

Series: Navigating Relationships (Wisdom from the Book of Proverbs)

Sermon: The Restraint of Self-Control

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Texts: Proverbs 20:3, 17:14, 18:19, 15:18, Ephesians 4:26-27

Good morning! We're in the middle of a series called "Navigating Relationships."

We're created for relationships and yet even though they are so important, they are often so hard. We've been looking at Proverbs to glean from its wisdom.

I may be biased but I really believe that Cornerstone is an amazing church. We're not perfect, but we're good.

We have a lead pastor in Andrew who has served faithfully for all these years and is going to make space for a new era by stepping down as lead pastor and part of the exec team.

We have Steve who has been here over 25 years serving faithfully who is going to step into the role of lead and we have Jeremy who's been here over 20 years who is going to step into the Executive team role starting next year.

It's a lot of change. We are growing, and doing some really good things in the community - whether it's BBQ's for the condo peeps, backpacks for Greensborough, haircuts and a gathering for our street friends downtown, mission's to Thunder Bay, Roatan and Nicaragua, plus all the stuff we've got going on here - like children's, youth and young adult ministry, workshops and classes and what's that other thing that we do? It's a big one, happens once a week, every week, we do two of them? Singing, announcements, prayer, tithing...

All this to say, God is at work here and we praise him for that.

But that also means, the enemy is not happy. And he is moving around looking to destroy all of that. He's looking for an opportunity, a weak link, a foothold. The slightest space where he can attack.

Today, we're going to talk about an opening that many of us give the enemy. We're also going to talk about what we can do about it.

Today we're going to talk about anger - but instead of focusing on anger, we're going to talk about the antidote to it - self-control.

I think that it's critical to get a handle on this issue. Our relationships depend on it.

The title of this sermon is "the restraint of self control."

Proverbs 20:3 says, "It is to one's honour to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel."

The book that inspired this series "Living Well: God's Wisdom from the Book of Proverbs" says, "Arguing takes no wisdom. Some people actually boast about telling someone off, but should that really be a source of pride? Even children can argue. **One sign of wisdom is the ability to avoid dissension.**"

Do you know a person jumps at the chance to argue? If you're sitting beside someone whether you're in person or online and you nudge someone or give them a look - they're not the person - you're the person :)

Sometimes, it's better to avoid it than to jump at the chance for it. You can't always avoid an argument, nor is it right to always avoid arguments, but one way we can use self-control is to avoid unnecessary confrontation.

Our first tool of self-control is AVOIDATION (yes I made that word up).

When you are about to get angry, pause for a moment and step outside the situation. Mentally get yourself above the issue so that you can look down on it. Like an eagle flying high in the sky. As you look down at yourself, and the people in the situation, think... is this worth getting angry about - or should I let it slide?

Later in the sermon we're going to get really practical and I'll give you tips about what and what not to get angry about. But for now, it's enough to take that pause and think to yourself - self is this something worth getting angry about? Or is it better for me to take the high road and practice the restraint of self control?

Proverbs 17:14 - Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.

One Bible translation says, "to start a conflict is to release a flood" Think about the potential damage that could be done to a precious relationship - is it worth it?

The image is of a small leak, slowly spurting water. It's only going to get worse. The wise thing would be to stop it before it breaks out - AVOIDATION

Proverbs 18:19 - A brother wronged is more unyielding than a fortified city; disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel.

When you get angry, When you argue, it builds up walls. Then, when you try to make up, you find that people have these huge steel walls protecting them. Think of the bars of a jail. Once that's created, it's hard to get around. Imagine trying to get through to someone when they and you have these huge metal bars around them, a fence.

It would be offensive :)

As an aside, the book was talking about the fact that sometimes we have to accept that there will be disagreements - sometimes it can't be avoided. We can't walk around pretending wrong is right and truth is not truth just to avoid conflict. At some point we do have to say something - but like we talked about a few weeks ago in the message about powerful words - we need to say the right thing, at the right time and in the right way.

Proverbs 15:18 - A hot tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel.

We have to know when to fight and when to be a peacemaker.

Some people do everything in their power to turn something small into a big deal. Some people do everything in their power to minimize things before they get out of control. Which person would like to have around. Which person would you like to be?

Practically speaking, how does this work? How can we show the restraint of self control?

Glad you asked :)

Paul says this in the book of Ephesians - "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" - Ephesians 4:26-27

Another translation of this passage says, "Be angry but do not sin"

We will get angry. Anger is an emotion - and emotions are an important part of how we experience life. They make us feel alive. They energize us. They motivate us. They can lead us closer to God or further away.

Pastor Tim Keller said, "Anger is the capacity to be roused by the sight of evil. It is energy released to defend or attack something."

But since we're talking about self-control, this passage helps us by teaching us how to prevent our anger from causing sin.

Someone has said that "anger is like a warning light on the dashboard of a car - it informs us that something needs our attention."

Mark Twain said, "Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured."

When anger is used properly it is an agent of change. Think about Christians like William Wilberforce who used anger to challenge the slave trade. Or Martin Luther King Jr who used

anger to confront racial inequality. Or Mother Teresa who got angry about poverty. Or Jesus who got angry about people turning a house of prayer into a place where poor people were extorted.

