



I Want to Know What Love Is Part 7 – Love is Easily Provoked

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Today, we're looking at *Love is not Easily Provoked*. Or, your version might say "angered" or "irritated." Last night, I asked permission from my wife to share this story. She's sitting right here with my six-year-old. I can count two times in my ten years of marriage where I would say that I was very angry, like with outward expressions. I never raised my voice with my wife. When I get mad, I get really quiet instead of loud.

We were moving, so I asked a friend if we could borrow his \$40,000.00 truck. We packed some stuff, moved some stuff, and sweet Seth let us borrow his truck. My wife said, "Hey, I have to run an errand; do you mind if I take Seth's truck?" I said, "Yeah, just be careful. It's a \$40,000.00 truck, a nicer truck than we'll ever own."

She decides to hop on the phone with her dad. She's talking to her dad and not paying attention. Right when you leave our house, you go down this hill and around a curve that has a guard rail that goes all the way along the curve. She's driving, talking to her dad, and she bumps up against this guard rail from the front of the headlight all the way back to the rear light, so it looks like Freddie Kruger took his claws and just scraped all the way from one end of the truck to the other. She gets back from her little errand, and she's got a half smirk, half legitimate concerned look on her face and says, "You might want to look at Seth's truck."

I walked out there and looked at the damage. Instantly, I'm thinking about how much this is going to cost. Where we used to live, there used to be a wood railing. I literally walked towards the wood railing and I just slammed my hand on this wood railing as hard as I could. I pulled it away and I had two splinters in my hand. As I was looking at those splinters in my hand, I began to realize the reason why I'm angry. It has everything to do with money, not the fact that everybody makes mistakes, everybody has done a finder binder. In that moment, God exposed my heart. I was worshipping money and that's why I was so angry in that moment, why I was so easily provoked or easily angered or easily irritated.

It's important to know that this verse right here does not say, "Love is not provoked, or love is not angered." Anger is not a sin. It says, "It is not *easily* angered or *easily* provoked. As a matter of fact, in the very first verse we're going to look at in John 2: 13- 17, we see a large amount of anger in Jesus. As a matter of fact, it impacted the four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, so much that all four of them mention this. That's not the case with everything that Jesus did or every ministry he had. This one, specifically in these gospels... So, you have Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They are considered the synoptic gospels. They are in sync; they look very similar.

Matthew wrote to the Jews. Mark wrote to the Romans. Luke wrote to the Greeks. John is considered the love gospel; it's not paired with the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John is a love gospel, written to Gentiles, you and me. That's why a lot of times, believers will hop into John because it resonates; it's more written to a Gentile people. I actually think John also gives the best description of this account.

So, you imagine Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have followed Jesus now for three years and they see him heal the lame, the blind, and help the poor, which is loving and sweet. They had never really seen him fly off the handle or go AWOL at all. They just saw this gentle, loving man, who combatted hate with love, combatted violence with peace. He did the opposite of everything they'd ever seen. They were like, "This is one of the most amazing, sinless people I've ever been around. As a matter of fact, he's the only sinless person I've ever been around; this is unreal." So, all four of them were profoundly impacted by this incident because all four of them wrote a descriptive account of it.

John 2 - **13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand...** The Passover is a celebratory time for the Jews, and they use the temple to worship God and to usher into intimacy with God. **...and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple...** which should be used to worship God and to invite people into intimacy with God and get their hearts cleansed before God. **...he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons...** So, now they are using God's temple as a mall. They turned God's temple into Amazon. **...and the money-changers sitting there.** So, now they are monopolizing off of these crowds, kind of like the people that set up shop outside of big sporting events. That's what these people have done. They wanted to make a quick buck off the people that made journeys to the temple. Watch what happens.

