

A Two-Edged Sword

by Bill Wright

Bill Wright's sermon explores the transformative power of the Word of God as a two-edged sword that divides truth from falsehood, emphasizing the importance of application and trust in God amidst ministry challenges.

Duration: 1:04:53

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 4:30, 2 Timothy 2:15, Hebrews 4:12, James 1:22

Topics: "Word Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the power of the word of God as a two-edged sword. While Hebrews 4:12 is mentioned, the focus is on Proverbs chapter 29. The preacher shares his personal struggle in preparing for the sermon and the difference between the first and second hour of preaching. The sermon then delves into Ephesians chapter 4, emphasizing the importance of applying the teachings of the first three chapters in our daily lives.

Transcript

Proverbs chapter 29. Would you turn there with me for a moment? Some of you may have seen in one of the flyers that was handed out that we were going to talk about the two-edged sword today, and I'm sure that many of you have already in your mind run to Hebrews chapter 4 and verse 12. The Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing through the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and that's not the passage I'm going to deal with.

Well, that is a great passage, and certainly it relates to what we are going to talk about in many ways today. For if the Word of God is not allowed to be alive, it will never become a divider in our lives. It will never divide righteousness from unrighteousness, godliness from ungodliness, light from darkness, unless the Word of God is allowed to be alive in our lives, pulsating, living, applied.

How many of you were in the first service yesterday morning here? How many of you are in the second service? There is a good application for me as a pastor between those two services. Now, your pastor was in both services, and I think he'll identify with what I'm going to say. In the first service, I felt hampered.

Now, it didn't have anything to do with anybody here or the schedule or anything. It just had to do with me. I approached the Word of God in Luke chapter 24 in the first service from the standpoint of content.

Good content, I think, because it was the Word of God. Good content. Tried to exegete the passage to a degree.

I knew I had just a certain amount of time because people were going to be coming in. And, you know, that's one of the blessings and one of the problems of growth, and I've lived with some of that in the past, and so I know what that is. But in the second hour, it was a whole different situation.

In the second hour, I left my notes on the pew by the pastor, and I very seldom preach from notes. But in a conference sometimes when you've been asked to go in a particular direction, it's probably the insecurity on my part that makes me want to go back and get married to notes again. And I've been divorced from notes for so many years that I find a hard time now dealing with them sometimes except for little cheat sheets.

In the second hour, the Word of God became alive and dividing. Now, in the first hour, from my perspective, the Word of God was alive. It's always alive when you present it if God the Holy Spirit is in it, and I believe that He is, and I believe He was yesterday morning.

But I was frustrated at the end of the first hour because I ended up, due to my own approach to the Word, I ended up with about two minutes to apply the truth of that passage. Now, it is when the Word of God is applied that it becomes dividing in the very purest sense of the word. It then can become a dividing, and it will divide for people righteousness from unrighteousness, godliness from ungodliness, light from darkness, and on and on.

Now, I say that to you today because I want the Word of God and what we are going to share together as pastors and wives and workers to not only be alive, I want it to also be dividing. I'll be honest with you, I have struggled with today. I've enjoyed this entire week here.

It's thoroughly enjoyed that time of interacting with pastors and leaders and guys that are on the firing line, and I love that. I do. And Saturday's session was a real highlight for me as well where we just packed a room full of guys, and they got to sit on the floor, some of them because there wasn't enough room, and we just got to grapple with the text and grapple with issues that are rattling all of our cages.

Now, I love that, but today is a different cut of cheese for me, and I'm just being honest and transparent with you. I was up until about 2.30 this morning grappling with what I was going to share with you. I really came prepared last week to share something else in this hour, and the first day I was here, I began to be exposed to some areas that many are, many in this room and many that are not in this room, are battling with in the ministry.

And it is an area that I have lived through, and I suppose that's one of the reasons I didn't want to deal with it. It is a two-edged sword that will kill you in the ministry, and it is literally doing that to many men. It is slaying many pastors' wives.

There are as many pastors' wives just about today that are bailing out of the ministry as there are pastors. And one of the reasons is because of this two-edged sword. Proverbs 29 introduces both of them, and then we're going to go to Ephesians for God's answer, hopefully.

Verse 8 of Proverbs 29 says, Scornful men bring a city into a snare, but wise men turn away wrath. Verse 22 of this chapter says, An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression. And then in verse 25, The fear of man bringeth a snare, but whosoever putteth his trust in the Lord shall

be safe.

I would like to share with you, just for these few moments, and just interact with you. And believe me, I am not a master in this subject unless having failed in these areas makes you such. But I think I can identify with you, because I've been through the pain of both of these, both sides of this two-edged cutting sword of anger and fear, to the place that it almost ruined the early years of our ministry and certainly affected my family as well.

I am meeting more and more men today that are suffering under the bondage of anger. A pastor before this service today asked me, What do you tell people that are angry? What answer is there for someone that's really angry? Well, I'll try and apply it now and make the word dividing for you. And alive, I trust, by exposing a little bit more of myself.

I think that in this group, if anybody can appreciate the threat of exposing yourself, it is pastors and wives. But here we go. In 1976, God sovereignly led us to the church in which we pastor now.

And it has been a very interesting nine and a half years. We have seen God sovereignly do some things that if someone had told me that they were going to happen before we went, you couldn't have drug me there with a team of horses. We really did not want to go.

I shared this earlier this week. We really didn't want to go there. They'd had two pastors, three pastors fall morally before we got there.

