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Alright, well I want to welcome everybody joining us across all of our physical locations and those of you joining us online. If this happens to be the first time that you're tuning in, you've picked a really great day to do that, because we are starting a new series of messages that we'll be in for the next four weeks together called *Let's Talk About It*.

And I really do believe that God is going to speak and that this is going to help a lot of people. Really, the big idea around this is—it's no surprise for me to say to you that the past year has been filled with all kinds of unexpected challenges that none of us ever saw coming.

Last March we were thrown into a once-in-a-century global pandemic that none of us know how to deal with because we don't have any personal experience with it. We've just read about it in history books. And it's sort of turned all of our lives upside down. And even today it sort of dominates the media and we can't go a single day without being reminded of it.

So there's that pandemic that is always in front of us, but what I want to suggest to us today is that there is also another pandemic that is going on underneath the surface that doesn't get nearly as much coverage or attention. And it's the:  
Mental and Emotional Health Pandemic

We might even say that it's the pandemic behind the pandemic. And according to research by the Kaiser Foundation, it has pointed out that right now one out of two of us are wrestling with mental and emotional health challenges.

Now I want you to let that sink in for just a minute. One out of two. That's 50 percent of us. Either you or the person next to you. If you're in an auditorium that's 50 percent of the auditorium. If you're in a living room, that's half of the people in the room wrestling with some sort of mental or emotional health challenge.

The CDC listed a report not long ago saying that in the past year one out of four young adults have seriously contemplated taking their life. That's tragic. We see that divorce rates are up. Cases of domestic and child abuse are up. Anxiety and depression are up.

Right now new addictions are being developed and old ones are resurfacing, and this has been true in any plague or pandemic in history—in fact, a Roman Emperor and philosopher by the name of Marcus Aurelius said this in the second century during a plague. He said: "The corruption of the mind is a far more serious pestilence than the physical one that corrupts the body."

Now that's his way of saying that they were dealing with mental and emotional health challenges during that plague.

In April of 2020, they did a survey trying to gauge our emotional wellness as a society and they were comparing it to 2019 numbers. So overall:

Feelings of Enjoyment were at 83 percent in 2019 but it was down to 64 percent in 2020.

Feelings of Worry were at 35 percent in 2019 but they increased to 52 percent in 2020.

Feelings of Sadness—23 percent in 2019 increased to 32 percent in 2020.

Feelings of Anger—15 percent of us in 2019 but it increased to 24 percent this year.

See, we're all feeling it. We're feeling it in a variety of ways. And so let's talk about it. And I want you to know that this is a safe place for us to talk about these kinds of issues.

I don't know. Maybe your experience with church kind of taught you that this wasn't a safe place to talk about some of these mental and emotional health challenges you were going through. And maybe you had a well-meaning Christ follower kind of suggest to you that you shouldn't talk about it, these kinds of issues you should just sort of keep to yourself.

I think one of the things about mental health is that oftentimes we keep it to ourselves and then we feel like we are the only one—we're the only ones dealing with this. We feel like we're the only ones feeling this.

When you look at everybody else, from the outside in they look like they've got it all together. On social media everybody looks happy. So that can feel even more isolating. And then when we're in a season of a pandemic where we're told to isolate, it just accentuates the problem.

And I want you to know that this is a safe place for you to talk about some of these issues, because just look around. Fifty percent of us are wrestling with it right now if not more.

So over the course of these next four weeks, I want to encourage you to join us because we're going to talk about:

**ADDICTION ANXIETY DEPRESSION**

And today I want to talk about **ANGER**. And I started with anger because I really do believe that our inability to really process and express our anger is feeding the addiction, the anxiety, and the depression.

Now I know what some of you are thinking. Some of you are thinking, "Well, this sounds like an awesome series. It kind of sounds like a real downer." And I want you to know that it's not going to be a downer. We're all living through it right now; we might as well talk about it openly.

But I want you to know that God's word has a lot to say about these subjects and every single week I want to give you help and hope from God's word, wherever you may be spiritually. You may be here, and you are like, "I don't know that I believe in God. I don't know that I would follow after Jesus just yet. I'm not quite sure that I believe what's in the Bible."

But I want you to know that the wisdom from God's word can provide help and hope and oftentimes that's where our spiritual journey begins. We see how helpful and hopeful God's word is.