15 And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. Can you imagine one man driving all of these people out? It was so out of left field for these people that they were like, "Holy cow! He has lost his marbles." Here's the crazy thing. He goes in and he starts throwing money out. He's throwing tables. He is irate, AWOL, angry. **And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. 16 And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."**

So, what we learn in this passage is that anger is not a sin. Sadness is not a sin. Emotions, in and of themselves, are not sin. But what we need to understand is that anger is not the problem, but how we handle it can be. How many of you were easily provoked on the way to church this morning? Great, I'm in a room full of liars. Come on. Sunday morning is the morning to be irritated and easily provoked. "She's not moving fast enough." "The kids are not listening." "They're not grabbing both shoes and the socks aren't on the right feet."

Sunday morning is when we get the most irritated and easily provoked. And it's over things that just don't matter. Some of you can't stand being ten minutes early to church because you've got to sit in the same spot every single time. Some of you don't care if you're late and it's evident every week to your husband. He knows you don't care that you're late. But anger is not the problem.

Why are you angry that your wife might make you late to church? Is it because your heart wants to look a certain way to other people? Is it a control idol you have in your heart? Is it an appearance idol you have in your heart?

You see, Jesus never sinned, even when he was angry. But what sadness and anger and other emotions, that God has given to us, do is they help give us a pulse of where our heart is. To put it another way, what easily provokes us, what easily makes us angry or irritated, is a good indicator of what our heart treasures. So, in that day when I slammed my hand on a wooden railing and got two slivers, I was treasuring money over grace, over forgiveness, over patience. A lot of times, that's what our anger will show us. Our anger is simply an external expression of something deeper going on internally.

Ephesians 4: 26 says it this way. Paul says this to the saints in Ephesus. ***In your anger do not sin.*** He separates the two. He separates being provoked or irritated or angry from sin. He's saying anger is not a sin, but in your anger, when you get mad, don't sin. Don't say things to your spouse that you're going to regret. Don't slam your door. Don't punch your fist in a wall and have to go get a cast. Don't do things in your anger that are going to cause you to sin. Don't say things, do things, respond a certain way... "I'm angry, so I'm just going to go slam a fifth of tequila," or whatever the case may be. In your anger, do not sin. Don't stomp out. Don't react in anger. Paul was quick to realize, and Jesus was quick to realize that when we get irritated and angry, we are more likely to walk into sin. Anger, in and of itself, is not sin; it's a God-given emotion, but how we handle it can be a sin.

I love the way John Piper says it. This is so good. *"My feelings are not God. God is God. My feelings do not define truth. God's word defines truth."*

I tell my young people that I disciple, "Your feelings are real; they're just not always reliable. God's word is reliable. I get that you feel this way, but that contradicts God's word and it's not a wise decision. Following God's word is always the right decision."

"My feelings are echoes and responses to what my mind perceives. And sometimes - many times - my feelings are out of sync with the truth. When that happens - and it happens every day in some measure - I try not to bend the truth to justify my imperfect feelings..."

I see this a lot with young people. They want to date somebody they know they shouldn't be dating, but they want to justify the truth. They say he's got so much potential or whatever the case may be, so they try to justify it to fit the their imperfect feelings.

"...but rather, I plead with God: Purify my perceptions of your truth and transform my feelings so that they are in sync with the truth."

Why am I angry about this? Is it truth? Should I be angry about this? Why am I angry about what this person said? Why am I angry about this person disagreeing with me? Why am I angry that this person cut me off in traffic? Why am I angry that this person doesn't have good customer service and they are in a customer service job? It doesn't make sense to me. Should those things provoke me to anger?

Now some of you are in marriages in here... I'm going to get real with your guys. I told you I blew up one time and smashed my hand on the wooden railing. You feel like, as a spouse, you are walking on egg shells. You feel like there's nothing you can do right without him or he just snapping.