They'd only had four pastors before we got there. The other, the original pastor, had left the ministry also for one reason or another. And the three that followed him, I had had personal relationships with all of those guys.

I had been with the last pastor of that church in soul winning many times and had rejoiced with him and wept with him over souls that had been set free. And he was a dynamo, unbelievable in front of people, just like a magnet. People just came to him like that.

And you can imagine that when I received a call to go there, that I wasn't really terribly anxious. Now, if you think I wasn't anxious, you can imagine my wife's response. You know, most of you wives wouldn't be anxious for your husbands to take a church that had had three pastors who had fallen morally, right? My wife is no different than you.

She wasn't terribly anxious and she said, I don't want to go there. And I said, well, I really don't want to go there either because everything wonderful is happening here. And that was true.

We were in such a positive ministry in those days that we'd seen God turn a church around just supernaturally from a very dead situation into a very living, vibrant, wonderful love bond between the people and between us and them. And I was just thrilled. And the last year we'd seen that church double in attendance and it was just full of new babies in Christ who were eager.

And you know, that's like saying, sick them to a dog. You know, for a pastor who has young people out there and young adults and families that are sitting there with their Bibles and notebooks and they are grabbing everything they can get and they call you up in the middle of the night and they say, Pastor, our relatives have just got in earlier this evening and we've been sharing the gospel with them and we don't know how to lead them to Christ. Will you hurry up and come over here and help? They want to accept the

Lord and we don't know what to do with it.

And it was that kind of, you know, that kind of environment. You don't want to go to a church that's had this other stuff. No matter how big it is, you don't want to go.

That church had been just under a thousand in attendance. They had a bus ministry with 13 buses when I got there. And we were there a year and they had two.

And I don't know if that tells you anything or not, but it just, you know, it was just, there was a different philosophy in that church than from where I was coming from. I was for evangelism, but I was for discipleship that had to be nailed to evangelism or I didn't believe it was biblical. Now, I believe you can have discipleship evangelism with a bus ministry, but I really do question that we could have had discipleship evangelism when we were running to Green Valley, which is 60 miles from our church, and we were passing 10 or 12 good, strong, evangelical, Bible-believing churches on the way to get them into our church.

And then we were going 40 miles the other way towards Catalina to do the same thing. And I just had a problem with that because it didn't fit in with a philosophy I believed of the scripture of, you don't just win them, you got to win them and you got to nurture them. You got to help them grow and you got to, you know, pour your life into it.

It's pretty hard to pour your life in by proxy or long distance. And so I really wasn't anxious to come there. And we came though.

God sovereignly led us and I praise his name. I will never be able to praise his name enough for bringing us to Del Norte Baptist Church. If we left tomorrow, and some people may be praying that we do, but if we left tomorrow, honestly, that was facetious.

I don't believe that's true. We really have a love relationship going on there and it'd be tough for me to leave now. But when we came, and I've got to make a long story short because this could be a book, but when we came, we had been there almost a year.

We came in January of 76 and in December of 76, we were having a, we put together what we thought would be a bit of an outreach, just the beginning, you know, you don't change things quick. So we just thought this would be kind of a good way to reach out in the community at Christmas time. And we put together an entire live Christmas pageant of the nativity on our grounds.

And we put it out in the community, invited the community to come in where they could drive in. They didn't go into a building. Everything was done outside, live animals, I mean the whole nine yards.

And we were going to do that for three nights before Christmas, 23rd, 24th, no, 22nd, 23rd, no, 23rd, 24th, 25th. That's how we were going to do it. The very first night, and it was quite an undertaking to do this, because they really did it up very well.

One of my staff men just went crazy on this thing. I mean, they brought in the goats and the cows and the, I mean, they just did it up right. And the very first night, the community began to come in to our parking lot.

And they would come and they would stay and they would listen to the music and they would hear the scripture shared. And it was just a wonderful success. And my mother-in-law was down from Phoenix, and

so we decided we would take her to Winter Haven.

And Winter Haven is a well-to-do community in our town that always decorates to the hilt for Christmas, and it's a regular thing. You'll read about it in Sunset Magazine, where people will tour through this, and it's a competitive thing among the neighborhoods and stuff. And anyway, we were going to take her.

So about 830, we left, and we took her, and everything was locked up at the church, and we took her, and we were making our tour around. And then we came home, and at about 930, the phone was ringing right as I walked through the door. And we lived about two miles in those days from the church.

And I picked up the phone, and it was a lady from our church named Jane Graham. And Jane sometimes tends to be a little bit excitable, and so, you know, you understand those things. And Jane said, Pastor, the church is burning down.

I said, you're kidding. She said, it is. It's burning right down.

I dropped the phone, and I came hauling out of the house, and my family was hardly out of the car, and I said, hurry up. Get out of the car. I got to go.

I got to go. Charlene said, what's the matter? I said, the church is burning. So she jumped in one side of the car, and I got in the other, and Grandma took the kids in, and we went flying down to the church.

And sure enough, somebody had set our church on fire, and they had poured gasoline all over the organ, and the piano, and the choir area, and all over the seats in the building. Now, this building is a double brick-walled building with four-inch tongue-and-groove deck ceiling, if you know what that is. It has iron.

It had steel windows that were the small kind and the long panes, and it had steel doors. What we had was a kiln going on there. I mean, it was just like a kiln, and the firefighters couldn't get in the building, and so what they had to eventually do was take a chainsaw and cut about a six-by-ten hole to get the fire to come out of the building so they could begin to put it out.

