

**Monday, July 10 - Read Ephesians 4:25-27; Hebrews 12:12-12.** The apostle Paul quoted Psalm 4:4 from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint). Then, as though he realized that "be angry without sinning" might be a little hard to apply in real life ("How do I do that?"), he added his timeless personal advice: "Don't let the sun set on your anger." The Message put it in more modern English: "Don't go to bed angry." Anger is one of four basic human emotions. Ephesians linked teaching about honesty with its call to "be angry without sinning." If we haven't learned to deal with angry feelings honestly within ourselves, we often try to hide them ("grrr—no, I'm not angry"). When have you seen a failure to honestly face anger be harmful to a relationship? How do you see the difference between "I feel angry because..." and "You always make me mad by..."? Anger becomes dangerous, to us and our relationships, when we let it fester. Hebrews warned readers to see "that no root of bitterness grows up." One counselor said, "Bitterness is anger grown stale." Ephesians 4 knew that "anger is natural... because people hurt each other in various ways.... Paul wants them to deal with it right away so that no one sins against another by feeding on that anger and doing further damage."\* What is helping you grow in recognizing your anger, and then promptly dealing positively with it?

**Tuesday, July 11 - Read Luke 6:31-38.** Luke used much (but not all) of the material from "The Sermon on the Mount" (cf. Matthew 5-7) in this passage. That does not mean we have to choose the "right" version. Most scholars believe these principles were likely the core of most of Jesus' sermons. Too often, we are a bit glib about forgiving. "No big deal—it doesn't matter," we want others to say. But it IS a big deal to forgive. Forgiving as God forgave reminds us that it took the cross to show us God's forgiveness. Luke linked the Golden Rule ("Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you"—verse 31) to Jesus' words about how to treat enemies. In what relationships do you find it hardest for you to treat others as you'd wish to be treated? How can Jesus' teaching help you discern how to live out the Golden Rule in ways that bless others while you maintain healthy boundaries and self-care? From Francis of Assisi to his namesake Pope Francis, from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Mother Teresa, many Christ followers have stood with the poor and victims of injustice. The Message rendered Luke 6:46 as, "Why are you... always saying 'Yes, sir,' and 'That's right, sir,' but never doing a thing I tell you? These... are words to build a life on." How are you building your life on Jesus' values, as so many of his followers through the centuries have done?

**Wednesday, July 12 - When Is Anger Okay? In the temple courts [Jesus] found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. (John 2:14-15)** This story is kind of confusing. It looks like Jesus lost his temper and went ballistic all of a sudden. I mean, if I did that, I'd get in big trouble! The difference here is that Jesus was angry for a good reason. The people he chased out of the temple were messing with God and turning a holy place into a very unholy place. No wonder Jesus got so mad! There are some things in life worth getting mad about, like abuse and murder and people who say terrible things about God. But there are lots of things that aren't worth getting mad about, like your brother sneaking into your room or your parents asking you to do something you don't want to do. The key is asking yourself, "Would Jesus get mad about this?" If he would, ask him how you should respond. But if he wouldn't, ask him to help you get over it before you do something you'll regret. What About You? When is anger a good thing? When is it a bad thing? Make a list of things that make you angry, then look at each one carefully and ask, "Is this really worth getting upset about? What should I do the next time I'm feeling angry about this?" Ask God to help you decide what's a big deal and what isn't.

**Thursday, July 13 - Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end. Proverbs 29:11.** The neighbors probably didn't know what to think as they looked out their windows at me one wintry day. I was standing in the driveway with a garden shovel clutched in my hands, whacking wildly and angrily at a clump of ice that had formed beneath a corner gutter. With each smack, I was uttering prayers that were variations on one theme: "I can't do this." "You can't expect me to do this." "I don't have the strength to do this." As a caregiver, with a long list of responsibilities to handle, I now had this ice to deal with, and I had had enough! My anger was wrapped around a bundle of lies: "I deserve better than this." "God isn't enough after all." "Nobody cares anyway." But when we choose to cling to our anger, we become mired in the trap of bitterness, never moving forward. And the only cure for anger is truth. The truth is that God does not give us what we deserve; He gives us mercy instead. **"You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you" (Ps. 86:5).** The truth is that God is more than enough, despite what we see. The truth is that His strength is sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9). Yet before we can find such reassurance, we may need to step back, lay down the shovel of our own efforts, and take Jesus' hand that's extended to us in mercy and grace. God is big enough to listen to our anger and loving enough to show us, in His time, the path forward. By Shelly Beach

**Friday, July 14 - "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate." 1 Peter 2:23.** I had been driving for almost half an hour when my daughter suddenly wailed from the backseat. When I asked, "What happened?" she said her brother had grabbed her arm. He claimed he had grabbed her arm because she had pinched him. She said she pinched him because he had said something mean. Unfortunately, this pattern, which is common between children, can show up in adult relationships too. One person offends another, and the hurt person shoots back a verbal blow. The original offender retaliates with another insult. Before long, anger and cruel words have damaged the relationship. When we trust the Lord, we don't need to use words as weapons. The Bible says that "the words of the reckless pierce like swords," and that "a harsh word stirs up anger" but "a gentle answer turns away wrath" (Prov. 12:18; 15:1). And sometimes not answering at all is the best way to deal with mean or cruel words or comments. Before Jesus' crucifixion, the religious authorities tried to provoke Him with their words (Matt. 27:41-43). Yet, "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate . . . Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). Jesus' example and the Spirit's help offer us a way to respond to people who offend us. Trusting the Lord, we don't need to use words as weapons. By Jennifer Benson Schuldt