So I want to extend some lifelines to you. If you're drowning in addiction, anxiety, depression, or anger, there is some help and there is some hope. And I want you to know that you're not the only one. We're all wrestling through this. If I'm being really, really honest, I've struggled with each one of these in this particular season that we're in.

Here's what I think is happening. This is sort of like the recipe for explosive anger. Right now we're dealing with public health challenges—the pandemic—which has triggered all of this economic strain. And then we're told to isolate so we're personally isolated from one another. There's all of this social tension. There's political division, which has then led to paralyzing anxiety and fear.

And that is the perfect recipe for explosive anger that comes out in ways that set us back in our emotional and spiritual health, it puts distance between us and our relationships, and it distances us in our connection to God.

So let me go ahead and offer this definition of anger so that way we're just kind of all on the same page. Anger is a strong feeling, it's an emotion of sorts, it's something that we feel and it's a feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility.

So, how many of us have expressed displeasure or hostility toward someone just in the past month? Any of us. Yeah. We all have. How many of you have been the recipient of somebody else's displeasure or hostility? Online, right? Because of the isolation and because we're online more, I think that a lot of the explosive anger that is dividing us and causing all kinds of anxiety is happening to us online.

Here's where I think we need to begin when we talk about anger—the first thing I just really want you to know right away is that anger, in and of itself, is not a bad thing. It is a very real and I would even say helpful emotion.

Let me say this as plainly as I can. It is not a sin to be angry. But anger is kind of like fire, right? Within certain confines it's good, but when you get it outside of that it will burn your house down. So we've got to be very careful with how we process and express our anger. It's not a sin to be angry. It's a very real emotion and actually not being honest about that, we set ourselves up for it to be destructive in our lives.

Jesus got angry and he demonstrated that anger. When they turned the Temple into a marketplace, he got angry and he expressed it. Jesus got angry one time when somebody criticized him for healing somebody on the Sabbath. He was like, "Listen. The Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath." Jesus got angry when he saw injustice in all of its forms.

In fact, there are some things that merit our anger. We should get angry when we see abuse or injustice or racism. In fact, the Bible has a term for this, it's called righteous indignation.

Ephesians 4:26 says it so plainly. It says:  
*"...don't sin by letting anger control you."*

So you can feel angry but don't let it control you. One translation of that passage says:  
*"In your anger do not sin."*

So it's possible to be angry and not sin. And when I say sin, that is shorthand for setting you back emotionally and spiritually, damaging your relationships, or distancing yourself from God.

There is a way to be angry and not sin. But can I just say that it's really, really challenging? There are all kinds of pitfalls for us to fall into. And so when we are feeling angry, when something angers us, I think we've got to stop, and we have to recognize it for what it is. It is a symbol of some kind. It's a signal of some kind.

It's kind of like on the dashboard of your car, whenever the red light comes on. That's a signal that there is something happening under the hood that you need to pay attention to right away. And it alerts us to the fact that we need to do something inside, some heart and some mind work that we need to deal with. And we need to learn to listen to it. We need to learn to process it instead of...

Here's what oftentimes we have a tendency to do and maybe you might be in one of these two camps when you are beginning to feel angry: we either stuff it or we spew it. And both of those things are so damaging and so unhealthy.

In fact, there may be some of you right now who are automatically like—when I talk about this, you're like, "Yep, I've got an anger problem." And more than likely it's because you've got a short fuse, you've got a hot temper, and you just kind of let it go all of the time. Your emotions are on your sleeve.

There are others of you who may be like, "I don't really know that I wrestle with anger. I'm pretty chill." But here's the thing. Maybe most of the time you don't get angry but what happens is you stuff it, you stuff it, you stuff it and eventually you turn into the Incredible Hulk and you just kind of go off. Where in the world did that come from? Well, it's been simmering there for a while.

See, it's not anger that is destructive to our lives and relationships, but it is unprocessed anger.

So, can I just take a quick minute to just ask you right now, are you angry? Just stop and slow down enough right now just to feel that. Are you angry? And if the answer is yes, there is nothing wrong with that.

There are all kinds of things to be angry about right now. Our world is severely broken, and if there is anything that the pandemic has shown us it's that it has sort of pulled the curtain back to show us how broken it really is.