Well, by the time I got there, the parking lot was full of people from the community and from our congregation, and I walked into a situation. They had had to cut all the power, so everything was black, and people were weeping every place. And they had the fire out when I got there with Charlene, and people were just in little clusters.

If you've ever been in one of those kind of tragic situations, people just kind of bundle up like a herd of cattle in little groups all over, and they just kind of moan. And I walked through and walked into the building, and it was just jet black. Everything was melted and charred and chewed, and my whole heart just sunk.

And of course, I didn't know who had done it, but I will never forget that night that some of our boardmen came and got me by the arm, and they said, Pastor, we're going to go have a prayer meeting right now. Now, if you're a board member here tonight or today, you need to recognize that sometimes your pastor needs you to take some very positive leadership in situations where there is a crisis in the body. Please don't always wait for him.

You know, I am so grateful for Bob Lynn. I will never forget that Bob Lynn, and he was vice president of Anaconda Mines in those days, and they've moved to Colorado since, but big old Bob Lynn, massive man.

And he just came out, and he put his arm around me, and he said, Bill, some of us are going to go over here and pray.

Well, we got on our face, and we claimed that property for God, and we rebuked the devil. And when we came out, our people had moved. They were all standing there in a big congregation, about 300 of them, and they were standing there waiting to see what we were going to do.

And Bob Lynn told them what we were going to do. I didn't tell them. Bob Lynn stepped up, and he said, Get the word out.

The live nativity is on tomorrow night. Great. They did it.

Now, there are a lot of things I could share in relationship to that, but the seeds of anger were sown on that night in my heart in a very real, very tangible way. Now, for the next 11 months, we stayed on our campus. We met in what then was a high school room.

You could seat 150 Macs in there, and God supplied miraculously in those days a brand new Kauai grand piano and a new organ, and someone wanted to put them in storage until we got our new worship center built. I said, Not on your life. They are going in that room, and I don't care if it blows our eardrums out.

We're going to have them in there, because I'm not going to give one iota of victory in this situation. We're going to be victorious in it. And we met five times on Sunday in the most unbelievable situation in Arizona, weather-wise, in the whole works.

You get that many bodies together. And we grew, and it was a positive situation. I had been a carpenter.

That's how I got through school. I had worked with my hands all my life with my dad in construction, and so I kind of enjoyed that 11 months. I just rolled up my sleeves, and we jumped in, and I remember sandblasting that entire building.

I'll never get the smell out of my mind, I don't think. But you know, God gave me a bond with my men in those days. He really did.

They saw that I could get dirt under my fingernails and blisters on my hands, just like them, and still rejoice in Jesus Christ. And it was a positive time. Now, we moved back into that building, and during all this time, there's some real miracles in that, that whole story.

The day of that fire, we paid \$85,000 for a piece of property we weren't going to build on for at least two years, because we didn't have any money. And the guy had wanted \$200,000 for this piece of property that our worship center sits on now, and I went down and said, we got \$85,000. We'll give it to you cash.

And he said, you got to be kidding. I said, no, I'm not kidding. We want the property, but that's all I'm going to give you.

And two days later, he called, and he said, well, you're robbing me blind, but he said, we'll take it. I said, great, we'll be there today. It was the afternoon at four o'clock of the fire that we gave him the money, and God just moved our master plan up two years, and we went into a program that put our worship center up.

During that year, we were rebuilding what is now our fellowship hall. The worship center was being erected. And on the 20th of November, 11 months after that first fire, we went into what is now our

fellowship hall for a celebration service, a victory service.

It was all done. The men had done it. We'd spent \$10,000 on it, and we got \$66,000 worth of insurance.

But because the men did it, it only cost us \$10,000 to put it back together. It was 10 times more beautiful than before the fire, too, by the way. And there wasn't a smell of smoke in the building.

And if you know anything about fires, you know that the one thing they'll tell you is you can't get the smell out of a building that's been charred. Don't you believe it? If God is in it, you don't even, we have never had a whiff of the smoke in that building. Well, we moved back in on the 20th.

We had people lined up. There was no way to get them all in. We already were into two services before the fire.

And then we grew during that time. And so people were lined up on both sides of the building. Now, all of this is glory to God.

Believe me, it was nothing that I was doing. It was just what God was pleased to visit on our body during those days. And we had a service that just, unless you've been in one like that, you just can't imagine what it was like.

It was just so electrified with the power of God. And God just did some fantastic things in that service. The next Saturday night after that victory service, I got a call at two o'clock in the morning, and it was the fire chief.

And he said, Pastor, I hate to tell you this, but you got a fire at your church. I said, You have got to be kidding. He said, I wish I was.

I didn't wait to find out what building was burning. I already knew. I slammed the phone down.

I got in the car. I screamed out of our driveway. I went flying down 100 miles an hour down flowing wells.

And I just had already made up my mind. It was our worship center. Our worship center was a totally two by six frame building.

There's about 10,000 square feet of building there, a high ceiling. And it was all in the framing stage completed, but it hadn't been closed in. It was just, boy, what a fire that would make.

And I just knew it had to be that. All the way down the road, I was looking for the flames, and I didn't see any. I thought, boy, they already got it out.

I pulled in. That structure was perfect. Not a thing wrong with it.

I thought, well, rascals, they went. And I call them other than a rascal. I'll be honest with you.

They burned our worship center again, our fellowship hall, which is our fellowship hall now. But the hoses weren't going in there. When I pulled out, the hoses were going into the office area where our staff wing is.

