Has anyone here ever been angry? That’s not a rhetorical question. Go ahead and raise your hand if you’ve ever been angry. For those of you who don’t have your hand up, I’ll refer you back to what we saw in Proverbs a few weeks ago about being honest. We all know what it’s like to be angry. And today we’re going to see what wisdom the book of Proverbs offers us about our anger. But before we do, I want to be clear that the Bible does not condemn all anger. There is such a thing as righteous anger. For example, in Mark chapter 3, the religious leaders don’t want Jesus to heal a man on the Sabbath. They love their traditions more than they love people. And verse 5 tells us Jesus *“looked around at them in anger and (was) deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts.”* We know that Jesus never sinned, so his anger at the unloving religious leaders was a righteous anger. Another example of righteous anger is Romans 2:8. That verse tells us that God will pour out wrath and anger on everyone who is self-seeking, everyone who rejects the truth, and everyone who follows evil. So God has a righteous anger toward sin, and that anger will be expressed in His wrath. A few chapters later, in Romans 12:9, Paul gives us the command, *“Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.”* It is a biblical command for us to hate evil. So there’s a type of righteous anger that we should have toward evil. And then one more really helpful verse is Ephesians 4:27, which says, *“In your anger, do not sin.”* That means it’s possible to be angry without sinning. There is such a thing as righteous anger. But there’s also such a thing as unrighteous anger. And that’s the type of anger we’re going to focus on this morning. And the reason we’re going to focus on unrighteous anger is because that’s the type of anger Proverbs focuses on. For example, Proverbs 29:22 says, *“An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins.”* Obviously, the anger that that proverb is describing is an unrighteous anger, because it leads to many sins. And throughout the whole book, Proverbs offers a lot of wise warnings about that type of anger and the destructive effect that it can have on your life and the lives of others. So we’re going to listen to Proverbs’ wisdom today, and I pray that God will use His Word to purify our hearts from the unrighteous anger that leads to many sins.

A good place for us to start is for us to see what unrighteous anger looks like. Since there’s such a thing as righteous anger and such a thing as unrighteous anger, we need to know the difference. We need to know what unrighteous anger looks like, so we can recognize it in our own lives. So let’s look at five Proverbs that do a great job of describing unrighteous anger for us. The first one is Proverbs 12:16. It says, *“A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.”* If you tend to respond immediately when you get annoyed, that’s probably unrighteous anger. If you never overlook anything… if you never let anything go… that’s probably unrighteous anger. If every little disagreement becomes a crusade for you where you have to have your say and make your point and defend yourself, that’s probably unrighteous anger. *“A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.”*

Another proverb that helps us recognize unrighteous anger is Proverbs 15:18. It says, *“A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.”* When you encounter disagreements or difficult situations, what’s your track record? Do you tend to stir up dissension or calm things down? If disagreements tend to blow up into huge arguments when you get involved, you’re probably bringing unrighteous anger to the conversation. If your reputation is that you stir up instead of calming down, you probably struggle with unrighteous anger. *“A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.”*

Proverbs 20:3 also helps us recognize unrighteous anger. It says, *“It is to a man’s honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.”* Are you quick to argue? Are you quick to jump into a fight? Do you go from 0 to 60 in one second flat over every little thing you disagree with? Then you probably struggle with unrighteous anger. *“It is to a man’s honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.”*

Proverbs 20:22 helps us recognize another aspect of unrighteous anger. It says, *“Do not say, ‘I’ll pay you back for this wrong!’ Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.”* If you’re seeking revenge, that’s always unrighteous anger. If you keep score and try to settle accounts and pay people back for what they’ve done wrong, that’s always unrighteous anger. We should trust vengeance to God and His justice, because He will do the exact right thing at the exact right time. So revenge is a form of unrighteous anger that grows out of a lack of faith. *“Do not say, ‘I’ll pay you back for this wrong!’ Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.”*

Proverbs 29:11 helps us see one more aspect of unrighteous anger. It says, *“A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.”* Out-of-control anger is always unrighteous anger. If you open the flood gate and let the full force of your anger come flowing out unchecked, that’s unrighteous anger. If you let your anger breed more and more anger, and somewhere deep inside, you secretly enjoy getting to pour out your anger, that’s unrighteous anger. *“A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.”*