Maybe you've lost a job, or you've lost a source of income and you're angry about that. You know what? I don't blame you. Maybe right now you're angry because of what somebody said or did online. Maybe you're angry at your spouse or your kids. Maybe you're angry at some co-workers.

Maybe you're angry about how the election went down. Maybe you're angry because you're told to wear a mask. Maybe you're angry because you don't think enough people are wearing a mask.

We've got all kinds of anger issues going on in our life right now. And I just want you to sit in this moment right now to go, "You know what? I totally get it. It's a very real emotion that all of us are feeling."

So, how do we process it? You see, just because you're angry doesn't mean that you've done anything wrong or that you have sinned, however there is a line where in our anger we sin. So the question is where is the line? And I'm really glad that you asked that. So let's talk about it.

What I want to do is point us to Exodus, chapter 17. If you have a Bible or a device with a Bible on it, go ahead and turn to Exodus 17 because we find an example of the Israelites feeling angry and they didn't process it well and they crossed the line.

Just to give a little bit of context here, the Israelites are God's chosen people. They have been taken, against their will, by a ruthless leader by the name of Pharaoh and they are in slavery, And God raises up an imperfect leader by the name of Moses. Every leader is imperfect. Moses demonstrates all of that. And Moses goes reluctantly—he didn't want to be used in this way, but he goes, and he goes nose to nose to Pharaoh. He says, "Let God's people go."

And Pharaoh just flips and flops. He decides to let them go and he changes his mind. He goes back and forth, back and forth. And as you read through the Israelites' story, God is delivering them from slavery into the Promised Land, but it is not a straight-forward path from point A to point B. It never is. It's filled with lots of zigs and zags and twists and turns and challenges and difficulties and pain.

Here's the thing. As you read through the Israelites' story, every time they get themselves in a bind—like when their backs are against the wall, God comes through at just the right time, but rarely according to their perfect time. He always delivers them. And it's miraculous. And the Israelites, initially, are so grateful and they're humble and they worship, and they thank God.

But then they were a lot like you and me. They suffered from short-term memory loss and they forget how faithful God was to bring them through that challenge or that calamity and they begin to let their anger brim the surface once again.

And we see it boil up and over in verse 1. It says:

*“At the LORD’s command, the whole community of Israel left the wilderness of Sin,”* that’s just short for Sinai, *“and moved from place to place. Eventually they camped at Rephidim, but there was no water there for the people to drink. So once more,”* meaning that this wasn’t the first time, *“the people complained against Moses. ‘Give us water to drink!’ they demanded.”*

Now already I see all kinds of things wrong with this. First of all I would say totally understandable that they would be upset that they didn’t have water. That’s a bad thing not to have water. But they didn’t handle it very well.

Instead of voicing a concern or asking a question, they complained against the very leader who had risked his own neck to help deliver them out of slavery. They didn’t make a request; they laid down a demand, more than once, meaning this had become a destructive pattern of behavior in the Israelites’ lives. Anger had them in its grip. And they weren’t even fully aware of it.

Moses had anger issues of his own. Look at verse 2:

*“‘Quiet!’” Moses replied. “‘Why are you complaining against me? And why are you testing the LORD?’”*

I don’t blame him. Moses is frustrated and angry and upset. And so what did he do? He pushes back on the Israelites with his own angry response. What I want you to see is that it doesn’t do a lick of good. Look at verse 3:

*“But tormented by thirst, they continued to argue with Moses. ‘Why did you bring us out of Egypt?’”* And then the next question is just absolutely stunning. *“‘Are you trying to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?’”*

And this is where, if I were in Moses’ sandals, my spiritual gift of sarcasm would have been front and center. I would have been like, “Yeah, you’ve got me. I risked my neck to get you out of slavery just so I could bring you out here and kill you.”

Do you know what this is? This doom and gloom talk. This is worst case scenario. This is conspiracy theory, “Well, I heard from somebody, Moses, that you’re just in this for yourself and you just really have it out for us, and you wanted to bring us out here and kill us with our thirst.”