And what a mess. Somebody had taken my associate pastor's office and filled it with his books and music and poured gas on it. And we had steel doors in all those buildings, too.

Lit it on fire, slammed the doors, and took off. And the fire got so hot. That's a two-story building.

It got so hot, it blew the windows out of the top story. I lost two-thirds of my library just from smoke damage and water damage. Then I went into my secretary's office and took all the files.

Any church secretaries here, you can appreciate this one. Took all the files, pulled them out, just threw them everywhere. Well, when the firemen came in, you don't suppose they picked anything up, do you? Everything got baptized, and it was just an ungodly mess.

And I will admit to you right now, and I have shared this story not too many times publicly, but a few times, and it's always been in a setting like this. I don't know why God keeps making me be so transparent in front of pastors. I don't mind admitting to laymen sometimes what a wretch I've been, but it's kind of tough with pastors.

That's that old pride. You know, I was so angry that night that if anyone had said anything, I will guarantee I would have hit them. There would have been no containing it.

Nine months later, a man asked me who I was angry at. His name was Dr. Tim LaHaye. Tim and I were friends, and I had spoken in his Bible conference, and he was speaking at a pastor's conference nine months later after all of this, a pastor and wives conference in Prescott Pines.

I really didn't want to go. For that nine months, I had lost all of the motivation that I had, and I have kind of run on super energy, high octane. When my feet hit the ground at five every morning, they're usually burning rubber.

That's not a plus, by the way. That's just how God wired me. That's all, and it's not any better or any worse.

Sometimes it could be a lot worse, but that's the way I've always been, and I'm a people person. I love people. I love to be with them.

I'm not a loner. I like to be where they're at. I like to be where the action is happening.

I'm athletic. I like to be on the court every morning at six in a racquetball court and play as hard as I can play for an hour and a half. That's just how God wired me, but for nine months, I went into a depression.

I'd never known a day of depression my entire life, not a whole day ever. Some of you guys can identify with that. Some of you have never been depressed, and you know what? You're having a hard time identifying with people who are.

You're unsympathetic sometimes to them because you've never been there, and I was very unsympathetic to people who were depressed. I just thought they were on a pity party, and if they wanted to, all they had to do was grab themselves a little bit and shake themselves, and they could be all right, you know, and that was really my attitude, and I'm cutting a lot of things out, but I just want you to see that Satan can plant the seeds of anger and leave them there, and you won't even know they're there, and they'll fester, and then he knows right when to push the right button, and when he pushes the button, then the anger can become extremely overt. We were building a home in those days, literally building it.

I mean, we poured the slab for our home with two one-sack mixers. You guys who poured cement know what that is, 40 yards now, 40 yards with two one-sack mixers and wheelbarrows. We literally, as a family,

built our home, and it was during this time, all during this time, we were doing it, and every day off, and all of our vacation time for 18 months, and late night under lights after all of our ministries were done, we were working like that, and the anger was just boiling, and I did some unbelievable things that I did not have time to share with you today, but it was very obvious.

Nine months later, we went to a Pastors and Wives Conference only because my wife insisted. See, I was usually the first guy at the Pastors and Wives Conference. I just couldn't wait to get there.

I just thought that was the greatest thing, just to be there and get fed, and I was always hungry to be fed, and I did not want to go to this one. I just lost all my motivation, and anger does that to you because it always produces depression, and I ended up talking with Tim that night, and I gave him what I've shared with you, plus a few more details, and he said, let me ask you about your theology, and I want to ask you about yours today. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the sovereign Lord of the church? I said, of course I believe that.

You know I believe that. You've heard me teach that. I mean, my favorite book in the Bible, in the New Testament, is the book of Ephesians, and you can't believe Ephesians.

I believe that, and I said, you know I believe that. He said, do you put into that scheme of theology that God has a right to do whatever he desires to do in your church? I said, yes, and he said, then would you be willing to say that God had a right to allow a fire in his own church? In fact, God had a right to allow two fires in his church. You know, I really didn't want to hear that, and I said, well, yeah, I guess I'd have to say that's true.

If he's the Lord, and I'm going to be consistent, I got to say he's got a right, and he said, Bill, who you mad at? I said, well, I'm mad at whoever done it, and I literally can tell you that I would have killed, in the second fire, I would have killed the man if I could have got a hold of him. That's how angry I felt. In fact, I dreamed of doing that, and I said, I'm angry at the police because they never catch these bums, and when they do, they always let them go.

So, you can see it had really generated in my heart and in my mind, and it was just boiling, and he challenged me that night about midnight, he challenged me that I was angry at God. Boy, I did not believe that. Honestly, I didn't believe it.

I said, Tim, I have never thought an angry thought towards God ever. I've never said an angry word. I'd be afraid to do so.

I'd be afraid it'd strike me dead. I mean, my theology does have a very high concept of who God is. Some of you have heard that, and I honestly could say that.

I had been afraid to curse God or say something against God, and he said, well, if you believe that God is the Lord of His own church, and if you believe that He directs the steps of His children, and that He makes no mistakes in His own church, and you're mad because of some of the steps that have been happening in your life, and in the life of your church, he said, wouldn't you say that that lands right back at the feet of the fact that you're angry at God? I said, I don't know. I'll just have to weigh that one out. I went back, and Charlene was already in the rack, and I just laid there.