There are two things I want to say. If you're dating someone and you see these little spirits of anger, don't ignore those red flags. A lot of times, I see that in dating, it's hard to notice the red flags when you have rose colored glasses on. Now, if you are in the marriage, Woodland Hills is a family church; you stay in that marriage, but you need to identify the root of the anger. A lot of times, it's not your spouse. My spouse will brush her teeth and use my towel to wipe her mouth. That's not something that should easily provoke me to anger. If it does, there is something deeper in that issue and it's not a towel. Towels are going to get dirty anyway. So, if there is anger within the marriage, what needs to take place is for the spouse to figure out the core root of the anger. Why am I losing my temper every time that this happens or that happens?

James 1: 19 says this: ***Know this my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to become angry...*** Once again, anger is not a sin, but love is not easily angered.

We know that Jesus was the epitome of love. He radiates love. Literally, love is oozing out of his pores through drops of blood. He is love. He is the definition of agape love.

John 14: 6 says he's the way, the truth... So, love is truth. And when we talk about being slow to anger, Jesus was very slow to anger. God gave his only Son... Jesus gave us love. What person has more love than this that he who lay his life down for his friends. So, Jesus is the prime example of how love is not easily provoked, even though he was angered and provoked as I showed you in the very first passage we looked at.

There are things that Jesus shows us throughout scripture that should make us angry, and then there are things in life that should not make us angry at all. Let's look at a list of some of those things that should not make us angry. So, these shouldn't easily provoke you to anger:

Rude or negative people - They shouldn't provoke you to anger. Somebody can say one thing to you at a store... I've seen this. One little comment to you and this is the little volcano up here. One person says one little thing to you and all of the sudden, you're just boiling over. Now you're fuming because they said something or they cut their eyes at you or they did something wrong, etc.

I'm friends with a college basketball coach and he and I had a conversation this last week. We were talking about culture – family culture, team culture, working environment culture. He said to me, "No one ever catches good health. We catch colds, we catch the flu, we catch viruses. When everyone around you is healthy, no one is worried about getting sick. No one is worried about catching the flu. You decide to either be the provoker yourself – you love to stir up the pot and get people provoked, which is sin in and of itself. Or, you decide to migrate toward toxic, negative people, which will affect you and you'll catch the flu. Or, you make a decision to completely remove yourself from unhealthy people that like to provoke people to anger on social media sights or whatever other medium it could be.

Robert Tew said it best. *“Don't let negative and toxic people rent space in your head. raise the rent and kick them out!”* Why do you care what they think? There's another saying that *“Lions don't consume themselves with the opinion of sheep.”*

Do you want to know what God's truth says about you? Look at Psalm 139 - ***13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. 17 How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!*** This is what God thinks about you. And then, when you get consumed with what negative, toxic people think about you, you start to allow yourself to be provoked to anger.

I got off Facebook about three years ago. We made a video that went viral and I got death threats and hate. It was just unbelievable the amount of toxicity I saw on Facebook. I decided I was done. I was not going to allow all these negative, toxic people to provoke me. I know what God says about me. I know he knows my heart. I know he knows where I'm at. Those other things aren't going to provoke me. I am amazed by the amount of fellow believers I see that want to interact with people on social media that are negative and toxic. Why? How does that help your heart? How does getting angry at somebody and putting the red face emoji towards somebody help your soul that day? I don't understand it. Anger is not the problem. The red face emoji is not the problem. It's your heart and being a steward of that.

Repeating yourself – This is another thing that probably shouldn't easily anger you. When my wife has to repeat herself four times, it's because I didn't listen the first time. Or if I did, I didn't respond. That's all she wants. Just let her know you heard the first time. And all the wives said... Amen. I'm an idiot. I'll say, *“I heard you the first three times”* and she'll say, *“Well, you didn't respond, so how did I know you heard me? If you would have just said, ‘Yes, sweetie, I hear you,’ we could have just moved on.”* That shouldn't provoke me to anger. I'm the idiot for not responding. When you listen, you respond. That's called active listening, husbands.