I believe that verse 4 is the pivotal moment that de-escalated the situation and changed everything. And it’s subtle. Look at verse 4:

*“Then Moses”* he didn’t yell back at the people, *“Then Moses cried out to the LORD,”* did you see that? He shifted his focus and he said, God, *“‘What should I do with these people? They are ready to stone me!’”*

See, instead of yelling back at them as he had done before, because, obviously, that didn’t do any good—it just continued to escalate the situation—he shifts his gaze to God and he says, “God, would you help me here?” And notice God’s response to him in verse 5:

*“Walk out in front,”* in other words, you set the example, Moses. *“Walk out in front of the people. Take your staff, the one you used when you struck the water of the Nile, and call some of the elders of Israel to join you.”*

Here’s what God says to Moses. He goes, “Moses, stop reflecting the anger of the Israelites and be a leader, be a leader and don’t go alone.” Could we take that same word from the Lord and receive it into our own lives?

Right now instead of reflecting the fear and the anger of our culture, especially for those of us who are Christ followers, be a leader. Go against the grain. Run against the flow. Choose to live your life with poise and conviction instead of just inflaming the situation with your own fear and control issues. Shift your gaze from the person who we might be getting angry with to God. Be a leader.

Right now, more than ever we need leaders who will not reflect the anger of society, but be a manifestation and amplify the peace of God that is found in Jesus Christ.

I’m fully convinced that right now, more than ever, a watching world is looking at how Christ followers are handling themselves. And it is either making Jesus more attractive or less. Be a leader.

God says:

*“I will stand before you on the rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come gushing out.”* I love this. God doesn’t say, “Hey, find a water fountain. He doesn’t even say, “Go to the river.” No he says, “God to…” who goes to a rock to get water? This is God flexing. This is God saying, “Watch what I can do if you’ll just be obedient to me.”

And it says that the water came gushing out, and *“Then the people will be able to drink.” So Moses struck the rock as he was told, and water gushed out as the elders looked on.”*

We read that so passively, but can you just imagine to be Moses for a minute? You’ve just got your staff. You’re on the rock. And you’re like, “I don’t know. Here we go. I’m going to look like a fool.” And all of this water came gushing out.

*“Moses named the place Massah (which means ‘test’) and Meribah (which means ‘arguing’) because the people of Israel argued with Moses and tested the LORD by saying, ‘Is the LORD here with us or not?’”*

Have you asked that question in the past year? I have, “God, are you with us or not? God, where are you in the midst of this crazy situation.”

Now, what can we take from the passage? How do we apply this to our lives? Well, I think that there are a lot of things right now that very understandably can evoke feelings of anger in all of our lives. And I don’t think that the answer is to spew it and I don’t think the answer is to stuff it.

So, what are we to do? I think that we need to process it before we express it. And when we express it, it needs to be constructive rather than destructive. We want to process our anger in such a way that it doesn't cause damage to ourselves, our relationships, or our connection to God.

I've got to tell you that anger issues are something that God just continues to take me to the mat on over and over and over again. In my life it kind of feels like maybe I've gotten a handle on some of my anger issues and then I just find myself in a new season.

There are times when my anger might come out and really, I would say most of the time, it doesn't have... Rarely does it have anything to do with a specific set of circumstances that I'm in. It has everything to do with something else that is going on in my heart. And all that was in front of me, it just sort of brought it to the surface and reminded me of some heart work that I needed to do.

Several years ago we were on vacation in the Outer Banks. And there is a section of the beach there where you can take your vehicle out on the sand. But you need to let air out of your tires so that way you don't get stuck. So we did that. Had a nice drive on the beach.

Get back out on the road and there's a little gas station right there where you can then put air back in your tires before you go on. It's a tiny little gas station, postage stamp parking lot. Not much room.

There's only one parking stall that accessed the air hose. And so I pull in there. It's a really crowded parking lot and there was a pickup truck parked in the parking stall that I needed to air up the tires. So, I parked right behind and I kind of waited.

And these two gentlemen come out of the convenience store. And I don't know who they were. I don't know their names. But in my mind, they were Johnny and Billy Bob. That's just what they looked like. And they came out with corn dogs and sodas, that's Johnny and Billy Bob. And I thought, "Okay, they've got their lunch. They're going to get in the truck. They're going to leave.

But they didn't. Instead they sat on the hood and ate their lunch. They knew I was there. They knew I was there. They turned back and even looked at me. And they kind of gave me that look like, "We don't care."

