

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Real People Dealing With Real Emotions

by Dan Trygg

“But you did not in this way experientially-learn (put-into-practice) Christ,²¹ if indeed you heard Him and were taught by Him, according as truth is in Jesus,²² y’all to put-aside (pt. in time) according to the former manner of life the old self, the one being corrupted according to the lusts of deceit,²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind,²⁴ and to put on (pt. in time) the new-and-unprecedented self, the one according to God created in righteousness and holy-devotion of the truth.²⁵ Therefore, laying aside (pt. in time) the lie/fake/phony, be-speaking truth, each one of you, with his neighbor (near-one), for we are members of one another.²⁶ Be angry, and do not sin (miss-the-mark; make a mistake); do not let the sun go down on your provocation (angry mood; or, the thing that provoked you),²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity (lit., ‘a place’).” Ephesians 4:20-27

Jesus was the perfect man. He was the Divine Word of God who was born into this world as a human baby. The mystery of the Incarnation is that somehow He was fully God, but was also fully man. Although He was human, He had no sin nature, ...no sin inclination..., as we do. Even though He was tempted, tried or tested in every way as we are, He never sinned (Heb. 4:15). He was the “outshining of God’s glory, and the exact representation of His nature” (Heb. 1:3). **As such, He provides us a perfect example of balanced human emotion. God Himself experiences and expresses emotion, so it should not be surprising that Jesus would, and that we should, as well.** We are made in His image, and part of that likeness to God is emotion.

There are several examples in the scripture where we are told of Jesus’ experience and/or expression of anger. Mark 3:1-5 describes Jesus going to a synagogue on the Sabbath day, and there was a man there with a withered hand. The Pharisees were watching Him to see if He would heal on the Sabbath, so that they could find fault with Him. In their minds, healing would be breaking the Sabbath by “doing work”. He was well aware of their hard and legalistic hearts. He had the man stand up, and come forward. **He challenged the religious leaders, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do evil, ...to save life, or to kill?”** They were silent. Then, the text reads, “And looking around at them with anger (*orgē*), being grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And the man stretched it out, and his hand was restored.” **Clearly, Jesus felt both anger and the pain of grief. He made a point to publicly demonstrate the heart of God by healing the man right before their eyes. This exposed their wrong beliefs in the eyes of the people. The word for “anger” here is the same root used by Paul in Ephesians 4:26.**

Mark 10:13-16 describes another similar occasion. Some people were trying to bring their children to Jesus, so that He might touch them, and bless them. The disciples were rebuking or forbidding them to do so. When He saw this, **Jesus was indignant (*aganakteō*) and intervened. He said, “Permit the little children to come to Me. Do not hinder them, for of such ones is the kingdom of God.” In the mind of the disciples, as was common for the time, children were seen as “less than”. They were considered to be insignificant, unimportant, or even a nuisance. Not to Jesus. He saw them as important and valuable.** To Him, it was worthwhile to stop and pay some personal attention to them, and their parents. **He confronted the misbelief of the disciples, and countermanded their wrong actions. Jesus drew a lesson from this.** He said that those who would enter the kingdom of God must come with trusting and open hearts which children typically exemplify. Then, He took them into His arms, and blessed them.

In John 2:13-18; Mk. 11:15-18; Matt. 21:12-16, and Luke 19:45-47 **we have accounts of Jesus’ brandishing a whip made of cords, driving out the animals being sold in the temple courts, pushing over the tables of the moneychangers, and forbidding anyone to carry anything through the temple.** These are actually two separate events, the account from John took place at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, while the other gospel accounts occurred at the conclusion of His ministry. **While none of these accounts explicitly say that He was “angry”, His actions, forceful commands, and accusations clearly indicate that He was.** John reported that they were *reminded of* a verse from the Psalms, “Zeal for Your house will consume me.” **The Hebrew word in that verse can indeed refer to anger, especially a zeal or jealousy that is provoked to anger.** (Psa. 69:9; Ezk. 8:3). Clearly, what Jesus saw happening in the temple courts was highly offensive to Him. It made a mockery of God’s holiness, and of His purpose to sanctify that place as a location for people from other nations to gather to seek God. Instead of a serene place for meditation and worship, it was a chaotic, noisy and dirty marketplace, right there in the temple compound. **Jesus was motivated to take action.** Interestingly, no one found fault with His motive. They cleared things out, and He was not arrested or even resisted.

Finally, in John 11:33, when Jesus came to Bethany, to raise Lazarus from the dead, as they were going to the tomb, the text says that **He saw Mary and those with her crying, and He was “deeply moved in spirit and He agitated Himself” (or, “deeply moved by the Spirit, and He stirred up Himself”).** The word translated as “deeply moved” is describing a reaction of intense anger or indignation. (It was used in Lam. 2:6 of the “indignation of His anger”. It is used in other literature

to describe the angry “snort” of a warhorse.) **It would seem that this indignation was against death *itself*, the cause of this sorrow.** The word is often used to give a rebuke or to censure someone. **Here, Jesus was feeling the anger of the Spirit inside of Him. He was embracing a rising reaction that was like saying, “Oh, no you *don’t*!”** to someone who was attempting to hurt or steal from someone you love. **Of course, in this case, He called Lazarus back to life.**

What can we learn from these experiences?