Teenagers and Toddlers – This also shouldn't easily anger you. Of course teenagers don't think like you think. Their whole brain is not fully developed. And why do you try to reason with a toddler? They are toddlers. That should not easily provoke you to anger. Look at what the scripture says about letting toddlers or teenager provoke you. Proverbs 26: 4 – ***Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.***

Why are you trying to reason like a teenager? There is no reasoning in their brains. There's no common sense. *“Why did you do that?” “I don't know.”* Exactly, so why are you trying to reason with them. They don't know. They can't give you an explanation for why they did what they did. And toddlers... Why are you trying to reason with a five-year-old? You're the parent. If you had a quarter for every time you heard *“I'm the parent; that's why.” “Because I said so; that's why...”*

Toddlers and teenagers should not easily provoke you to anger. They're going to act like teenagers and toddlers. Just like you and I acted like teenagers and toddlers. It's a part of God's sanctification process,

so embrace it and don't be angered. Thank you, God, for the sanctification. Thank you that I just heard "Dad" 20 times in a row. My five-year-old will be like, "Dad, Dad, Dad, Dad..." I'm immature and I'll go, "Anders, Anders, Anders, Anders..." I'm a fool! I'm a fool!

Non-believers – This also shouldn't provoke us to anger. Now, if you're a non-believer in here, we couldn't be happier that you're in here with us. But, why in the world, as Christians, when a non-believer does what non-believers do... They just cussed or they did this or that and all of the sudden we're angry. What? Of course a non-believer is going to act like a non-believer. They're not going to act like a fellow Christian. And for us to get angry at someone who doesn't have customer service skills or is rude or doesn't have any barometer in their spirit because they don't have the Holy Spirit living within them... For us to get angry and mad about that or easily provoked, it just doesn't... People who aren't following Jesus are going to act like people who are not following Jesus. So, if we know that, why should we get easily provoked or angered.

Remember 1 Peter 4: 8 says **Love covers over a multitude of sins**. This is also non-believer sins. Love covers a multitude of sins. People who don't know Jesus are going to act like people who don't know Jesus. People who do know Jesus are going to act like people who don't know Jesus.

Bad drivers – This should not easily provoke you to anger, unless they put my family in harm's way or you in harm's way. If they just cut you off, they don't deserve the one-finger wave from you. They don't deserve the horn. I always love it when people hit the horn and then they see it's somebody they know. They're like, "I was just saying hi. I'm not angry. I'm not irritated." No one is a perfect driver. Some of you senior citizens are like, "Yeah, I am. Do you know how low my insurance is?" Well, you commute five miles a week and you live in Branson. It's not hard to keep on a good driver list in Branson.

But that stuff shouldn't provoke you to anger. There's something else going on. If every time someone beats you at a red light or somebody cuts you off and you get angry, the driving is not the problem. You want to be in control, or you want to be first, or you don't want to be behind somebody, or you don't want somebody else dictating your pace of speed, or you don't want somebody else slowing you down. There's something else going on inside of you where if there is road rage, the car is not the problem. There's something deeper going on that's the problem.

Different points of view – Just because somebody disagrees with you – different political views, different views on gun rights, different views on the sanctity of marriage – it doesn't mean they hate you. Now, I'm not telling you to agree with those things, but I'm saying just because somebody believes in homosexual marriage doesn't mean you come in the room exploding with angry. That's really attractive. That's going to help dialogue. Differing points of view are not reasons for you to be easily provoked to anger. Care more about people and less about what people think. Then you won't be ready to erupt all the time.

Chewing/Talking with food in your mouth – This shouldn't provoke you to anger. "If I want seafood, I'll go to Landry's." Some of you can fly off the handle at your kids because they're still learning table manners. Dad or Mom, the problem isn't your kid chewing with his mouth open. There's something else going on in your heart.

Hiccups - They can't control their hiccups. Why are you mad that they have hiccups? If they could control their hiccups, they'd stop hiccupping. He's five years old, give him a break. He doesn't want the hiccups. They're not comfortable for anybody. If hiccups easily provoke you to anger, the problems are not the hiccups.

