

## Fire In The Hole

1. Warm-up question: Human conflict is endemic. It follows us wherever we go. People can be aggravating. What's something trivial – maybe even silly – that somebody did this past week that aggravated you?
2. We're currently in a mini-series called "How to Keep Your Sanity in a Mad, Mad World." Human conflict, and the anger it engenders within us, is one of life's chief challenges to our sanity. On Sunday, Jeff shared several examples from his own life of how unresolved anger can affect us. He told about his father's painful conflict with his brother, and also about a huge conflict his family had with a some new neighbors who moved in next door and wreaked havoc on the neighborhood.
  - a. Tell us about a time you've experienced the destructive power of angry interpersonal conflict directly or by observing its impact on someone close to you.
  - b. Studies show that unresolved anger and grudges cause a measurable increase in insomnia, headaches, digestive issues, anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, heart attacks, and strokes. For you personally, how does deep anger affect in your body?
  - c. How does deep anger affect your mind?
  - d. How does deep anger affect your soul and your connection to God?
  - e. Is anger always bad? Does it serve any legitimate purpose? If so, when does anger cross the line and become bad?
  - f. If you're comfortable sharing it, who is the person in your life right now that most makes your blood boil? What's going on in that situation?
3. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us how we should respond when we experience a deep conflict with someone. Read Matthew 5:21-26, as printed on p. 3.
  - a. Here Jesus tells us that God's expectations go well beyond us simply refraining from murdering those who anger us. Jesus says, "If you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment, and if you say *Racca* to a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council, and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire." *Racca* means wanting to spit on someone. "You fool" comes from a Greek word that means someone is utterly wicked and reprobate – a lost cause. When we're really angry at someone, it's hard not to lash out with words that wound. Tell us about a time in your life when someone said something to you in anger that cut really deep.
  - b. Tell us about a time when you've said something in anger that cut someone else deep and you now regret.

4. In verse 22, Jesus warns that indulging deep anger toward someone puts us in danger of hell fire. The Greek word translated “hell fire” is *gehenna*. Bible scholars tell us that the word *gehenna* was derived from the name of a particular geographic location near Jerusalem called the Valley of Hinnom. In Old Testament times the Valley of Hinnom became a center for the worship of foreign gods – a place where people offered children as burn sacrifices. Because of that, no one wanted to live there, so the valley became Jerusalem’s garbage dump. People would dump their trash there, light it on fire, and let it burn. This once peaceful, beautiful valley was turned into such an awful place. So in today’s passage Jesus warns that if we nurse anger in our heart toward someone, say bad things about them, and view them as worthless pieces of %\*!&#, we are turning our lives into a Valley of Hinnom, *i.e.*, hell on earth. In other words, we are trashing our own life and lighting it on fire, as it were.
  - a. What do you think of this interpretation of our scripture passage? Does it resonate with you? Is it consistent with your own personal experience of deep anger? Why or why not?
  - b. Have you ever known someone who literally made themselves sick by nursing their anger?
  
5. In our passage, Jesus identifies three steps we should take to deal with anger and human conflict in healthy ways: (1) Refrain from lashing out and talking bad about the person you’re angry with; (2) Don’t sit on your anger; seek to resolve it quickly; (3) Go to the person and seek “reconciliation.”
  - a. It’s really hard not to lash out or talk bad about people who anger us. From your own experience, do you have any practical tips for how we can better restrain ourselves?
  - b. Why is it so hard not to sit on our anger instead of working to resolve it?
  - c. The Greek word for “reconciliation” means to renew a friendship by mutual concession. Rick Renner explains the word this way: “The idea is giving up an argument, surrendering a point, conceding to someone else, or letting something go and refusing to let it be an issue. In other words, even though the issue is not totally agreed upon, you have at least agreed to be ‘right’ with each other [going forward].” Does this make sense to you? Is it healthy to reconcile with someone even when you’re unable to agree who did what wrong? Why or why not?
  - d. When in your life have you experienced the power of reconciliation? How did that feel? What helped make that reconciliation possible?
  - e. Is there someone in your life right now that you are feeling that you should try to engage in a process of reconciliation? Tell us about the situation and how you might be able to facilitate reconciliation.

## **Matthew 5:21-26**

21 Jesus said, 'You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgement."' 22 But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you say "Racca" to a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool", you will be liable to the hell of fire.

23 So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.'