And they knew that was the spot that I needed because that was the only parking stall that accessed the hose. And they could tell that our tires were low. So, I'm sitting there and I'm starting to fume. Began to get upset, but I didn't say anything. Just kind of waiting and waiting, impatient.

But then, what triggered it was there was a delivery truck that pulled in right behind us. And the driver was trying to get to the back of the convenience store, but they couldn't get around me to get to the store.



I didn't want to move because then I would give up my spot in line. And so I'm just kind of waiting and I'm like, "Come on Johnny and Billy Bob, let's go." And the driver of the delivery truck started laying on his horn, honking at me. So, now all of a sudden, I've become the bad guy. And that just set me off.

I'm not proud of this, but I got out of the truck and I slammed the door, and I started walking toward the delivery truck and I started raising my hands in the air and I'm like, "Where to expect me to go?" And then I noticed that he was a much larger man than me. So I was like, "Just think about that, alright?" I got back in my truck. And I was kind of thinking, "Yeah, I kind of let them have it."

But I turned around and I could see my eight-year-old daughter and she was in tears. And she said these words that pierced my heart. She said, "Daddy, I don't like it when you get that way."

And it was as if the Holy Spirit kind of took me to the mat of, "Where did that come from?" And you know what? It had nothing to do with Johnny and Billy Bob. It had nothing to do with the delivery truck driver. It actually had something to do with the season I was in of stress and anxiety and I'd been stuffing it and it came out sideways, in an unexpected way.

You know, the actual residual damage of that was hurting my kids. That's how explosive anger works. When you're feeling angry, you need to stop and say, "What's happening under the surface."

You've probably seen a picture of an iceberg before. We see what's happening above the surface, but there is actually a whole lot going on beneath the surface. And what's happening above the surface, that's usually what we let other people see. You know the face that we put on, the presence that we put on social media.

From the outside looking in, it just kind of looks like everything is okay. But there is all of this stuff going on underneath the surface, that we may, or, in most cases, may not be likely to be in tune with. See, this is where explosive anger comes from. It's the stuff that is brewing underneath the surface.

So, if we really want to get ahold of our anger, that's where we have to go first. We can do this in a variety of ways. We can do this through counseling. We can do this through extended conversations.

This is what the Psalmist was getting at in chapter 139, verse 1. It says:  
*"O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me."*

See, if we want to get a handle on explosive anger, that's where we have to begin. We've got to lay ourselves before God and say, "God, would you please examine my heart? What is going on underneath the surface that I need to process?"

Not long ago there was a study done by Cornell University and they wanted to know if there was a trait that most successful CEOs have in common. And it didn't have anything to do with IQ. It didn't have anything to do with their ability to strategize. What they found was that the most successful CEOs had great self-awareness. Self-awareness defined is a: conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires.

Maybe a little easier way of saying that is that, when you are self-aware you know what it's like to be on the other side of you. When you are self-aware you know how you make other people feel. And whenever we don't have much self-awareness, that's when we can very easily fall into the pit of explosive anger.

See, the Israelites had a lot going on under the hood, so to speak, within their hearts that they weren't fully aware of and the result was:

CONSTANT COMPLAINING MAKING DEMANDS DIVISIVE ARGUING CYNICISM  
CONSPIRACY THEORIES DOOM AND GLOOM, and WORST CASE SCENARIOS

Does any of that sound familiar?

And in verse 3, they say:

*"Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?"*

You want to know what that question is? That question is a direct result of something called and amygdala hijack. And an amygdala hijack is: a personal, emotional response that is immediate, (in other words we don't take time to process it) overwhelming, and out of measure with the actual stimulus because it has triggered a much more significant emotional threat.

In other words, it is an emotional over reaction. And we don't take time to be self-aware; we don't take time to really process how this is coming out.

Over the past 10 months we have been in a set of circumstances that are prime for an amygdala hijack, whether that's online, whether that's road rage, or whether that's saying something to somebody who lives under your own roof and something just sets you off, something gets triggered.

See when we explode in anger, what's really happening? I might suggest this. Explosive, destructive anger is a form of grasping for control when I feel like I have no control.

So, we're in a pandemic. We don't feel like we have any control. We're in an economic downturn. We don't feel like we have control. There's all of this political division. We don't feel like we have any control. We don't feel like we have a voice. So when we get fearful and when we feel like we don't have control, that's prime for explosive anger.