Slow people - They should not provoke you to anger. As a matter of fact, they can teach you a lot about yourself. I was traveling to Rhode Island two weeks ago. I don't like layovers. I don't who does. If all of us could have direct flights, we would have direct flights. I had a 45-minute connection in O'Hare Airport. I was in Terminal 1 and my connection was in Terminal 3 and we were ten minutes late getting into O'Hare. If you've ever been in O'Hare, you know how crazy the airport traffic is.

So, I'm probably about 30 rows back of a 100-row plane. The first people in first class that get off probably had a three-hour layover connection. They decide to walk down the jet bridge shoulder to shoulder and in no hurry. Why are they in a hurry? They probably have a three-hour layover. If you are ever in the front of a plane with 100 passengers behind you, you might want to be mindful that there are people trying to get to their connection.

Now, as I was trying to catch my layover, sprinting through the airport, I literally made the last boarding call as I got on the plane. But I thought, *That wasn't their problem. They were smart; they scheduled a three hour layover. I'm the one that wanted to keep it close and exciting. I shouldn't be easily provoked by my own decisions.* We do that as spouses. We'll do something and we'll try to shift it over to our spouses. Somehow, it's their fault that we're getting angry about it and it was really our fault because it was something we could have controlled or something we could have helped at. Love puts the brakes on anger, slowing it down for the sake of the others.

Here is the other thing people do. When they get angry about stuff, they just kind of sweep it underneath the volcano. They just sweep it and sweep it and sweep it. A lot of these people are loyal people who hate conflict. Until one day, they've eventually had enough and they just explode or erupt. The anger comes out in sinful ways or in unhealthy ways or in ways that leave words that are wounds and scars, with different things that have to be navigated.

Now, here are some things that should provoke us to anger. According to scripture, I think these are things that should provoke us to anger.

Abortion - I know it's a hot topic, but abortion provokes God to anger. Now, let me be very gentle and considerate. Some of you in here might have gone through that process. We have ministries at Woodland Hills to walk through grief sharing those things. We don't judge you. We don't look at you differently. But we believe abortion angers God. We believe a righteous anger should be easily provoked when abortion is taking place. That is God's creation. That is God's hand on that child. Now, just because you are pro-life, that doesn't mean you take that anger out on people that are pro-abortion.

Idolatry – Idolatry should anger you. I did a mission's trip in Bangalore, India about eight years ago. When I was there... The system is Hindu. There are sun gods, moon gods. They pay heed to the cows

that cross the road. You have to wait for the cows to do their thing because they believe they are reincarnated relatives. Dave and Sadeer, the missionaries there, I asked them, "Does all this idolatry make you mad." He said, "No, I've been to the States. You guys have all the same idolatry. You guys have fast food restaurants on every corner. Your God is your stomach. It's like a spoiled child; you give it whatever it wants." They have their images out there, but we just have our Chick-fil-A signs and our McDonald's signs and our Steak-n-Shake signs. It's just a different type of idolatry. We worship food and we worship money and we worship success and we worship the white picket fence and we worship the American dream. Those things should anger you because they easily provoke God to anger.

The Lord's name being used in vain – I'm amazed at the things we'll decide to get angry about – gun rights vs non-gun rights – when I don't think Jesus is easily provoked to anger about whether or not you have a gun or don't have a gun. But I think he would be easily provoked to his name being taken in vain. And then we pay \$20.00 to go to a movie that's going to use it multiple times and have zero conviction about doing that. Or get in conversation with people that use GD and JC and it doesn't even phase us. These are things that anger God. These are things that should provoke us to anger. We should be provoked to anger any time our God is demeaned or belittled or monopolized off of movies that use his name in vain, or supporting movies that do that.

Injustice – Any time you see injustice, that should easily anger you.

Oppression – That's why I love that this church is involved with Haiti, and now Fiji, and Africa where there are a lot of oppressed people. Woodland Hills is trying to come alongside and love and serve and help the oppressed people. Why? Because God cares about these things.