So let’s bring these five descriptions together and ask Proverbs to diagnose the unrighteous anger in our hearts. Unrighteous anger shows its annoyance at once. It lashes out. It reacts quickly and thoughtlessly. It’s out of control. Unrighteous anger refuses to overlook insults. It won’t let things go. It refuses to forgive. It seeks revenge. It wants pay back. It makes a big deal out of every slight, every mistake, every hurtful word someone says. It always has to respond, always has to defend itself, always has to announce when it’s been hurt. Unrighteous anger stirs up dissension. It makes disagreements worse. It doesn’t calm a situation down, and it doesn’t try to avoid strife. It’s quick to speak its mind, quick to quarrel, and quick to turn every issue into a divisive discussion. Unrighteous anger can’t imagine sitting by quietly, letting something go, not making it a big deal. Unrighteous anger unleashes its rage and displeasure. It rants and raves and wants to be fully expressed instead of being kept under control.

And if we’re being honest, are any of us really going to say that we never struggle with that type of anger? Are we really going to say that we never speak too quickly, that we never lash out, that we never lose control, that we never make a big deal out of a small issue, that we never harbor bitterness or hold a grudge or want to get revenge? We’re all in this boat. And we all need the wisdom of Proverbs to speak into our lives and purify our hearts from unrighteous anger.

So in the rest of our time, I want us to do two things. First, I want us to listen to the warnings Proverbs gives about unrighteous anger. And then second, I want us to look at the cure Proverbs offers for unrighteous anger.

So first for the warnings. Proverbs’ warnings about anger can be summarized in two big truths. The first truth is that anger is costly. Proverbs 19:19 says, *“A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty; if you rescue him, you will have to do it again.”* I want you to notice two things about that proverb. The first half of the proverb tells us that anger comes at a price. “A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty.” Anger is costly. And then the second half of the proverb tells us that if you don’t deal with your anger, the cost just keeps increasing over time. If you bail out a hot-tempered man, you’re going to have to do it again. Bail him out again, you’ll have to do it again. And again. And again. Unless God changes your heart and sets you free from your anger, it will just keep costing you and keep costing you and keep costing you. So Proverbs 19:19 helps us see that an out of control temper is more expensive than gas prices. Anger is costly. That’s because, when you lose your temper, you lose a lot more than just your temper. Think about all the things that you lose when you lose your temper. If you lose your temper, you can lose your job. Nobody wants to work with somebody who’s always exploding on everybody. If you lose your temper, you can lose your friends. It’s hard to be friends with somebody who can’t get along with anybody. If you lose your temper, you can lose your health. Studies have shown that anger is related to heart disease, high blood pressure, headaches, strokes and stomach problems. If you lose your temper, you can lose your reputation. One fit of rage can undermine years of integrity. If you lose your temper, you can lose your freedom. There are a lot of people in prison today because of an out-of-control temper. If you lose your temper, you can lose your witness. Think about the way your outbursts reflect on the name of Jesus.

Anger can be very, very costly, because when you lose your temper, you can lose a lot more than your temper. You can lose your job, your friends, your health, your reputation, your freedom, your witness. It’s not worth it. I don’t care what the situation is, anger’s not worth all that.

Chuck Swindoll once said, “I got so angry that I gave him a piece of my mind, and it was a piece I couldn’t afford to lose.” That’s so true. Our anger costs us. So the first warning Proverbs gives us about unrighteous anger is that anger is costly.

The second warning Proverbs gives us is that anger is contagious. Proverbs 22:24-25 says, *“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared.”* Those verses tell us that if you surround yourself with angry people, you’ll learn their habits and you’ll get infected with their anger.

