

Eugene Peterson translates Galatians, chapter five, this way:

“It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on.

This isn't the first time I have warned you, you know. If you use your freedom this way, you will not inherit God's kingdom.

But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.” (Galatians 5:19-23, The Message)

The simmering anger, annoyance and even rage that we carry in our gut against everything and everyone that doesn't go the way we wish. The irritation with every emotional, intellectual and physical discomfort that we encounter. It all adds up to an accumulated ugliness that has no part in the Kingdom of God. Why? *Because it doesn't look a thing like Jesus.*

But what would happen if we were to just pause? If we just took a breath, or perhaps a hundred slow ones, and recognized that we, and everyone else, are objects of boundless love and patience? What happens, today, if rather than thoughtlessly thundering into our cubicles, offices, daycares, classrooms, practices, board meetings, appointments, traffic jams and dinner tables- we realized that our peaceful, loving response to real life is what actually brings peace. Not getting the rest of the world into conformity with our own will- that will never bring peace to ourselves or to anyone else. It's the humble submitting to the fact that Jesus calls us to love *this* world, now, and to wash its feet long before it makes our own life easier. This, he calls peace.

“God, today I need the image of Christ's gentleness and peace to permeate my mind. I don't want to be someone that walks around in a daze, unbothered by anything. But I also don't want, for even another day, to live so mindful of the failures of other people and ideas that I don't present you well in my life. I want to get over the subtle demand in my heart to get things, big and small, in alignment with my desires, because I want to stop being angry. Help me to get over these demands. And with the same energy with which I've been angry, help me to love like you do, despite the shortcomings we all have when compared to a far better standard than I: Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Steve Daugherty, Teaching Pastor

Who in your life have you determined is no longer worth effort? Are there people who hurt you, hurt someone you love, or has proven to just be generally annoying? Have you dismissed them as better off outside the scope of your life?

Perhaps some space between you and this person(s) is healthy; but do you withhold love from them?

Spend a few moments and pray for their wellbeing. It may be difficult to do at first, but ask God to bless them with His love today. See yourself, despite your disappointments, frustrations and hurts, having the ability to call down absolute love on their life. Pray that the love of Christ would wash over them today. And when the voice in your head tells you that they don't deserve this, that they owe you before you could ever dream of this, or that if people knew what had happened they would understand why today's exercise is completely unrealistic, recite the following passage with all the sincerity you can muster, and then continue asking for God's blessing on the life of this person(s), and for yours as well.

“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience...”

(The Apostle Paul, 1 Timothy 1:12-16a, NIV)

I remember dealing with the temper tantrums of my children when they were younger. When one came on, I was surprised by the intensity of the anger demonstrated by my child—so much rage in such a small package. But, over the years, I have found that as a mom what I deal with more often than my children's anger is my own anger. It seems that kids, regardless of their age, have a way of pushing all of our buttons, sometimes triggering an overly harsh reaction.

A nationwide study among young adults conducted by the Barna Group revealed that verbal abuse was one of the most serious mistakes made by parents. A surprisingly large number of them criticized their parents for saying things that were permanently hurtful. I know I've done it. There have been times when I can feel the slow boil begin and before I know it, words get said that cut to the bone. Sometimes there is even a conscious thought that I should stop, but I choose to continue. Why? Because it makes me feel better— but not for very long.

The Bible speaks clearly about the power of words. And we've all seen firsthand how damaging they can be. When our anger is allowed to take root, the result is often words that cause hurt—especially to those we love the most. But, let's face it. There are times when the only response to the situation is anger. Ephesians 4:26 reveals some insight into these moments.

“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.”

Note that it doesn't say, “*don't get angry*”. God wouldn't command us to *not* get angry, both because anger can be useful for doing good, and because it's an emotion. Would God command us to not feel something? How would we obey that? Instead, Paul is giving us a tool, a measuring stick for keeping our anger in check so that *when we get angry, we don't let it take root and cause us to sin against others. Put your love for people over and above your own anger, or the devil, our enemy, will have made some ground. Acknowledge the anger, but don't let it direct you, or sin wins.*

Today, when you feel the slow boil beginning, stop. Watch your words. Examine them before you say them. What do you feel yourself wanting to say? Are your thoughts rooted in something good? Something pure? Does it have love in it? Check your heart, and refuse to speak, plan, respond, gesture or act until you sense that you have your inner tantrum-thrower under control.

“Father, God, help me today to be controlled by love, and not by the mentality that makes children scream when they don't get their way. Teach what it means to love and embrace peace with people I disagree with, or who disagree with me. Help me to not let the sun go down on unresolved anger issues, so that there aren't any lasting divides between me and your other sons and daughters. Help me pause. Help me evaluate myself when anger boils up. Help me to be angry less and less frequently, and help me never sin when I am. Amen”

Kris Stoner, Children's Pastor

Let these ancient proverbs fill your mind today.

“Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.” (Proverbs 14:29)

“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.” (Proverbs 16:32)

“A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.” (Proverbs 29:11)

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Proverbs 29:15)

“A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.” (Proverbs 29:18)

Jesus knows something deeply insightful about us as human beings. He knows that when unhealthy anger festers, when contempt grows, it leads to destruction—destruction of trust, of relationships, of peace, and perhaps most importantly—our ability to define people not by what they did wrong, but rather by who God says that they are.

There's a lot at stake.

So Jesus says, 'Do what you can do to reconcile; to settle matters quickly. Don't let it fester.'

Now, as we live this out, here's something to keep in mind. Many times when conflict happens, often there's one person who wants to deal with it right away. He or she is very comfortable with conflict and so he/she wants to throw it on the table and talk it out right away. At times, that can be a great thing. However, sometimes, the other person in the conflict isn't quite ready to talk it out and confront it. For them, "settling matters quickly" doesn't mean "instantly". Perhaps they need some space to gather thoughts. Perhaps if emotions get elevated in the heat of the moment, they need to back away to simply breathe and let those emotions settle down first so they don't say something they may regret later.

But, within this tension, lies a great temptation for those who like to jump into the conflict right away. It's easy to start to think that, based on this Scripture; you're the one acting most 'like a Christian.' *It's black and white, right?* Either you deal with it now or you're sinning. But maybe it's just that you're better with words. You're more confident in an argument. You know you can take any push back and twist it around and make the other person feel small and completely at fault in a matter of seconds. And the reality is, you're not acting more 'like a Christian.' You're acting more like a steamroller.

But where's the *color* in that?

It's important to understand that desiring time to take a deep breath and reflect first, is often a very wise decision to make in conflict. It's equally wise to not create a new problem by letting issues fester by never dealing with them. So, may I suggest the next time that you enter into a conflict, and one or both of you can't talk it out right away—honor that in one another and decide on a time when you will talk about it. Maybe it's in 10 minutes. Maybe 30. Maybe that evening after the kids go to bed. Maybe the next morning in your office. Before you separate, decide on a time when you will talk it out and talk about it soon—so that, in yet another way, you'll discover much more the *color* of what Jesus was trying to teach.

"God, help us each to understand that disagreements can be healthy and lead to good things. Remind me today, and tomorrow, that so often it's just a matter of humility, timing and making sure that, above all, your love is being presented with more enthusiasm than my case."

Jonathan Bow, Lead Pastor