Deception – This should easily anger you. Satan is the father of lies. Jesus is the truth, as I alluded to earlier in John 14: 6. Being deceived with people lying. People being manipulated. Deception should anger you. Proverbs 12: 22 says, ***The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men that are truthful.*** Deception should easily anger you.

Abuse – Emotional, physical, spiritual, sexual abuse should anger you. These are things anger the heart of God. These are things you should get mad about. These are things you should seek help for.

Addiction – Now, I don't think you should get after the person with the addiction; you should be mad at the enemy that is pushing them into addiction. There is still responsibility that needs to take place. My wife and I are dealing with addiction with a close family member right now and it's tough. I'm not mad at the person that is addicted; I'm mad at the addiction and what's it's doing.

With all of these things, we have to remember this: "Being hot tempered usually involves making snap judgements, seeking instant vindication, and refusing to grant second chances. However, true love refuses to jump to conclusions, take revenge, or hastily judge anyone."

It's that time of year where you guys are going to start pulling weeds, landscaping. Any green thumbs in here? Is anybody really excited to start doing some landscaping? The anger right here, as you guys know... I'm not a landscaper at all, but I went out in my backyard and pulled this weed. If the anger is

coming out here and I decide that I'm just going to take care of this by breaking off the top of the weed... The top of the weed is the anger that is coming out. This is what I've told you is coming outward. The top of the weed isn't the problem. The anger, the raising my voice at my spouse, the name calling to my spouse, the yelling at my kids, this isn't the problem. This is the pulse of something that's going on much deeper (in the roots). Guess what? That weed hasn't gone anywhere. That problem is still there. The outbursts of anger are still going to be there because the problem, if you know anything about landscaping, is you have to get to the root. Yeah, it's dirty. Yeah, it's gross. You have to get to the heart of the problem.

Some of you husbands are angry and critical because your dad was really angry and critical with you. Some of you wives snap and yell because your mom snapped and yelled. Some of you are angry any time something threatens your bank account. Some of you get angry any time something threatens your control. Some of you get angry any time something threatens something you worship or idolize. Jesus said first clean the inside of the cup, your heart, then the outside will be clean. He called out the pharisees who acted like everything on the outside was okay. Everything above the surface looked pretty and great and had flowers and roses. He said, "You whitewashed tomb, you look great on the outside, but inside is full of death and decay."

You don't get rid of the problem without getting to the root of the problem. The root drives the fruit, or the lack thereof. So, your anger and being easily provoked goes back to the depth of the root. Some of you don't want to go there. Any time I get angry or upset and I really stop for a second to figure out why I'm getting angry and I realize it's just not that big of a deal. Think about something you've been really angry about, for example the truth that I slapped my hand on the wood railing about. I'm laughing about it now. It just wasn't that big of a deal. It wasn't worth me losing my temper over. And the majority of the time, it's not worth it. It's driving to an inner problem and that's why our anger is there.

Let me close with this verse. Psalm 86: 15 - ***15 But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.*** Slow to anger, not wanting any to perish, wanting all to come to repentance.

If you're in a marriage and there's a lot of anger and angst and raising your voice and yelling and fighting, let's get to the root. Jesus can heal all this. Come to him with your junk. Come just as you are, and he'll get to the root and help you pull this thing up from the root, not letting the weeds keep coming back, staying in this cycle. That's the beauty of Jesus. He's the great heart surgeon. He's the great root puller.

Father God, I just know in a room this size that there was anger this morning that was easily provoked, and there was anger last night, there were raised voices, there was name calling, there were slammed doors, there were stomped feet. God, let us look at our own hearts. Let us look at the root of what we're worshipping other than you, of what we are valuing more importantly than you.

God, I pray you do a work in our hearts. I pray you forgive us for our anger that isn't justified. We love you and it's in the matchless and mighty name of Jesus we pray... Amen.