

**Series: WHO GETS THE BLESSING? October 26, 2008**

**THE SERIAL KILLER**  
how unresolved anger keeps on killing  
**Matthew 5:21-26**

**I. INTRO**

A. I don't know if I ever told you this or not, but Lori and I did time as what's known as **trailer trash**. Yes, we lived in a mobile home! Actually, we were **glad** to have a home—even if it was in a trailer park! We had just gotten married; I was working armed security at a nuclear power plant and Lori was working at a sewing store and taking night classes.

-The scary thing about our housing situation was that a serial killer was preying on people in the area. Anyone here ever lived in a mobile home? You can break into one with a can opener! This murderer would break into a home in the middle of the night, shoot the husband, and take the wife—who would later be found dead. Not only did this happen to the sister of a close friend of ours, it also happened to a couple who lived in a mobile home just a few miles away. It's not politically correct to say this, but at that time I was grateful for my training as an armed guard!

1. The whole concept of a **serial** killer is this terrifying mystery in human behavior. We think to ourselves, "Why would someone ever do something like that to other people? How could a human heart get so twisted and fouled up?"

-Interesting, isn't it, that three pages and four chapters into the Bible—one brother named Cain is jealous of his younger brother Abel—so he takes him out into the field and brains him with a rock. It's fascinating that before that even happens, God talks to him about his **anger**. He says, It's crouching at the door—and it will **control** you—if you don't control it!

2. Thousands of years later, God walks the planet with humans—and says once again, "You can't control the problem of bloodshed on this planet by telling people not to kill each other—or else...! You have to go for the **roots**--and all murder, whether it's shooting someone—or maiming them emotionally—or destroying their heart or their reputation—all this tragedy is rooted in anger. And **no one** is excluded!

B. So, my message this morning is...**Don't get angry! Be happy!** You can go!

-Actually, it's not that easy, is it? Anger is this mystifying force inside us. I just did an online anger test—purely out of curiosity—and scored a 37 out of 100—for guys my age. I was disappointed. I was hoping for maybe a minus 5 or something. The test kept asking questions like, "Do you like to live in neat and orderly environment" and, "Are you easily irritated?" I mean, after the third time, I said, "Doggone it! I **wouldn't** get so irritated if you didn't keep asking the same **stupid** question!!!!"

-You all are looking pretty cocky sitting there laughing like **you** never get angry! I can test you on your anger quotient, if you'd like. It's a simple multiple choice question: When you're driving, how often do you use your horn?

a) Never. No matter what happens.

b) As needed—at least once a day—like vitamins

c) It's the most used part of my car—in fact, I find myself reaching for it right now!

1. But anger is no laughing matter, is it. Not in our world. Not with all the shattered hearts. Not with the anxiety—and guilt people feel. Not with the blood that gets spattered in fields, alleys and homes every day. Not with the

bruises and cuts and pillows wet with tears. Not for the 1 million people injured every single year by violence in the workplace—in North America!

2. The ultimate serial killer of all time is not Jack the Ripper or John Wayne Gacey. It's anger—and all of its ugly sister. You can take all the anger management classes you want—but the life of Jesus is the only real antidote for this kind of poison.

## II. BRIDGES AND FENCES

- A. It's important to understand that the bedrock behind Jesus teaching here is the Ten Commandments. His point is that we tend to look for loopholes. "Well, I didn't technically commit adultery!" "Well, I'm not sure that I actually **stole** anything!" -So, Jesus gets right to the roots of how these commands relate to loving God and loving others. Notice what Jesus says right at the front end of this message:
 

**"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. Truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20 TNIV)"**

  1. Jesus says, "Let's be clear. I'm not here to trash the Big Ten—or any of the implications of what God has already said about life. I'm here to **fulfill** it. Complete it. Get to the heart of what it's calling us to be. Live it out so people have an idea of what it **looks** like to love God and love others."
 

-In Jesus' day, the religious professionals had built a bunch of bridges and fences around the law. See, whenever you have laws, you have lawyers—who interpret the law—and basically find ways for people to do what they **want** to do and yet stay out of jail. They did this with divorce. They did this with honoring parents.

-Jesus said, "The Law is **good**—and it leads to **life!** You've just missed the point of it all and turned it into a way of living a religiously respectable life without your heart ever changing."
  2. I'll tell you specifically where this hits us; it's who I **am** vs. what I **do**. Sometimes people will say things like, "I would like to be known as a caring and compassionate and loving person." The real question is, "**Are** you? Or is this an acting job you've taken on to fool everyone?" Companies do this all the time. Ever have someone call you right at meal time—and their first question is, "How are you today, Mr. Davis?" Do you think they care how I'm doing? Of **course** they don't! They want me to buy their product.
 