(1.) Anger can be a legitimate, healthy and valuable emotion. God Himself experiences anger, and so did Jesus, the God-man. Both Psalm 4:4 and Ephesians 4:26 *command us* to be angry. This is called a “permissive imperative”, meaning that it is saying that anger is good and appropriate, at times. We need to embrace it and learn to handle it well, ...as Jesus did.

(2.) Anger seems to have been a response to something Jesus perceived happening in the world around Him. Emotions are like that. They are like a warning signal, or a thermometer, that gives us a “reading” on what is going on around us, ...in our circumstances, our relationships, or in the larger world around us. They are not chosen, ...they are involuntary responses to what we perceive. Our perception or our understanding may be faulty, which could bring up emotions that are misguided, ...but the problem is not the emotion. It is the perception.

(3.) Anger motivated an action or intervention to address something that was wrong. In each of the examples we examined, Jesus took action, in some way or another, to expose error, confront injustice, to call people to account, or to right a wrong. This is the value of healthy emotions. They can “motivate” us to act.

(4.) Anger is to be limited in scope. Although Jesus lived in a world full of injustice, corruption, immorality and sin, the examples of anger that we see in His life were only within the confines of His own life and circumstances. His responses were immediate, personal and practical. We must keep to our own area of responsibility (Prov. 26:17).

(5.) Anger is to be limited in duration. We see that Jesus responded to His healthy emotion, acted, and then went on with His life. The emotion was a signal that He evaluated and acted upon, but then it was over. Jesus did not “stew” in His anger, or let it linger inside of Himself. He dealt with it, and moved on. When you survey His life, you are impressed by His great love, compassion and tenderness. Jesus did not come off as an “angry man”.

When we return to Ephesians 4, we saw that Paul talked about “putting-into-practice Christ”. We do this by putting aside the old persona and practices of our previous sinful lives, gaining new understanding and insights, choosing to put on who we now are in Christ, and living by the power of the Spirit. In verse 25, the first area of application that Paul brings up has to do with honest communication with one another. Literally, the verse says, “Consequently *put away from y’all the lie* (the fake, the phony, the façade) *and be speaking truth* (honesty, reality), *each one with his neighbor...*” Why? “...because we are members/limbs/parts of one another.”

Again, it is important to remember the context. We have been recruited, gifted and empowered to work together as a team. As we are “truthing in love”, we are to grow all aspects of our lives up into Christ, who is our Source and the One who brings us to completion. Out from Him, then, the whole body, being fitted together and knitted together, through every connection of supply, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love (vss. 15,16). **So, if we are to grow and mature by “truthing in love”, then “being fake or phony” is interfering with what God wants to do through us.**

Why do we learn to be fake or phony? It is what we do to avoid conflict or discomfort. We learn to “go along to get along”. We conform ourselves to fit in, or avoid uncomfortable interactions. **But, in Christ we have a higher purpose. We are to help one another grow.** We all have rough edges, or areas where we either drop the ball, or disregard others. **We desperately need other people to help us with our “blind spots.”** In Romans 12:2, Paul wrote, “Do not conform yourselves to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your perception in order that you might try new things to discover the desire of God, that which is beneficial, well-pleasing and mature.” **Part of how God intends for us to see things differently, and learn new approaches to life, is through the input of others. One motivator for “speaking up” is when we see something that is amiss, or wrong, and we experience the emotion of anger.** That it a signal, a prompting, to look closer, and maybe to intervene or speak truth into the situation.

We often have a problem with “anger” because we link it with explosive rage in our minds. That may be from the experiences we have had in our lives. **But the Greek word for “anger” here is not about explosive, hurtful, out-of-control-rage. It literally means a swelling, agitation or upsurge of internal energy to address something that is wrong, unjust, or invasive. It is a mental bent or impulse to act to correct error, right a wrong, stop something that is hurtful. Paul encourages us to recognize, evaluate and act on such promptings. “Be angry...” He gives us the further caveat, however, “...and do not sin.”** We have often understood that to mean that the anger is wrong, ...but *it is really talking about our refusal to speak up, or get involved!* Our “going along to get along” is the sin in this passage. **Remember, it is about speaking truth to one another, so that we can help each other grow. It may be awkward, even messy, but we will learn as we experiment.** Grace needs to flow both ways. Then, *we need to make short work of this*, so the devil can’t use this against us. Unresolved conflict, unaddressed injustice, or unsettled emotions *all* can give him an opportunity.