You know, we see this in the life of Peter. Peter was a guy who had problems with his anger, and we see it all culminate in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. And Peter has his whole world flipped upside-down.

You want to know why? Because Peter kept thinking, no matter how many times that Jesus corrected him, Peter kept thinking that Jesus was here to usher in an earthly kingdom. He thought Jesus was going to run for office. And he thought, 'I'm going to have a front row seat to Jesus' reign and rule. This is going to be great.'

And then all of a sudden, in a matter of an instant, Peter's expectations come tumbling, because now the Roman soldiers seek to arrest Jesus. And Jesus had just told them, 'I'm going to lay my life down.' Peter just couldn't get his head around that. And he was fearful. And he felt like he didn't have any control.

So what does he do? Remember that scene when he literally, not figuratively, he literally takes out a sword and cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest by the name of Malchus. What is that? That is Peter lashing out in anger and he cuts off his ear.

What does Jesus do? Jesus didn't turn to him and say, 'Oh, man. Way to go. Chest bump. That's awesome.' No, Jesus, I think he just shakes his head and goes, 'Peter.' And he bends down, and he grabs the ear of Malchus, and he snaps it back onto his head like a Lego block.

He undoes the explosive anger that Peter had just demonstrated. And it stunned everybody. Jesus, without even saying any words, said, 'Peter, would you let go of the control that you think you have to the One who is in control?'

So right now, today, there are all kinds of things that can make us feel angry. I want to encourage you to practice a little Psalm 139. When you begin to feel angry, just stop for a minute, and go, 'God, would you please examine my heart, what's going on underneath the surface?' And then this is, once again, instead of grasping for control to let go of that control to the One who is in control.

I want to give you a few practical handles here, some help, as we wrap up. So there are just a few of these that I want to get to if you're taking notes. The first thing is, I think this will help to dismantle some of the explosive anger. When you feel yourself getting angry, particularly online:

Don't drop a comment, but have a conversation.

See, comments don't get us anywhere. Conversations really help bridge the gap. I don't know how many times... Have you ever noticed that we will say stuff to each other over a keyboard we would never say to somebody's face?

Occasionally if I get a comment or a DM or an email that is particularly mean-spirited and untrue, and I have a phone number, occasionally I'll call. And hands down, every single time

I've done it, the tone changes and we have a good conversation. It just changes the whole dynamic.

Can I just say if you read something online from someone and you don't know them, just keep scrolling? If you know them and you really have an issue with it, just reach out to them. Send them a DM and say, "Hey, I'd really like to understand where you're coming from. Can we get coffee? Can we have a phone conversation?" This, instead of the explosive hand grenades that we throw back and forth into each other's comments—walls. It doesn't do any good. It just entrenches us farther and creates more echo chambers.

In Proverbs, chapter 14, verse 29 it says:

*"People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness."*

Here's the second practical handle.  
Choose to respond rather than react.

If we could just respond rather than react it would change a lot. And I'm convinced that if we could apply this simple step it would eliminate 99 percent of the destructive anger that we all experience.

I know this is true for me. If I get angry about something, I just need to—I call it the 24-hour rule—I just need to not do or say anything for 24 hours. Just let my emotions simmer down a little bit. Pray about it. Let me get a good night sleep.

Let me reach out to two or three trusted people who I know have a lot of wisdom and ask them for their objective insight on this rather than just responding via my subjective emotions. And almost always it changes the way that I would respond.

God's word just affirms this. Proverbs 15:1 says:

*"A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare."*

The third thing is:

Refuse to stereo-type people from a distance.

And right now, in this season of distancing, we are away from each other and we are communicating a lot online and it's so easy to just create a narrative in your head about where you think somebody is politically or socially based upon certain terminologies or words.

Right now we are so, so divided. So if somebody speaks out against racism, you go, "Well, you must be left-leaning." If they speak out for the unborn, "You must be right-leaning." Hey, we need to re-open for the economy. "You must be right-leaning." No we need to stay locked down in order to preserve lives. "You must be left-leaning."  
"Hey, you need to wear a mask." Left-leaning. "De-mask us." Right-leaning. "Get the vaccine." Left-leaning. "I'll never get the vaccine." Right-leaning.