-What Jesus communicated all through his life—in fact, the message of the Bible, especially the New Testament, is that keeping rules doesn't change your heart or earn a way to Heaven.
- B. What Jesus makes clear in this talk known as **The Sermon on the Mount** is that wrong actions are not the real problem; they're symptoms of a much deeper problem. What Jesus exposed with His teaching and his life is that people would **much** rather **do** the right thing than **be** the right kind of person. I'd much rather be **known** as a loving, patient person than actually **be** a loving, patient person—because to actually

**be** that kind of person means I'm going to have to grow and do things I don't *feel* like doing.

1. See, if Jesus had a yard, He wouldn't try to solve the weed problem with a lawnmower. Jesus created them. He knows that weeds have **roots**. Keeping the lawn mowed will give you a respectable look; but pulling the weeds by the roots is how you solve the problem!  
-And Jesus knows that unless our hearts are changed to **want** goodness and **want** love and **want** God—the image management stuff really doesn't matter at all. And **that's** why Jesus would say something like: **For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:20 TNIV)** We don't need behavior modification. We need a transformed heart!
2. That's why Jesus would later say: **But the words you speak come from the heart—that's what defiles you. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. These are what defile you. (Matthew 15:18-20a NLT)**  
-And **that's** why Jesus came to change hearts through the power of God. He said, "Good fruit comes from **good** trees; bad fruit comes from **bad** trees."  
So—let's not just paint the rotten apples red; let's heal the tree!"

### III. UNRESOLVED ANGER JUST **KEEPS ON KILLING!**

- A. Jesus then begins to illustrate what a transformed heart looks like—and He reaches right down into some of the messiest stuff of life on planet earth. Anger.  
**"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. (Matthew 5:21-22 TNIV)**
  1. Anger is an emotion that **all** people feel. Question—is anger a **sinful emotion?** And the answer? Well the record is quite clear in telling us that Jesus got angry. He got angry at the religious professionals when they humiliated a crippled man—simply to trap Jesus into healing him. The Bible says, **He looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. (Mark 3:5 NLT).**  
-He also got angry when a bunch of merchants scammed visitors to the Temple in Jerusalem. In fact, He made a whip and drove them out.  
-So—was Jesus violating his own teaching with his reactions? The answer is....? No! Anger is simply a natural response to being hindered or frustrated in something we want to do. Anger is intended to send a flow of adrenaline into our bodies to empower us to deal with difficult—or dangerous situations. Sometimes anger is the **right** emotion—particularly at times when a person is being exploited or harmed or humiliated.  
-In fact, when Jesus saw the situation this crippled man was in and the hardness of heart of those who were using him, it would appear that his anger was expressed in healing the man—correcting the problem he had and teaching the hard-hearted people about God's response to pain.  
-The form of anger Jesus is dealing with here seems to be anger that is never expressed in any constructive way—in making things better—but is stored up inside as a deep prolonged, smoldering resentment. It's anger at a person,

without ever taking the steps or being willing to humble yourself to resolve the issues.

