

On March 21st, 2003, my son was born. When I first saw him, my heart was overcome with love, joy, and pride. There were so many things I wanted to say to him in that moment—about how much I loved him, about how precious and valuable he was—but he was far too young to understand any of what I wanted to say.

But like most parents, as our children grow, we find ourselves saying things we never imagined would ever need to be said. Things like:

- don't put your Lego in the peanut butter, or
- no weapons at the dinner table, or
- stop eating dirt, or
- don't write on the walls

There are all kinds of things that parents say to their kids that they never imagined they would ever need to say—I wonder...does God feel the same way?

We've been making our way through a series on the Ten Words and this morning we come to Word #6: *You shall not murder*. It must have pained God to utter this Word—what makes this Word so painful is the fact that it needed to be spoken. The first recorded murder takes place only four chapters into the Bible.

Many people recall exactly where they were on November 22, 1963, when they heard the news that American President, John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

During a four month period in 1994, members of the Hutu ethnic community in Rwanda slaughtered 800,000 Tutsis.

On September 11, 2001, terrorists hijacked three planes and flew them into buildings—they were responsible for the deaths of 3,000 people.

Between the Columbine High School and Sandy Hook Elementary shootings, 43 people died.

On May 22, 2017, a suicide bombing was carried out in Manchester, England, following an Ariana Grande concert—23 adults and children died.

Sadly, the events I've listed are not even remotely comprehensive. *You shall not murder*. Our world needs the 6th Word, and this morning we're going to take a closer look at the implications of this Word for our lives. Let's take a preliminary look by way of three questions; here's the first:

1. Should the 6th Word read “Do not *kill*?” or, “Do not *murder*?”

If you grew up reading the King James translation of the Bible—as I did—the 6th Word was translated as follows: “*Thou shall not kill.*” With the exception of the King James translation, our modern English translations are more specific—*You shall not murder*—and there is good reason for this specificity.

In current Canadian law, the taking of a life is nuanced. Premeditated murder is different from killing in self-defence, or, unintentionally causing someone's death. Similarly, the Old Testament differentiated between killing in self-defence, or taking a life in war, from what we would call 1st degree murder. It is murder that God prohibits in the 6th Word and this much is clear from the larger context of the Bible.

Throughout the Old Testament, God called Israel to bear arms against its enemies which involved killing; in this broken world, at times, taking a life is unavoidable.

The second question is as follows:

2. Why did God issue the 6th Word? What does this Word tell us about God and humanity? How far does this Word extend?

Genesis 1:27 says, “*God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*”

Genesis 9:5-6 says, “*from each human being...I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being. Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.*”

These verses reveal that human life is given by God, and, patterned after God’s own life, and for this reason, life is sacred. Darrell Johnson is right when he says, “Every human life, however young or old, however deformed or evil, is sacred. Sacred because every human life, regardless of the circumstances in which it is conceived, is the work of God. *To take the life of another human being is to destroy a work of God.*”¹

There is no life apart from God—He gives life, He sustains life, and for this reason we do not have the right to unilaterally take another person’s life. Job 1:21 says, “*The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord.*”

And while I know I am treading on sensitive ground, throughout history, the 6th Word has been applied by Jews and Christians alike to issues like abortion, suicide, and euthanasia. To end the life of an unborn child, to end your own life, or to act to end the life of another—even at their request—is to break the 6th Commandment.

The 6th Word challenges the idea that each individual is sovereign over his or her own life. Any time any one of us says, “*I can do what I want with my life,*” we’ve wandered away from Christian thinking.

We are most tempted to break the 6th word when we find ourselves overwhelmed by pain, fear, and hopelessness. If you’ve broken the the 6th Word, you may look back on this moment with sorrow and regret, wondering if God could accept and forgive you. If you are asking this question, allow me to repeat something I said a few weeks ago.

There are no *ifs*—no conditions—in God’s love. He doesn’t say, “*If you are faithful, obedient, and keep every one of these Ten Words, then I will love you.*” When God the Son took on our flesh and blood, He bound Himself to the human race—in His life, death, and resurrection He demonstrated the truth that God is for us, not against us.

We don’t have to achieve a standard to earn His love. In Christ, our past is forgiven; in Christ, we are accepted. Now that’s not to say that God expects nothing of us, as though He forgives us and then sends us on our way saying, “*Go do whatever you’d like.*” God is a good Father, not an absentee, uncaring, Father. And so, while the Ten

¹ Darrell Johnson, *Jealous For Our Freedom*, 52

Words are not the way into relationship with God, they do reveal the way on—they are God’s path to our freedom.

At the risk of doing more harm than good, I want to briefly address a third question that is connected to second but ultimately arises from the first.