And we've created this stark division that has come into the body of Christ. And more than ever, we need to stop yelling at each other and cry out to the Lord. Hey, and by the way if you don't already know, social media just preys on this.

It's called algorithm. And they just accentuate the echo chambers. What that means is that they look at who you follow, they look at where you go online, they try to guess what your personal and political convictions are, and that's all the feed you, which is why I like to follow people and things that they don't think a pastor will follow, just to mess up the algorithm. That's a lot of fun. You should try it.

1 Peter, chapter 3, verse 8 says:

*"Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters." Because that's what you are, "Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do," he's not suggesting it, he's called you to it, "and he will grant you his blessing."*

Last thing:

Listen with an open mind, rather than speaking your mind.

I don't know how many times this has been true when somebody has said something a little bit sideways and when I really sit down to investigate, really all he needed was just to know that he was being heard. She just needed a voice. He just needed somebody to process this with them.

It doesn't mean by listening that you are affirming, it doesn't mean that you agree. You just listen because he/she are human beings and God has called us to unity. How do we stay unified when we disagree about so much? By fixing our gaze on Jesus.

In James, chapter 1, verse 19 it says:

*"Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry."*

So have personal and political convictions, by all means. Don't put your hope in them. Put your hope in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Listen. I just don't get Christ followers who fall into doom and gloom, worst-case scenarios, and conspiracy theories. I don't get it. They are just following after the behavior of our ancestors, the Israelites.

God has called us to hope. There is a reason that the number one command in Scripture is: fear not. Because when we are in fear, there is no room for faith. When fear has its grips on you, the next step is explosive anger. How do we get free from that?

I don't know about you, but whenever there has been a time in my life when I did something or said something foolish and it really hurt somebody and he had every right to be angry with me but instead of lashing out at me he gave me grace, he let me off of the hook, he forgave me genuinely, I've got to tell you, that is so humbling.

Do you know how many times God has been gracious to me in my inconsistency? How many times God has every right to be angry with me but instead he gives me grace? You know how many times I've said to God, "God, I'll never do it again." And I do it again. Commitments I've made to God that I've broken.

If there is anybody who has any right to be angry with our inconsistencies, it's God. And yet he chooses grace. He chose to give the life of his only Son so that we could be set free. Therefore, the only anecdote to explosive anger in our lives is:  
GRACE

And if you are having a hard time with explosive anger, you've got to really stop and you've got to ask yourself, "Have I really received grace? Like really?" Because I'll bet you that if you're expressing anger all of the time toward others, more than likely, you're pretty angry with yourself.

What I've found is that God has a far easier time forgiving us than we have in forgiving ourselves. He laid down the life of his Son so that we can be set free, that we wouldn't be caught in that trap any longer.

Grace is the only lasting anecdote to anger. Psalm 103, verse 8 says:  
*"The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love."*

Aren't you grateful for that? Aren't you grateful for a God who is slow to get angry? He doesn't stuff it or spew it. He's slow and he is filled with compassionate love for you and for me.

So if we can just receive a portion of that, don't you think that we might be people who live and extend that to others? Because right now, in this season, the world does not need more anger, the world does not need more paranoia, the world does not need people perpetuating worst cast scenarios, the world needs citizens of Heaven with poised feet and steady hands and humble hearts who are willing to point people to the grace that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

So, if you're feeling angry, totally understandable. Be a leader and receive the grace that has been made available to you so that you can perpetuate that grace in the midst of a really divisive and hurting world.

Lord God, we come to you today and I ask that over these next four weeks that you would speak loudly and clearly to these issues that touch every single one of our lives, either us personally, or someone we know.

So, God, as we kick it off, I just want to collectively ask you to examine our hearts that even this afternoon as we go throughout our day that your Spirit would maybe bring some things into our consciences. That you'd point out some things that maybe we need to deal with under the hood, so to speak, because anger is really just a signal of something deeper that's going on.

God, I pray that as people who are saved by grace, that we would be people who live in that grace, and freely give it to others because that's what sets us apart.

The world does not need more people perpetuating or mirroring the division and the anger that is already out there, the world needs citizens of heaven who will be leaders and demonstrate the way of grace, because as much as we love our country, this isn't our final destination. We are citizens of heaven and we want to represent you well. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.