Many of us have anger because of stuff that has happened to us in the past, or something that we're currently going through. If we don't work through these issues, they leak into our relationships. Often, when we get angry it's because someone or something is poking at these hurts.

These are real feelings. You can just unfeel them. So what do you do?

A key word in the Ephesians passage is "still." Do not let the sun go down while you are STILL angry

There is an immediacy to this. It also highlights the fact that we have a choice. We choose what we will react to and what level our actions will take. We can have self-control. We can be angry, hurt, offended, but in that moment there's a choice that can be made.

When you are in that situation, which choice will you make?

Proverbs 29:11, "Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end."

A story that highlights this lack of self-control is found very early in the Bible. After Adam and Eve sin in Genesis 3, the story quickly goes from bad to worse. In the very next chapter you have Cain and Abel

Genesis 4:2b-7

A couple of things stand out to me in this passage. First of all, Cain is very angry. He's stewing in his anger.

God gives him a way out. This is gospel right here. Cain is going in one direction, and God is pursuing him. How gracious it is of God to come to Cain and love him and want the best for him. Just like us.

Cain has a choice. Will he go with God or go his own way?

Genesis 4:8

Cain lets his anger get the best of him. In his anger, he sins.

What about us? What do we do when we have that choice? God comes to us in that same loving way.

“If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” - Genesis 4:7

Commercial break.

This is probably the most important part of the message today so pay attention. You may be here today and you're feeling pretty beat up. You know this is something you struggle with. You can think of broken relationships that happened cause you didn't handle it well.

Let me tell you this. If you're feeling ashamed, that's the enemy trying to kick you when you're down.

But if you feel a burning in your heart, like you want to do better but you need help, that's God.

Even in the story of Cain and Abel, God still pursued Cain after he killed his brother. God is still pursuing you. It's not too late. It's not the end of your story. How do I know? Cause you're here today. So perhaps today is the day that you say, “God, I need you, I can't do this on my own anymore.” If that's you, I'd love to talk to you after the service. I'd love to pray for you.

I heard someone say that God comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable. Where are you today? Are you comfortable doing what you know is wrong? Stop.

Are you feeling beat up by life? Come to Jesus. Rest in him. Feel his love, his grace, his peace.

Back to our regularly scheduled program.

We have a choice. One choice is avoidation. Another choice is to confront. You can't just say don't think about anger. It's like saying don't think about a pink elephant. You have to replace the thought. It may feel fake in the beginning, but it's all about training.

When you feel angry, pause... Take a deep breath... say a breath prayer... Lord Jesus, have mercy on me... Think of a worship song, Bible verse that calms you down, count to 10....

Here's a tool I came across a few years ago that I've found really helpful

Anger wheel...

Why is self-control so important when it comes to this?

Back to our verse in Ephesians

Do not give the enemy a FOOTHOLD

There's an ancient story about a Trojan horse. After years of defeat, the Greeks built this huge horse, put a select group of their army inside and sent it as a gift to Troy. Once inside Troy, the Greek army was able to (from their strategic position), to advance and defeat Troy.

Anger is like a trojan horse that the enemy can use to attack. The Greek word for foothold can literally be translated as opportunity or location - an occupied territory. If you are not self-controlled, anger will control you.

This passage assumes we will get angry, but we can't let it build a home in us.

The counter for this is being angry at sin, but loving towards people.

Let's take a couple of examples to put this on its feet.

Cain and Abel. Where do you think Cain was on the anger wheel?

Imagine if instead of getting angry and killing he asks God why he didn't like his sacrifice?

God tells him it's because you didn't give your best.

Oh, it wasn't because it wasn't meat? Oh. Okay.

The whole scene is different.

Story of kid with messy room and parent gets upset with them - they fight

What is the kid on the anger wheel? What is the parent?

Think about motivation. That really slows the situation down. It slows you down. It helps with communication. That builds community instead of tearing it down.

Story of me getting in an accident. Not my fault.

I was angry. Brand new car. So unnecessary.

I stayed calm, and I wonder if because of that, the situation wasn't as bad as it could have been.

I saw a video where a car cut another car off. The person who got cut off, yelled at the person who cut them off. The person in front slammed on the brakes, and jumped out of the car. The lady threw an empty bottle at him. The guy ran to her car, she rolled up the window, he flew in the air like a superhero and karate chopped her side mirror destroying it. He jumped back in his car, she pulled out her camera and he sped away.

Was that really necessary?

Think of a situation that you recently had where you were angry?

What were you on the wheel?

What if instead of losing control, you were able to restrain yourself, identify what you were and communicate that instead?

If this is speaking to you, we have some practical tools for you.

We're offering a Crucial Conversations Workshop. This two-part workshop will give you key insights and strategies to have difficult conversations. So go to our resource page and sign-up for this workshop using the QR code on the screen. This workshop is based on the book Crucial Conversations which you can also find on our resource page and purchase on your own. Another great resource is the book How to Have That Difficult Conversation. These tools can help you to grow in things like: confronting well, setting healthy boundaries and improving relationships.

My prayer is that we would have the courage to confront the things that are worth getting angry about, like injustice and stuff like that.

My prayer is that we would avoid the things that are not worth getting angry about.

That we would know the difference. And that we would be able to have the restraint of self-control.

Blessings,

Benediction