About two o'clock in the morning, I got before the Lord, and I said, God, I want You to show me. I want You to show me what is really behind all this, because I am sick of living this way. And God made it

extremely clear by bearing witness with my spirit, by His spirit, that I had a real problem with anger towards Him, that I was really angry at Him.

And when I was willing to admit that, and when I was willing to confess that, and not debate any longer about it, and then ask God to fill the void that I was leaving with His blessed Holy Spirit to take control of that area and return to me the joy of my salvation, which I had not had for quite a long time, God was pleased to do it. I went, I didn't have any, there was no emotionalism, there was no anything. I just went back to bed.

But I can tell you this, I got up the next morning, and the joy of my salvation has not left since. And that has been almost nine years ago, eight years ago, that Satan knows very, very well what buttons to push in your life to set you off. And he has set some of you off to the place that your people are afraid of you, and they have no personal relationship with you, and you have no personal relationship with them.

And it is a frightening thing. Now, the other side of anger is fear. And Don and I were talking about that before this session, of how they are kind of married, and they really are.

An angry person is an insecure person. An angry person is one who is afraid that what they have planned or what they want to happen isn't going to happen or hasn't happened, and therefore fear begins to grip their life. Now, fear is a very immobilizing thing in the lives of many pastors and wives.

But I want to take you to a solution, okay? Ephesians chapter 4. I apologize for taking as long as I did on that, but I really feel that you need to get a background on how God has spoken to my own heart in this area if you're to see that it is applicable perhaps to you. Now, this is a familiar passage in Ephesians 4 to all of us that have taught the Word any length of time at all, I'm sure. It is the dividing point of the book.

The first three chapters of Ephesians, of course, we know it talks about our position in Christ, the fact that we've been blessed with all spiritual blessings, been seated in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. We have all of these blessings positionally in Christ. Chapter 4, 5, and 6, of course, we recognize is dealing with our walk, is dealing with the extension of our position in Christ.

It is the dividing part, okay? It's the application of the first three chapters, and it begins to divide a light from darkness in our walk. Well, when you come to chapter 4, the very first verse, you get a command, and Paul says, you know, that he beseeches us that we walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we have been called. And one of the questions some of us as pastors and wives need to ask is, what is our vocation? What have we really been called to? I'm convinced that there are many men in the ministry today that have never been called to that vocation.

It's obvious by the fact that their ministry is fruitless over a long haul. It's fruitless. It's obvious that there is no joy in that ministry in their lives.

It's obvious if it is absolutely ruining their marriages, and they have no real peace about that ministry, no real fulfillment about that ministry. You know, they have really somehow assessed the vocational calling of God in error in their own life. And so, therefore, they're not walking worthy of that vocation.

Now, the word worthy, most of you know that have done any word studies in this passage, is a word that came out of the first century marketplace, and it is a word which had to do with being in balance. And when a lady went to the marketplace, and she wanted three pounds of tomatoes, you know, they'd put three pounds of weight on one side of the scale, and then they'd begin loading up the tomatoes. And when

everything balanced out, the merchant would say that the tomatoes were worthy of the weight that was on the scale.

And so, what God is saying here to us, Paul takes that word right out of the trenches of reality in these people's lives, and he says, I want to beseech you that you begin to behave yourself in a balanced position of the calling wherewith you have been called. Your position, on one hand, is that you've been called to be the very mouthpiece as the oracle of God, and now it is imperative that you begin to walk in balance without calling. Now, if there are two things that will ruin that for you and me, it is anger and fear.

Anger will literally rob you of the vitality of the callings of God in your life. How many of you have seen Josh McDowell's new film series on Evidence for Faith? In that series, on the very first film, he shares this very principle about anger that he had growing up in the home of an alcoholic father, with an alcoholic father, and he talks about how his father used to embarrass him, and his father had come home drunk, and he would tie him up to a post in the barn and leave him there so his friends wouldn't know. And Josh, he was one of my roommates in school, and I remember hearing him talk about that.

And what he's sharing on that film is absolutely real. And he hated his father. And he was in the ministry for years hating his father, angry about his father, until God literally had to deal with him about this whole issue of his calling into the ministry was incompatible with an angry spirit.

A discontented, angry spirit is an absolute contrast to the callings of God. And he shares in that series. And by the way, I would recommend it, not because he's my friend, but because it is good, solid, meaty stuff for your people.

I mean, he really makes them stretch. And our people are coming out every Sunday night saying, there's six films in it, and they come out every night saying, whoo, that was good, but it's really stretching. And I said, keep on stretching, you won't break.

It's good for him, it's making him think. But anyway, here's a guy who was in the ministry, greatly used of God, from all the outward appearance, and yet he was walking in a vocation that was totally contrary to this one area of his life he had not turned loose of. He had not committed to God.

And he shares in that film how that when God really helped him in this area, and he got it right with God, and the Spirit of God filled his life, he was able to literally go to his father before his father died and say, Dad, I really love you. And his father said, I don't know how you can. And he said, because Jesus lives in me.

See? Now, you can call that revival, you can call that whatever you want, but I'm going to tell you, that is the work of God in a man's heart. And that's the only thing that will deal with anger. And you know, let me talk to some of you pastors' wives for just a second.

Some of you are angry, and I don't blame you. You know? Some of you gals live with guys who have time for everybody but you. My wife was one of those.

She lived for a long time in the ministry with a guy who didn't mind working 70 or 80 hours a week and feeling real good about it, because I was always there, Johnny on the spot, for everybody that had a need. It didn't matter when they called me. Boy, they called.