2. Jesus, surprisingly, relates this to murder. His point is that anger, in some form, is **always** at the roots of murder and violence. And anger is a heart issue.
  - Know where it starts? Holding a grudge toward another person. Someone has frustrated you, someone has hindered you, someone has done something to you or someone you love that at least **feels** deep and personal and intentional. That resentment you feel—however you want to justify it—has created this abscess inside, this infected sore spot that is filled with pus. Gross, I know—but true.
  - What Jesus is saying here is that if you don't deal with anger—if you don't deal with resentment in your heart, it will not only poison you, it will ultimately harm others—because it's impossible to love and care for people you resent.
  - Sometimes people think, "So what's the big deal if I just hold it inside?" Anger leaks. It infects. And it eventually comes out of us in ways we don't even see—or at least, admit. Jesus is pretty clear here; "You are accountable to God for what goes on in your soul!"
3. See, our hearts can't contain anger and resentment without it leaking. Sometimes it leaks out through our actions. "How are you?" "Fine!" But we freeze people out. And it's a form of manipulation. "I'll just make you feel so bad, so frozen out--that you **give** me my way!"
  - And, of course, anger that's sitting down in our souls ultimately tends to leak from our mouths—even if the volume never gets turned up one decibel. The term Jesus uses here is **raca!** I know, gross sound. It sounds like someone is clearing their throat. It's words that leak out when we're driving, or some other place where someone has said or done something that lit our fuse.
  - What Jesus is saying here is that if you have a way of skewering other people with your attitude or words—whether it's your kids, your spouse, your co-workers, or whoever—when you get frustrated or interfered with—it's **not** okay! It's not okay to manipulate, dump your load, give someone a piece of your mind, shred your child's heart, or slice and dice your mate. Doing that is an act of verbal violence.
  - It's not an etiquette issue, "Nice people don't **do** that." It's sinful, it's wrong, it's destructive, it escalates problems—and if you indulge in it—you need to stop. Not 20 years from now after you've left a trail of bloody people. Now. It doesn't change by trying harder—or even by taking anger management classes. Friends, this problem is only solved by a transformed heart. It's an inside job that only Jesus can manage as He pours His life into us and transforms the way we think about others and the way we think about ourselves. Sometimes it helps to have to go and clean up the messes we've made with our temper tantrums.
4. Anger takes another step downward—and it's into pure contempt for another person. The words Jesus uses are, **You fool!** In our culture, we can hardly feel the force of these words. Dallas Willard writes, in his commentary on this, that it would be like someone calling another person, "You **f...ing jerk!**" In essence, it's this way of degrading another person as being unworthy of the life they have and the soul they carry. This kind of stuff comes from a proud, arrogant heart—where anger and resentment has literally putrefied into a form of hatred.

- Contempt for **anyone** is a soul problem that contradicts everything Jesus taught and stood for.

- B. I want you to think for a minute about the crazy world we live in—the crowdedness, the expectations, the lack of sleep, the busyness, the rudeness. Most of us have grown up in and live in a culture that believes that we evolved in a process called, “The survival of the fittest”—with **no** knowledge of or interest in Jesus’ words, “Do for others what you would want them to do for you.”

-Our world is a set-up for frustration—and anger. There is a **lot** to get angry over! And we see it all over, don’t we? But it’s important to know—**so** important to know—that stewing in anger is **not** inevitable when people step on your tail or light your fuse. It’s a **choice**—ultimately. It’s looking at the black garbage bag full of stuff—and making the choice to hang onto it, rather than let it go. And when you do that—you are making the choice to create this inner reservoir of toxic waste that sits near the surface, waiting to spill out on others. And it will. Eventually it will become something you’re not even aware of. But the people **around** you will be aware of it!

1. Sometimes people kinda live in denial when it comes to anger. When we think of angry people, we think of the Incredible Hulk—eyes turn red, buttons pop, pants split, cars fly through the air. But some people just stuff it all down inside. Anyone know what happens when you swallow poison? You get sick—and it **can** kill you!  
-I mean, everyone here knows that mismanaged anger increases stress, affects your heart, your circulatory system and your digestive system, right? What Jesus says here about dealing with anger could save your life!
2. Mismanaged anger also has a way of driving friends away and killing relationships. Does anyone here have an angry person in your life? How many of you like being around that person? Just hearing their name on the phone or having their email address appear gives you cramps and diarrhea, doesn’t it!  
-If this is a normal audience, I’ll bet mismanaged anger has seriously damaged some marriages and some children. When anger gets into a person’s heart, it costs them friendships, jobs—all kinds of stuff. There was a survey done a number of years ago, and kids were asked the question, “If you could change one thing about your Mom, what would it be? The #1 answer—96% of the kids—said, “I wish my Mom wouldn’t yell at me so much.”
3. Something else happens when we hold onto grudges and **choose** to remain angry. It infects others. Especially those who are close to us. We pass on our prejudices, anger, and junk to others without even thinking about it. Know why? We don’t **want** anyone to like them, and we are quite prepared to destroy their reputation if necessary.
4. Something else that is very clear in what Jesus is saying. Anger, especially when it’s dumped on someone else, has a huge effect on them. When anger and contempt pours out of our mouth and body language and dumps onto another person’s soul—the communication is chilling: “The earth would be a better place if you never existed! You aren’t worth the dirt you stand on or the space you take up on this planet.” And Jesus makes it clear—God is passionately in love with every person. There is **no** way you can show this kind of contempt for another human being and **not** have it affect your relationship with God.

