. See the thing is

poverty is a problem. And not taking care of people who are impoverished is a problem. And greed is a problem. But stealing is also a problem. The Bible doesn't teach us to do whatever is required to accomplish something good.

I love how our Scripture passage begins, *Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. Romans 12:17* Give careful thought. So you do what is "honorable." The word "honorable" is actually a Greek word, **kalos** and it means "good." What you do should be good all the way through! God calls us to be good, and to do good.

The Bible even tells us that we are called to endure evil, to suffer when wrong is done to us, because God can work through it all.

That's the message of the Gospel, isn't it? Peter writes: *For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. 22 He did not commit sin... 24 He Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree; so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness. 1 Peter 2:21-22, 24* God allowed bad things, evil things to happen to His Son, and worked it all together for our good. So, like Jesus, we don't do bad, evil things. Instead, we trust God in all things. We do good at all times, trusting that God will work it out as He knows is best. We don't take things in our own hands, because we know God will work it all together the way He intends. The "ends" do not justify the "means."

**2. Focus on what you CAN do.** Just because you choose not to be angry doesn't mean others won't be. We live a culture that is so overflowing with frustration, so overflowing with anger and mean-spirited kinds of talk that too often we get distract by everybody else. We focus on what everyone else is thinking, what everyone else is saying, what everyone else is doing.

I love what Paul says: *If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:18* He puts two qualifying phrases in there. "If possible" in other words, if it can be done. "As far as it depends on you." Do everything within your power to live at peace with everyone. We can't control what everyone else is doing. All we can do is what is within our power. Focus on our own heart, our own

mind, our own attitude. Sometimes, the best thing you can do is ignore the other person who is pushing your buttons. Maybe you have to “unfriend” someone on social media, or “snooze” that person’s posts for 30 days so you don’t see their comments for a month. And then, snooze them for another 30 days. We have to do what we can to be at peace with everyone.

**3. Don’t get angry, get strategic.** Anger doesn’t make us better. What anger does is it clouds the clarity of thought, causes us to act impulsively, causes inner turmoil instead of peaceful reflection. Anger can even affect our physical response time like alcohol does. So instead of losing all those faculties, get strategic.

Paul says, *If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.*

*Romans 12:20* Feeding our enemies, giving your thirsty enemy a drink is so countercultural! If you heap fiery coals on someone, is that going to cause a reaction? YES! So what Paul is say here is, instead of responding to anger with anger, respond with kindness, and that will provoke a response. If someone is angry with you and you respond with kindness, it kind of throws them off their game, doesn’t it? If someone is being mean to you and you keep responding with love and gentleness, it takes all their fuel away to keep being mean.

A good example of this is Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Instead of responding with violence to all arrests, and name calling, and beatings, and fire-bombing his home, he responded with love; with peace; with praying for his enemies. And that’s what gave victory to the American Civil Rights Movement.

When was the last time you changed someone’s mind by getting angry at them? It doesn’t work! So, here’s a different strategy: Be kind to the other person. Kindness is powerful. Love is more powerful than hatred. Love changes things.

This leads us to point **4. Trust God.** I sometimes wonder if part of the reason we’re so willing to get angry is because we don’t think that God cares. All these bad things are happening to us, someone is pouring anger out on us and we think God doesn’t care. Let me tell you something certain: God Cares! He does!

God is patient with sin and evil, He doesn't destroy us people because God LOVES us! God is love.

Instead of giving us what we deserve, He heaps it all on Jesus!

That's the message of the cross, right? God put on Jesus all of our sin, and all of our unrighteousness, and all of our brokenness. Instead of giving us what we deserve, Jesus carried it all.

God's Word says this: ***God does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.*** *Psalm 103:10 (NIV)* God does repay US for OUR sins. He pours out His wrath for our sins by putting it on the shoulders of Jesus. What God did on the cross is He exacted His vengeance by putting it all on Jesus' shoulders. He invites us to do the same with other people. To let God take care of other people's sins; to let Jesus carry the punishment deserved by other people's anger.

That's why Paul writes: ***Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay, says the Lord.*** *Romans 12:19* God sees what's wrong with the world, and it troubles Him. But His judgment is much more effective than our vengeance! God's judgment leads to salvation. On the cross, God's judgment for our sin comes, but instead of falling on us, it falls on Jesus, so that we get salvation.

A few weeks ago, we sat down for supper and we heard a loud crashing noise coming from the garage. I got up from the table to see what had exploded or fallen over out there. What I found was that the spring on the garage door suddenly snapped. Thankfully, no one was around to get hurt by it.

The garage door was down when it broke, and Sue asked me if it could be opened to get her bike out. I said, "Oh, sure!" "I can lift it. It's aluminum. How heavy can it be?" Guess what? I found out how heavy it can be. There was no way I could lift that door by myself. Later I found out it weighs about 200 lbs. There's no way I can lift that kind of weight.

Once we got it repaired, the new spring did all the heavy lifting. It was like effortlessly, the garage door goes up and down. That spring easily carries the weight that there's no way I can carry.

Friends, when we try to deal with our anger on our own, there's no way we have the horsepower to do it. The load will crush you. It will hurt you. We may have good intentions even to deal with it. But there's no way we have the ability to turn our intentions into reality.

But there is good news. Jesus does. Jesus is happy to carry it for you!

God, in His love gives you forgiveness. In love, by His grace, He gives you heaven to come. In love He gives you the power of Jesus' resurrection to work in your life now. God loves you, and wants only the best for you. He offers to carry your burdens, and in exchange give you freedom, and wholeness, and peace. That's my prayer. May it be all of ours also. AMEN.