I was there. It didn't matter when their surgery was. I was there an hour ahead.

It didn't matter if I had to forget my kids' ballgames, if I had to forget my kids' school programs. It didn't matter if I had to forget where my wife's needs were, if we had to forget our anniversary, her birthday. It didn't matter.

You know, I was married to the ministry. And if you're married to the ministry, gentlemen, your wives are suffering and your kids are suffering. God never called you to be married to the ministry.

He called you to be married to the Lord of the ministry, and those are two total different things. And some of you poor ladies are here today, and I'm sympathetic with you because I have seen the pain my wife has gone through now as I look back, and I'm ashamed of that pain because I caused most of it. And some of you ladies are struggling with forgiving your husbands because of their stupidity in the ministry.

And I'm going to say to you that your husband might be angry, and he might be too busy, and he might be too involved in everything else, but it's not a rationalization for the sin of bitterness in your own heart. It'll eat you alive just like the anger will eat him alive. It literally will.

And the Apostle Paul knew that, and he addressed that. And I like solutions. Otto Kony told us we ought to, I don't know if he told us we ought to, but, you know, he kind of humorously ended his message today.

I thought it was great. About some of us are so excited about seeing God work that we're going to go out and look for problems. Well, it may be lack of faith on my part, but I got enough.

I'm not going to go look for any. I got to look for another one. But the ones I've got, I can really begin to apply the solutions of the Word of God to, and that's what I'd like to just take a minute or two to help you with, perhaps.

In verse 30 of this passage, there's so much in this chapter I would love to share with you. And someday you invite me back just to do some exegesis with you. Forget some of the topics and let me just do some exegesis with you.

I would love to do that, because I think that's where you really get solutions, where you compare Scripture to Scripture and you really deal with the text. But verse 30 says, Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption. And let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you with all of its malice.

And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. That's God's estimation of the problem and God's solution to the problem, right there. You got it.

Now, there are many of us in the ministry that are complaining about our people, that they are not on fire for God. And many of them are not on fire for God because we, in the position of leadership, are grieving the Spirit of God in our own personal lives. And if we are grieving the Spirit of God in our personal lives as the shepherd of the sheep, then the results of carnality and apathy will spread in our churches like an absolute wildfire.

If you don't believe that, I encourage you to go home and read today Ezekiel 37. For Ezekiel 37 is a word of exhortation from Almighty God to the shepherds of Israel, who we would liken to as the pastors. And you know what He said to them? He said, you shepherds who feed yourselves and starve your people, starve the sheep, He said, I have a word of judgment for you.

And I was reading that again this morning, early this morning, and boy, you know, I said, oh God, guard me from getting overfat and leaving my people too lean. And it's a real possibility. But there is a problem of us grieving the Spirit of God in the ministry, saying all the right things, going through all the right motions, being in all the right places at the right time, and grieving the Spirit of God, causing the Spirit of God to endure pain, anguish, limitation as far as what we will allow Him to do.

Now, I've always been a bit humored by many commentaries who deal with passages like this, because so often they run everywhere in the Bible to show you what grieves the Spirit of God, and they don't deal with the text. You know what grieves the Spirit of God? God tells you. Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, and malice.

That's what grieves the Spirit of God. You don't have to look anywhere else. You don't have to go to any other text.

This one tells you in the context exactly what will quench and grieve and stifle the ministry of the Spirit of God in your lives. Now, there is a cycle here. You see it in verse 31? You're not born angry.

I wasn't born angry. Now, I was raised in an angry home, in an angry neighborhood. I went to an angry school system my first seven years.

I was raised where anger was kind of the order of the day in my home life. But you know, I have learned that I wasn't born angry. God did not create me angry.

I became angry when I allowed bitterness to stick around in my life. When something occurred in my life, and the seeds of bitterness, which is a mental attitude of discontent, was allowed to take lodging in the back of my mind somewhere, and I put it on the back burner, and I went on smiling, and everybody would ask, how are you doing? I'm doing great. Praise God.

You know, let's give them another one. And everything was wonderful, you know, and we were running in place spiritually. But in the back of my mind was a seed of bitterness, and I wasn't even aware that it was there.

It's in the form of a mental attitude. It hasn't come out verbally yet. Bitterness hasn't come out in an open, outward way.

Bitterness never does. It rots you from the inside out. But if bitterness is not dealt with, it will move into the cycle of wrath.

And wrath is just another intensified form of pouring gasoline on the fire of bitterness. And it becomes a mental attitude of complaint that begins to warm up and become more intensified. And you begin to complain mentally in your mind.

You haven't yet complained to your wife. You haven't yet complained to your congregation. You're just simply keeping it in there, and it's getting more and more and more intense.

Now, you can deal with bitterness at the bitterness level. The minute you recognize it, you can confess it as sin against God. You know what most of us do? When we as pastors recognize that we have been bitter against our wives, we confess, I have been bitter to my wife.

And we wonder why we don't have any liberty or freedom from that bondage. It's because we didn't start where David started in the 51st Psalm when he said, Against thee and thee only, O God, have I sinned. Many of us are trying to heal human relationships, and we haven't yet healed the relationship between us and our Heavenly Father and the living Christ who dwells within us.

It is no wonder that many times we can say to our wives, Honey, I am sorry. Please forgive me. And they really struggle with forgiving us because they're not sure they can believe it.