Billy Martin used to be the manager of the Yankees, and he once told a joke about hunting with Mickey Mantle. He said that Mickey had a friend in Texas who invited them to hunt on his ranch. When they got there, Mickey told Billy Martin to wait in the car while he checked in with his friend. While Mickey was in the house, his friend asked him for a favor. He had a pet mule in the barn that was going blind, and he couldn’t bring himself to put the mule out of his misery, so he asked Mickey to shoot the mule for him. When Mickey came back to the car, he pretended to be angry. He jerked his gun out and slammed the door. Billy Martin asked him what was wrong, and Mickey said his friend wouldn’t let them hunt. And then he told Martin, “I’m so mad at that guy, I’m going out to his barn to shoot one of his mules.”

Martin said, “We can’t do that!”

But Mickey shouted, “Just watch me.”And he ran into the barn with his rifle and shot the mule. But as Mickey was leaving the barn, he heard two more shots. He looked over beside the barn and saw that Martin had gotten his rifle out of the car too. Mickey yelled at him, “What are you doing?”

Martin yelled back, “We’ll show him! I just killed two of his cows.”

Anger is contagious. And we’ve all experienced this in lots of different forms. Have you ever spent a lot of time around somebody who was bitter, cynical, grumbling, complaining, criticizing everything all the time? Have you noticed that the more you listen to them, the more you start to be bitter, cynical, grumbling, complaining, criticizing everything all the time? Anger and all of its expressions are contagious.

And it’s really important for us to think about this truth in the other direction, as well. Not only do we need to think about the way other people infect us with their anger; we also need to think about the way we infect other people with our anger. Maybe it’s not that you hang around bitter, cynical, grumbling, complaining, criticizing people and then turn into one. Maybe it’s that you are the bitter, cynical, grumbling, complaining, criticizing person, and when people are around you, they turn into one. Once you realize that anger is contagious, I hope that you would never want to infect other people with your unrighteous anger.

Proverbs 15:1 challenges us in that way. It says, *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”* Do you see how that verse teaches that anger is contagious? If you speak harshly, it stirs up more anger. But the good news is, the opposite is also true. When you speak gently, it turns anger away. So you can use your words to make a situation better, or you can use your words to make a situation worse. Speak gently, and you’ll diffuse a lot of situations. Speak harshly, and you’ll ignite a lot of situations.

So Proverbs warns us that anger is contagious. Be careful that you don’t get infected with other people’s anger. And be careful that you don’t infect other people with your anger.

And that brings us to the second aspect of Proverbs’ wisdom about anger. Proverbs doesn’t just warn us about anger. Proverbs also gives us the cure for anger. And the cure comes in three pieces. The first piece is Proverbs 16:32. It says, *“Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one takes a city.”* That proverb shows us that patience is the antidote for anger. A patient man is able to control his temper.

I read a great example of this truth as I was studying for this sermon. This example gives some really good practical advice for how to practice patience and control your temper. Several years ago a senior executive at what was then called Standard Oil Company made a wrong decision that cost the company more than $2 million. At the time, John D. Rockefeller was running the company. Edward Bedford was a partner in the company, and he went to see what Rockefeller intended to do to the man who had lost the money. When Bedford walked into Rockefeller’s office, Rockefeller was writing out a long list on a pad of paper. Bedford waited for several minutes before Rockefeller finally looked up.

Rockefeller said, "I suppose you've heard about our loss?"

Bedford nodded his head yes. Then Rockefeller said, "I've been thinking it over, and before I ask the man to come in and discuss the matter with me, I've been making some notes."

Rockefeller then showed Bedford his pad of paper. At the top of the page he had written, “Points in favor,” and then he had made a long list of the man's virtues, including a description of how the man had helped the company make the right decision on three separate occasions that had earned many times the cost of his most recent error.

Bedford later said, "I never forgot that lesson. In later years, whenever I was tempted to rip into anyone, I forced myself first to sit down and thoughtfully compile as long a list of good points as I possibly could. Invariably, by the time I finished my inventory, I would see the matter in its true perspective and keep my temper under control. There is no telling how many times this habit has prevented me from committing one of the costliest mistakes any executive can make -- losing his temper. I recommend it to anyone who deals with people."