3. If the Bible differentiates between murder and the taking of a life through self-defence or war, is there a place for the “proper” use of physical force?

This is a contested issue within Christian theology—opinions range from extreme militarism to extreme pacifism and everything in between. Here is how I am thinking about this matter these days.

Human life is sacred because it is given by God and patterned after God’s own life—we are made in His image; for this reason, we do not have the right or authority to unilaterally take another person’s life. But there comes a time—no doubt as a last resort, and, after much prayer and reflection—when the use of physical force is necessary to prevent some from destroying others. God Himself took lives when He protected Israel from Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea. We’re not living in the Garden of Eden; the world is not as God wants it to be, and so, in some circumstances, preserving life means stopping those who intend to take life.

It is a grave responsibility to be given the authority to use physical force to keep the peace and protect citizens from harm. We could all point to instances when those in authority have abused their power, but that being said, I am grateful to the men and women who put their lives on the line for our sakes.

My cousin is an officer with the RCMP and he spends most of his time working in the most troubled parts of Surrey. He and his colleagues are frequently called upon to enter into situations involving violence, whether domestic, drug-related, or gun-related violence. My cousin is a committed Christian, and when I think about the kind of work he does I say to myself, “Who better to use physical force than one who recognizes the image of God in all human beings? Who better to use force than one who would rather not wield it? In some circumstances, preserving life means stopping those who intend to take life.

There is much more that could be said, but I’m going to move on.

On first blush, the 6th Word could be considered the easiest of the Ten to keep. All of us have worshipped false gods (Word #1), we’ve all dishonoured God’s name (Word #3), we’ve all dishonoured our parents (Word #5), but how many of us are, or will ever, be guilty of murder? How does the 6th Word apply to your life and mine?

At this time I want to invite you to turn in your Bible to Matthew 5:21-26. Here, Jesus takes the 6th Word—*you shall not murder*—and dives beneath the external behaviour to heart of the problem: anger, hatred, and contempt.

*“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.’
22 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 court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

23 Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. 25 “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. 26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”

While you and I might never commit murder, there are other ways to destroy a life or relationship—anger, hatred, and contempt are very effective. I’m going to give everyone the next 30 seconds to come up with an answer to the following three questions:

- **when was the last time you were angry?**
- **what made you angry?**
- **how does anger affect your relationship with God and others?**

In verse 22, Jesus picks up on two common terms of verbal abuse in the ancient world. *Raca*, translated directly, means empty-headed or useless—in today’s slang we might refer to such an individual as a numskull. The second word, *fool*, comes from the Greek root *moros*—it’s from this word that we derive the English word “*moron*”.

These two terms, “numskull” and “moron” were every-day insults and not the sort of words that would land a person in court or in jail. The whole point of Jesus’ teaching is that these ordinary insults reveal a contempt that God takes very seriously.²

One scholar writes, “You think yourselves far removed, morally speaking, from murderers—have you not hated? Have you never wished someone dead? Have you not frequently stooped to the use of contempt, even to character assassination?”³ *When Jesus probes beneath the surface of our lives, what will He find?*

In James 1:19 we read, “*Everyone should be **quick** to listen, **slow** to speak, and **slow** to become angry.*” but all too often we are **slow to listen**, **quick to speak**, and **quick to become angry**.

D.A. Carson writes, “there is a place for burning with anger at sin and injustice. Our problem is that we burn with indignation and anger, not at sin and injustice, but at offence to ourselves.”⁴ Jesus’ anger was never wrapped up in His own personal ego. When He was most severely tested, during His trial and crucifixion, He did not retaliate in word or in deed. His dying words were, “*Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.*”

The **absence** of murder, anger, and contempt is not God’s ultimate goal; His goal is the **presence** of love, mercy, and kindness. Murder

² R.T. France, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew*, 201.

³ D. A. Carson, *The Sermon On The Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7*, 41.

⁴ Carson, 42.

is wrong, as is hatred and contempt, because they ignore the image of God in others.

Vs. 23-26: Let's look for a few moments at verses 23-26. Jesus offers two parables or scenarios that give practical shape to His teaching. *“if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”*

illus: Most scholars conclude that the location for Jesus' Sermon On The Mount is somewhere in Galilee, some 130 kilometers away from Jerusalem. Imagine making the trip to Jerusalem by foot or by donkey; it would take days of travel. Old Testament Law required faithful Jews to travel to Jerusalem several times a year in order to offer sacrifices at the Temple altar.

Imagine finally arriving at the altar in Jerusalem but there you remember that someone has something against you—something real or perceived. Jesus says, *“Leave your gift at the altar, hike back the 130 km and seek reconciliation; then you can return and offer your gift to God.”* What extent would you go to in order to seek reconciliation? Would you walk an additional 260 km?