And you know why? Because they haven't seen a broken and a contrite heart between us and God yet. So they're not convinced God can trust us because they know we haven't gone to God, so why in the world should they trust us? I said to my wife for years, I am sorry. Please forgive me.

But until my wife saw me broken in Canada, until she saw me really broken before God and knew that I really meant business about my pride and my anger and all of that other stuff, until she saw that, she wasn't set free to be able to let God deal with the bitterness that was in her own spirit of unforgiving. Now, if you don't stop it when it's bitterness, it'll turn into wrath. If you don't stop it when it's wrath, then it turns into what? Anger.

Now it begins to come out on the outside. Now it becomes much more external. It moves from the internal to the external.

Now the verbalization of our anger. Now the swinging of a hand begins. You see, child abuse and husband and wife abuse in this country that is absolutely on the rampage is not happening at the level of wrath and bitterness.

It's happening at the level when anger is there. And the reason that kids are getting hurt and mates are getting hurt today is that bitterness and wrath has been like a volcano just stirring up a whole lot of power. And when the top blows off, somebody gets hurt.

And one of the reasons that most psychologists and psychiatrists and counselors today are not helping people in the area of anger is that they try and get them to quit being bitter. They try and get them to quit doing something and really they haven't dealt with the fact that this is something that's rotting them from the inside out between them and God. And that's the only time that that release is ever really found.

You can stop it at the area of anger if you recognize it and are willing to be broken before God. But if you don't, it'll turn into clamor. And clamor is a picture of a bunch of old hens running around in a courtyard, you know, pecking and clucking and talking under their breath.

You ever catch yourself complaining under your breath, husband or wife? If you ever find yourself talking under your breath, you've already gone through bitterness, wrath, anger, I guarantee it. You don't just start talking under your breath one day because you decided to start talking under your breath. You start talking under your breath because you didn't deal with bitterness or wrath or anger yet.

And you're pretty far along in the cycle. It's going to take some radical major surgery for God to begin to do something in your life. But man, that is God's business.

God loves to do that which is impossible from a human standpoint. And do you know it's almost impossible to communicate with an angry person? Some of you have lived with individuals that are angry that aren't now, and you know what I'm talking about. God is freedom, and they've been set free.

But you can remember back how hard it was to communicate with them when they were angry. You can't. You can't communicate reasonably with an angry person.

They're out of control. A clamoring person is becoming more outward and makes the full cycle finally to evil speaking. And that's when we say things that we wish we could cut our tongue off for.

But you see, it's all been started in the seed. The seed of bitterness that started way back because we were discontent with how God has dealt with us. I meet guys in the pastorate now quite often, many of them in smaller works.

And by the way, if you're in a smaller work, you do know that about 90, I think the statistic is something like 90 percent of the churches in America are under, what, 150 or something like that. So, you know, don't feel like the Lone Ranger. You're really in the majority.

And there's nothing wrong with being a small church. I pastored two small churches long before I ever came to Del Norte, and in comparison to this church, I'm still in a small church. You know, in comparison, it's just, it's all relative, isn't it? But I talk with a lot of guys in smaller works who are battling with bitterness because they are not where they want to be.

They want to be in the church of the open door. They want to be at Del Norte Baptist Church. They want to be a Chuck Swindoll.

They want to be a J. Vernon McGee. They want to be, you know, and they're not there, and therefore, there's discontentment. Bitterness rises up.

It affects their ministry, their relationship with people in their church. It affects the relationship between husband and wife, between them and their kids. It affects everything.

It just is an insidious thing. What's God's answer? It begins with an act of your will. It begins with, I suppose we ought to say it really begins with recognizing what we've already talked about, that this is a gross sin before God.

It is a sin that only God can deal with, and it is a sin against God. Before it is a sin against your church, your husband, your wife, your kids, anybody else, it is a sin against God. And until I am willing to deal with it as a sin against God, I will never know victory.

Number two, it becomes an act of your will to do something about it. That's why you have a command in the last part of verse 31, put away from you all malice. That's an act of your will.

You've got to do something. You've got to make up your mind. You're not going to traffic that way any longer.

It's just a cold-blooded, pragmatic choice. You're going to make, you're not going to walk that way any more by the power of God. Not by the power of your flesh, but by the power of God.

You see, a lot of us want to be angry. You say, how did anybody want to be angry? Well, because we want to get even. Right? Want to get even.

Josh wanted to get even with his dad. You know, he wanted that man to suffer. He believed that that man caused his mother to die early.

That man used to beat his mother. And Josh justified his anger because he said, I wanted to get even with my dad. See, that's how anger works.

It takes a choice on your part to say, God, I don't want to be this way any more. I am tired of being controlled and manipulated in this way. And then in verse 32, he gives you the opposite of grieving the Holy Spirit.

Be kind. Be kind, one to another. Tender-hearted, forgiving one another.

Those are all acts of the will. You can't be kind by osmosis. You can't be kind just because, you know, you feel like, well, I've got to do that.

Kindness is an act of the will. If I'm kind to somebody, I have to make a choice to do something, to be kind. Tender-hearted, forgiving, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you.

And then in chapter 5, verse 1, be therefore followers of God as dear children. Be imitators of God as dear children. Therefore, on the basis of not grieving the Spirit of God any longer, dealing with this bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, all evil speaking, malice, all of that, and being kind to one another, therefore, on the basis of that, you can begin to become an imitator of Jesus Christ.