Here’s the thing: We all deal with people. You don’t have to be an executive at a billion dollar company to deal with people. We all deal with people. And we’re all going to deal with people who make mistakes. I want to encourage you to follow Rockefeller’s example. Before you tear into somebody over a mistake they’ve made, sit down and make a list of all their good qualities and all the good things they’ve done. Let that list give you perspective for evaluating their mistake. Now, you may still need to talk to them. I’m not saying you don’t talk about the mistake. But if you patiently make that list first, your patience will serve as an antidote for your unrighteous anger.

So we need the spiritual fruit of patience in our lives to cure us from anger. And this makes perfect sense. One of the main characteristics of unrighteous anger is that it lashes out… it responds quickly… it’s out of control. Patience is the antidote for all of that. But just saying that we need to be patient is not enough. If you’re struggling with anger, then you’re struggling with patience. So we also need to know, “Where do we get patience?” And that’s the second piece of the cure that Proverbs gives us. Proverbs 19:11 says, *“A man’s wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.”* Proverbs tells us that patience comes from wisdom. The more wisdom you have, the more patient you will be. And Proverbs 19:11 tells us that one of the ways this wisdom expresses itself in your life is that you’re willing to overlook an offense. You don’t take everything personally. You’re not easily offended. You’re not hyper-sensitive to everything anyone says about you. You shake things off and get over them and go on. And this is a really helpful diagnostic tool for us. If you’re prone to getting your feelings hurt a lot… if you’re easily offended… then there’s a need for you to grow in patience, which only happens when you grow in wisdom.

And that brings us to our next question, “Where do we get wisdom?” And that question takes us to the very heart of everything we’ve seen in Proverbs. Proverbs 9:10 tells us, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”* Wisdom comes from knowing who God is. Wisdom comes when you see God’s power and might and justice and holiness and righteousness, and you see your own sin in light of who God is, and you’re terrified at the thought of God judging your sin and you’re terrified at the thought of being separated from God by your sin. And in that moment, you run to God, because you know that God is full of love and grace and mercy. You know that God is your only hope because you’re a sinner who deserves wrath, and you know that God is good to rescue you and take care of you because that’s who He is. So you run to God and beg Him to take care of you. And God loves to do that. And when you know that truth about God… when you know who God is, and you know how much you need God, and you run to God… that’s the beginning of wisdom.

So, let’s put all the pieces together. Knowing who God is is the beginning of wisdom… Wisdom gives you patience… and patience is the antidote for anger. So the cure for unrighteous anger is found in knowing God. And it’s so important for us to see why this is the case. If anyone has the right to be angry about anything, God has the right to be angry with us. We have sinned against God. We have insulted His glory. We have lived as if all these small, insignificant things of the world are more important than the great big God of the universe. We have failed to glorify God as God. We have failed to live for Him and give our lives to Him the way He deserves. God has every right to be angry at us because of our sin against Him. But God, in His love and grace and mercy, offers to forgive us in Jesus.

And if you grasp that truth… if you really understand the forgiveness that God offers you… if you really see what it means for God to turn His anger away from you… then God’s grace to you will change your heart. And you’re going to learn to forgive the way God forgives. You’re going to learn to be patient the way God is patient. You’re going to learn to love the way God loves. And that is the cure to anger.

So listen, as important as it is for you to know these proverbs, I want you to realize that just knowing these proverbs is not enough. And as helpful as John Rockefeller’s example is, I want you to know that John Rockefeller’s example is not enough. And don’t me wrong, Rockefeller’s example is great. I hope you’ll start making those lists of good qualities. And even more, the wisdom of Proverbs is great. I want you to know Proverbs. But what I’m saying is that the most important thing of all is that you have to know God and be in relationship with God. You ask God to change your heart by His grace. You ask God to fill you with His Spirit and to replace your anger with His love and His grace. When you know who God is… when you know His love and His grace… that’s the beginning of wisdom… and that’s where patience comes from… and that’s the cure for unrighteous anger.

So Church, my prayer for you this morning is that your relationship with God is changing your heart. I pray that you’re blown away by God’s forgiveness and God’s patience and God’s love. I pray that the truth of God’s Word and the power of God’s grace will destroy the unrighteous anger in your heart. And I pray that you will love others the way that God loves you.