#### IV. GETTING OUT OF THE POWDER KEG

- A. Paul, an early church leader, makes it clear that anger, as an initial response to something—to getting hurt or frustrated—is not the real problem. It's what happens afterward. Listen to how he writes about it:

**"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold...**

**Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.**

**(Ephesians 4:26, 27-32 TNIV)**

1. Paul starts out, "In your anger (and you *will* get angry)—don't sin." And he gives the key to not sinning. **Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold... (Ephesians 4:26 TNIV)**  
 -Now, Paul isn't giving us a law here—that we *must* run to deal with it before even a day passes. His point is that if we let anger seep down into our hearts it will germinate and start to develop a root structure in a very short period of time. And *this* is where spiritual evil gets its start. Paul is clear that when we do that, we give the Devil a foothold; a kind of beachhead; a launching pad for doing all kinds of other things in our lives. See—bitterness, revenge, resentment and hatred is *his* territory.
2. Know what tends to happen? The more self-righteous we feel about a situation, the more our pride gets entwined around our anger. And *then* dealing with it becomes an issue of, "Who's gonna *win!* Who's gonna blink first? Who's gonna apologize first?" Pride, friends, makes issues almost *impossible* to deal with!  
 -To *stay* angry and continue the slow burn inside, we begin to see ourselves as mistreated. A victim of someone else—you know; the one with the *real* problem! That begins this downward spiral of the wounded ego. And that's when it begins to putrefy into all this other stuff Paul mentions. Bitterness. Rage. Slander. Malice.  
 -And then comes this surprising note. Paul says, "This stuff *grieves* the Spirit of God. Think about that. The Spirit is the One who helps us love, who brings joy and life—who makes us usable in the hands of God! At that point, Satan has his foothold. We're pre-occupied and hurt—and unusable to God. How *can* He use us? Someone else is hurt. The infection spreads. Can you see *why* the Spirit of God would be grieved?"
3. And the very next step is that all this stuff that's been putrefying inside gets sprayed out. I told you the story, didn't I, about my clever idea to stuff all the skin and guts from some chicken we were having in a glass jar. Not realizing, of course, what would happen over a couple of days in 35 degree temperatures? I got a call from Lori the day the lid blew...  
 -Store junk inside—it *will* come out—and it will smell about like the chicken stuff that came out of the jar that fateful day—in angry hurtful words that stick like shrapnel in the people around you. And *they* get infected. Sometimes whole families get infected.

-And that's why Jesus hates this stuff. That's why He has such strong words for it—because this is the ugly, smelly, basement for all the sadness and hatred that goes on in this world. Remember Columbine High School? The serial killing there started **long** before weapons and bombs went off. It started with the kind of contempt Jesus warned about.

- B. If we as followers of Jesus are going to get serious about the ugliness of anger and bitterness and resentment—we have to stop playing games with it—you know, why *I* have a right to be angry...and, "well, I'm **not** really holding a grudge, actually," and..."Well, if he hadn't been so obnoxious and made me so angry, we wouldn't be where we are!" We need to be honest about anger before we can deal with it—and break the downward spiral. A couple of years ago, I mentioned a few myths that tend to swirl around anger. They aren't mine—but I found them helpful. Mind if I just mention them to refresh my memory and yours?

1. **Myth #1: My anger is caused by external events and other people.** There are two categories of things that trigger anger. Things that have no personalities or brains make us angry. Like computers. I was working on this message—and lost about three hours of work! Stupid computer! Makes me **so** mad! But how can I be angry at a computer when *I'm* the one telling it what to do.  
-But people also trigger anger. And when they do we say, "You make me...**so** mad!" Anyone ever had a parent say this to you? Truth is, it's the person who's making us mad. It's the THINKING that goes on between the event and the anger; it's MY interpretation, MY perception of the event. And that is so important to see.  
-Here's the deal. *I* need to take responsibility for **my** anger—and **you** must take responsibility for yours. We **have** to—cause if we see ourselves as the helpless victim of the one who flips our switch, we'll **never** change! Anger is a very natural response to being frustrated or crossed. What you and I **do** with it is up to us and **no one else!**
2. **Myth #2: I just can't control my anger.** Anger comes boiling up from the depths of our soul—and it feels really strong, doesn't it? But we can control it. Let me tell you how I know that. Ever watched two people in the middle of a fight--like really going at it, veins standing out on their necks, face red. Then the phone rings--the transformation is amazing. @#@%#%#%! Hello? You and I learn how to express our anger. And that means we can **unlearn** it. But to do that, we have to own it.
3. **Myth #3: The best way to handle your anger is to ventilate it.** Back in the early 70's, the popular theory on anger in psychological circles was, "If you just let anger build inside, it'll be like steam in a kettle--and one day, it'll just blow. Do—you've got to vent! Get it off your chest!"  
-Know what studies actually show? Ventilating anger is self-reinforcing. People do it--and the more they hit, shout and scream—the more powerful it makes them feel—and the more they **want** to do it! There is not a single study that shows that catharsis—just letting it rip—is a healthy way to deal with anger. By the way, anyone here who's ever been ventilated on? How many of you found it to be an enjoyable experience? It's fun for the ventila-**tor**, but not much fun for the ventila-**tee!**
4. **Myth #4: Talking it out with a third party makes you feel less angry.** Let me be really clear here. Sometimes things from your childhood—or things that