But if you're trying to be an imitator of Jesus Christ, I don't care what your position, I don't care what the size of your church is, if you're trying to be an imitator of Jesus Christ, and you are grieving the Spirit of God because you are not willing to deal with the two-edged sword of anger and fear, and we've not been able to deal with fear, really, if those things are operating in your life as a way of life, whether anybody else knows it or not. I was an angry man for years, and people in my congregation really didn't know it. In fact, when I finally dealt with that before God and confessed it to my people, people came to my wife and said, Charlene, it really wasn't that bad, was it? The pastor was really exaggerating, right? They didn't want to believe that.

Well, you see, I played the game very well. I saved my anger for the people that I loved, literally, the deepest. And if you ask me to explain that, I can't.

I just, I absolutely can't. I deal with people every day, almost, that are in that, and I do not have an answer for that. I don't know why we take advantage of the people that we love the most and hurt them when we are the closest to them.

Maybe it's some kind of feeling that they will understand. I don't know. But if you want to be an imitator of Jesus Christ, and that's what God called you to be.

He called you to be a model, pastor. He called me to be a model. Boy, that's tough, because I have such clay feet.

And the only way you can be a good model is to keep your focus upon the one you're modeling. Some of you wives today, they're hurting. I trust that you will allow the Spirit of God to do a healing in your life.

You say, well, I'm not sure my husband wants to change, or will change. It doesn't make any difference. It doesn't make any difference.

He may never change. You want to be miserable the rest of your life? Then just go on holding that revengeful spirit. And not only will your husband be miserable, but you'll just join him, and you'll be one in

that as well.

What a tragedy that would be. I trust that God will help you be set free today, to realize that God is not reluctant, and God certainly understands where you are. Isaiah says, there's no searching of His understanding.

He knows where you are. He cares. He is such a loving, good, and chief shepherd of our lives.

And He understands the pain, because He has suffered under the pain of angry men. He suffered under injustice. He suffered under rudeness.

He suffered under it. Some of you fellows that are struggling in the ministry, it may be that one of the sides of this two-edged sword is cutting you up in the ministry, and you have not yet faced it. Anger or fear.

And if it is, and if God speaks to your heart about that, I pray today that you will become wise enough to be transparent to God. Don't deal with your mate first. You must deal with your own personal relationship between you and God first.

And you must pray the prayer of Psalm 51. You must pray that prayer. And mean it.

Make it yours. Personalize it. And when you do, then you have the promise of God.

That He'll set you free from that bondage, and He will set you free to minister with liberty. I cannot tell you how wonderful it is to be able to minister with liberty. It is so wonderful.

It is such a relief not to be under that bondage. And you don't have to be under it anymore. And you're going to have to have a maintenance program if you get freedom today.

You are. You know what the maintenance program is? Renewing of your mind. It is.

And if you don't know what that is, you just go to the New Testament and begin studying. In fact, in this chapter, He's got something to say about the renewing of your mind. It means turning over a trodden down ground.

We call it the road of telling principle in our church. And God wants to do that. But there are some specific things you need to do about renewing of the mind.

If you want to know some more about that, if you're in this church, except the pastor here. Forget who I'm talking to. We've written some stuff on that if you would like some stuff on that.

But all of you are good students of the word. You can bang that out. Bang it out for you.

Bang it out for yourself about the renewing of the mind. That is the maintenance program of the Spirit of God. It's no hocus pocus.

No warm fuzzy feeling. It's just renewing of the mind. And there are some very specific things said in the word of God about that.

And I encourage you that if you get right with God today, the next step is to begin that maintenance program of the renewing of your mind. And God can really use that to transform your ministry. Some of you may have to go back to your congregations.

If God sets you free in this area and asks him to forgive you. That's a hard and humbling thing to do. But you know, God says that real revival comes only when we're willing to step down so that God can elevate.

And I trust that if you are a layman, and there are some in here today I know, who are sitting under pastors who are angry. Some of you are, I know. If you're under a pastor that is angry, don't write him off.

Pray for him more than you've ever prayed. My counsel to you would be Matthew chapter 5 verse 44. If you got a pastor who has become your enemy, and that's really what he's become.

If he's angry, I'll guarantee it. But anyway, if you don't think he's your enemy, if it'll work for an enemy, it'll work for a friend. You love him, you pray for him, you do good.

You bless him. Don't give up. Ladies, if you're married to an angry man who doesn't want to give up, God's answer is Matthew 5 verse 44 for you.

I've told more women, go home and apply Matthew 5 verse 44. You mean you want me to bless that guy when he's done that? Yep, that's what God says. You say, that doesn't make a bit of sense.

I said, you're absolutely right. That's why if anything happens, you can be sure that God did it. But you know what, I have seen God use that.

I have seen God take situations you just would not believe today and just turn them around by Matthew 5 verse 44 being applied. See, God loves to do it in a way that we can't take any credit, doesn't he? He really does. I want us to close in prayer.

And I apologize for going over 15 minutes, but I trust that as we're just humbled before God today, that we would take a moment and let God search us and know us and try us and see if there is any wicked way in us so that he might then begin to lead us in the way everlasting. Too many of us have said to God, Father, I want you to lead me in the way everlasting. We haven't been willing to let him search us and know us and try us and show us the wickedness of our heart.

Whatever he shows you, confess it. Just confess it to God. Agree with God.

And by his grace, repent of that. Turn away from it. Make a mental choice to turn away from that.

Then be sure that you thank God that not only has he forgiven you, but he will fill that area with his own person, the Holy Spirit. To give you continual victory over that thing. Let's pray.

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