Jesus' second scenario envisions a person on their way to court because they have failed to repay a debt—this is a last chance opportunity for reconciliation. Jesus doesn't offer us a principle for dealing with legal disputes, instead, He is reinforcing a singular message: *deal with broken relationship before it's too late.*

In the time remaining, let's move on to the application.

Application: I want to begin with story that I told a few years ago—it took place on a soccer pitch. Our church team was playing in a quarter final playoff game, single elimination, and we were down by a couple of goals. The other team was young, big, and rough—our team was old, small, and frail, and the Ref wasn't doing us any favours.

At one point a ball ricocheted out to the sideline and I chased after it. Just as I got my foot on the ball, a blond-haired, 22 year old Viking, hit me from behind. I went flying, crashed to the turf, and laid there in a heap. When I went to the doctor a few days later, he told me I had strained all the ligaments in my lower back.

As I laid there on the pitch, I was feeling a combination of whiplash, blinding pain, and smouldering rage. Very slowly I got up onto to my hands and knees, slower still I struggled to my feet, and as I did the referee asked me the following question. *“What are you doing?”* I responded saying, *“I'm trying to contain my anger.”*

Perhaps some of you have discovered, as I have, that anger isn't something we can contain, at least not for long. Anger is like hazardous waste—some time, somewhere, somehow, our anger will come out. Unprocessed anger has the power to destroy. The question is, *how do we deal with our anger?*

1. First, when it comes to letting go of our anger, we need to be willing to be willing.

We will never be free of anger and contempt until we are willing to let it go. If you are already on this journey then you know it's harder

than it sounds. Letting go of your anger will mean forgiving those who have neglected, wounded, betrayed, or rejected you.

Perhaps your anger runs so deep that you cannot imagine living without it. If you want to be free of your anger, but you're not sure you're ready to let go, let me encourage you to pray the following: *Jesus, I'm not sure I can let go of my pain or my anger, but I want to be willing. Jesus, create in me a willingness to be willing.* If you are able to pray this today, your journey toward healing will begin.

2. Second, bring your anger to the Cross.

At the cross, Jesus, the Son of God, was murdered. One of the great paradoxes of the cross is that Jesus bore the anger, hatred, and contempt of the world, and in exchange, God poured out love, mercy, and forgiveness. At the cross we can be reoriented. At the cross, our clenched fists can be opened. And as our hands are unclenched to receive God's forgiveness and mercy, we are empowered to hold out forgiveness and mercy towards others.

3. Third, express your unfiltered anger to God.

Ephesians 4:26-27 says, "**26** *In your anger do not sin*": *Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.*" As much as it is possible, attempt to deal with your anger today. When we allow anger to hang around it will go "underground"

⁵ Stephen Seamands, *Wounds That Heal*, 63.

⁶ Colossians 3:13-14.

in your life, and once it goes underground, the devil can begin to destroy us—from the inside out.

When it comes to nursing our anger, there is what I call *the law of severity*—the longer you rehearse your anger, the deeper it will grow, and the more destructive it will become.

Love for God cannot be separated from love for others. We cannot live with one hand open towards Jesus, and one hand clenched towards another. One author likens it to driving with one foot on the gas while the other foot is on the brake.⁵ Try as we might, we cannot cultivate life with Jesus and nurture anger towards others.

And so the healthiest way to deal with our anger is to begin by expressing it to Jesus. We pray our anger to God until it no longer has a hold on us. If you've ever read the Psalms then you know you can pray unfiltered prayers to God. As we pray our anger to Jesus, He begins to diffuse it, heal it, and transform us.

4. Fourth, as you move towards Jesus, let Him move you towards others.

In Eugene Peterson's translation of Colossians 3, he writes, "*Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offence. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.*"⁶

Reconciliation requires more than expressing our hurt or anger to God, it requires us to move toward one another—forgiveness, mercy, and truth-telling are all required. There is a place for expressing our hurt to others, but we begin by expressing it to God so that by the time we express it to another, we are no longer trying to hurt them.

Conclusion: As I conclude, let me ask: *what is anger and contempt costing you? Has it cost you peace? Joy? Has it cost you deep relationship? Can you hold on to your anger and still cultivate the life with Jesus that you desire?*

God gave us the 6th Word because He wants us to be free—free from the destructive power of anger, hatred, and contempt. Imagine a world free from anger, hatred, contempt, and murder. One day we will no longer need to imagine. One day these things will be a distant memory, but for now, we are invited to live this future reality in the present. By the grace of God, may it be so.

Pray

Worship

Benediction