happen to you wound your heart and soul in ways that you really don't understand—and you need someone to help you sort it out. Like a counselor or therapist. And that is really, **really** helpful.

-But many times we're not looking for someone to help us figure out why we're angry—or help us deal with a problem in a constructive way. We're ticked off—and we're looking for a posse; a bunch of people who will grab pitchforks and torches--help us feel even more self-righteous about our anger. Slander—which is the proper terms for that--makes you feel better initially, but the more you talk about it and rehearse your anger, the more deeply the anger gets lodged in your heart.

5. **Myth #5: Truly spiritual people and emotionally healthy people never get angry.** That's just not true. Everyone gets angry. Anyone know what never feeling angry is a good sign of? Death. It's amazing, you know--when you die, you just don't get angry nearly as much.

-We all struggle--so we all need to learn to deal with it in the right way!

- C. The great news on this is that we haven't just been left to drift in a sewer of anger! The first I already mentioned. **Don't wait to deal with it!** Don't excuse it. Don't pretend it doesn't exist. And don't let it get down in your soul and wrap itself around your ego and become a part of your identify.

1. Jesus gives us some ideas—illustrations really—on what to do. Let me read them:

**"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to that person; then come and offer your gift.**

**"Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny. (Matthew 5:23-26 TNIV)**

In that culture, offering your gift to God at the temple was one of the most sacred moments of life—a little like a wedding or baptism. Jesus is simply saying, "Don't wait! Interrupt something important if you have to—but anger is a powerful emotion—and it can do a lot of damage in a short period of time! Don't wait!"

-The second illustration he gives basically says, "Don't just float downstream and let the court system take over. Humble yourself if necessary—and go to the person you're in trouble with! You could save yourself a **lot** of trouble—because when anger and self-righteousness and a victim mindset gets deeply seated in someone's soul—and goes public—there is **no** way they're going to back down!" This is just really, **really** smart advice!

2. And Ephesians 4 gives us some clues on **how**.

**Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4:28-29 TNIV)**

-Do you get what he's saying here—cause it's **really** smart. Don't go into a situation with an accusing spirit where you dump your load—empty your gun and walk into the sunset. If you do, things will be **worse** when you're done. Go in with the attitude, **I could be wrong!** The word for it is humility. If you have

something to say—it had better be for helping **build others up** not for tearing them down. Remember, any ape can tear down a house—but it takes a craftsman to build one! Notice that the communication you're initiating is about **their** needs—not your need to cut loose or change their mind. I have a one word suggestion that could radically change things for you and me in tense situations like this. **LISTEN!**

3. And then there's God's secret weapon for people who hurt—and get hurt. It's forgiveness. Forgiveness, friends, is a **choice** we make—and it needs to happen, for Jesus' sake. These verses from Paul close with this:

**Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:26, 27-32 TNIV)**

-To not forgive, as someone put it, is like drinking poison and waiting for someone else to die. Forgiveness—and the kindness and compassion of God's Spirit is God's best gift to people like you and me who get hurt.

## V. CLOSING

- A. Several years ago my family and I went through an experience that left us shattered and disillusioned. And believe me, I felt the rage and indignation burning deep inside. But we had good friends who loved us, believed in us—and, best of all, encouraged us—no, **insisted** that we forgive. And helped us. That was an awesome gift—and probably kept me from dying of terminal bitterness.
- B. Several weeks ago, I feel the gentle nudging of God's Spirit, once again, to go and without any plea whatsoever, just make things right with some of these people. My sense was God saying, "Ken—every week you come and offer your gift, and if you're going to ever teach on this, you need to practice what you preach. And so I did. -I thought maybe the clouds would open and I'd see God face to face. But I didn't! I just had this great sense inside that I'm clear! I'm done! And it's good. And so I offer the gift to you this morning. If you want—you can be free. I'd recommend it.