

Good morning. You have a senior minister with a really good heart. He's a really good leader. So my wife will be at the third service. I will sing more softly in that service.

She thinks I sing too loud. My kids think I sing too loud. And so when they're not here, I'm going to sing loud. But I like this thing. So I'm going to introduce myself by telling you, the people I think I'm better than, all right, the people I think I'm better than, these are people that offend me.

They make me angry because I'm better than them. All right, people. I think I'm better than drivers who drive too slow in the passing lane. Drivers who don't know how to navigate a roundabout. Drivers who still don't know how to navigate a roundabout.

I'm better than people who take forever in the self checkout line. I'm better than people that have 15 or more items in the express line. I'm better than people who design customer service phone systems that make you push buttons for ten minutes before speaking to a human being. I'm better than people who hate Donald Trump. I'm better than people who love Donald Trump.

I'm better than people who talk loudly on their cell phones in public places. I'm especially better of people who talk loudly in public places with the speaker on. I'm better than people who don't flush. I'm better than people who don't replace the toilet paper roll. True story.

In 30 plus years of marriage, just a few days ago, my wife did not replace the toilet roll. First time ever. I'm better than her. If she talks to you later, she'll deny it. She'll say it was me or a guest in the house.

It was her. There was nobody else in the house. I'm better than people who vote different than me. I'm better than people who worship different than me. I'm better than people who pray different than me.

I'm better than people who follow Jesus in a different way than I do. I'm better than people who don't like me. I'm better than people who've hurt me. I'm better than people who criticize me. There's times I even think I'm better than my parents, my four brothers.

Times where I think I'm better than my wife. And not just about toilet paper roll. I just think I'm better than she is. Here's the question. Is something wrong with me?

Who are you better than?

So the series is this default settings. And today we're talking about anger and whether it's righteous anger or self righteous anger, because really, self righteous anger comes from this heart of mine, and you probably know it, too, where we think we're just better than

other people. Nobody ever says it. You think it. And that seems to be the default setting of our hearts.

Ever since I heard Sean's sermon last week, ever since Genesis three, when Satan messed with the settings. And our default setting is more about self righteous anger than it is righteous anger.

So here's the question we're going to look at today is let's figure out. What do we do with this part of us? The default setting where we have self righteous anger. The anger. Self righteous anger is the anger we feel when we feel like we're better with somebody else, especially with religious overtones.

So let's define righteous anger from self righteous anger so we can kind of get that split apart there. Righteous anger. Best way to look at that is look at the Bible and see what God gets angry at. Right? That's righteous anger.

God gets angry at idolatry. He gets angry at sexual immorality. He's angry at the sacrifice of infants. He's angry at spiritual pride. He's often angry at his people, us.

Jesus was angry at spiritual arrogance. So that's righteous anger. If you've ever seen, which I'm sure some of you have had, seen Schindler's list or some kind of Holocaust movie or movies about American slavery, or you read a story about sexual abuse of kids, something stirs in you. I remember watching a movie of Schindler's list, and something was stirring in me with a particularly evil scene, and I just felt like I felt rage. I thought, what's wrong?

And I realized, and you probably had this, too, I'm feeling righteous anger. Righteous anger is the emotion you feel when you experience the world not as God meant it to be. So it's okay. There's times where righteous anger toward those horrible things is absolutely appropriate. It's the anger of God expressed through his people, through the Holy Spirit.

That's righteous anger. But we're going to talk today more about self righteous anger. How do you see it in yourself? What do you do with it? And how do you flip that default setting back to the original setting of when we were created in the Garden of Eden, where self righteousness anger wasn't part of our makeup?

What do you do? So to look at this, we're going to look at a parable that Jesus told in Luke, chapter 18. And you might know this parable. It's the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. And so Jesus was often using contrast to help us see the kind of heart he's looking for.

All right, so this is Luke, chapter 18. Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness. Paraphrase. People that think they're better than other people told this story to someone who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everybody else. Despised, scorned everybody else.

He's telling this to religious people when he's telling this parable. Two men went to the temple to pray. One was a pharisee. The other was a despised tax collector. All right, let's do a little description here.

Pharisee. We tend to think Pharisee. We think of guys with funny hats, long beards. And it's those people I'm going to find Pharisee this way. Which is actually Pharisee is someone who is deeply committed to living their life according to the Bible.

While at the same time thinking they are better than other people. And I'm saying that because that includes ouch me. I want to live my life by the Bible. I want to have spiritual disciplines in my life. But there's this part of me that still thinks the way I do it is better than other people.

So I'm saying that because. Let's not throw the Pharisees under the bus. Because maybe Jesus is talking to me when he says this parable. That's what he's trying to get. Tax collectors on their hand.

Were on the lowest rung of the social spiritual ladder. Not just social. They were despised. They worked for the Romans. And tax collectors would collect taxes from the Romans.

Tax collectors were known for being immoral, deceptive, fraudulent.

Their testimony was not even accepted at a court of law. Jews hated the tax collectors. Don't think it's. It's way different than that. They were despised people.

They were crooked, immoral people. So that's the two people that Jesus was talking about. Pretty significant contrast. So he says this. The Pharisees stood by himself and prayed this prayer.

God, I thank you. I'm not like other people. I don't cheat. I don't sin. I don't commit adultery.

I'm certainly not like that tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I give a 10th of my money. Spiritual disciplines. He knew the Bible. Pharisees in the Bible better than anybody in those days.

Wow, this guy must be a great spiritual giant. Jesus is pointing him. He's not the guy you want to be. Then Jesus said, but the tax collector. He stood at a distance and backed away from wherever the holy place of the temple was.

Stood at a distance, would not even lift his eyes up. So pharisees praying like this tax collector just got his head down. And let's just say his head was weighed. Probably with intense shame. And you know what that feels like, and I know what that feels like.

He knew what he had done in life. But yet he has something. He has his head down, but he simply cries out to God. He beats his chest. The Bible tells us in this passage, have mercy on me, a sinner.

So this. I have some friends that are catholic, and I have gone to catholic mass with them. At times, Jesus centered Catholics, prayer of confession, often part of the whole thing is when they do the prayer, confession, there's a part of they do this. And when I was first there, I thought, that seems a little bit demeaning, but I thought, oh, maybe that's the point. So the man beat his breast, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

And then Jesus, with that vast contrast, and he's speaking to religious people, he says, I tell you this, sinner, not the pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves would be humbled, and those who humble themselves would be exalted. Wait a minute. Jesus, that guy is justified. When you hear justified, think of the legal term.

He's free. He's free before God. He's alive, he's awake, and he's free before God. And this guy who does all these checkboxes of spiritual life isn't Jesus is like, yeah, this is self righteous guy. This is.

I'm better than other people guy, you don't want to be that guy. I don't want to be that guy.

So then the question becomes, so what do I do? Because both these men, and I'm saying this because it could be you, men, women, whatever, both of them desperately needed the mercy of God. Desperately. He knows it. He doesn't.

So I'm talking to all of us today who probably have been in this. Maybe we haven't been all the way over into this spot. We've been near that spot, and we're like, yeah, I know, I'm good. I'm saved. I don't know if I need, but we're all here some way.

How does God heal us of that? Because I don't want to be that guy. You don't want to be that guy. And that almost seems demeaning. And I don't know God, but we both desperately need the grace and the mercy of God in our lives.

And maybe that's the primary antidote to our self righteousness, not our knowledge of mercy, but our experience of it from God. So I had the opportunity to go to seminary many years ago, and three years of kind of academic work. And it's really easy in that world to become very much like a Pharisee, because we studied things like theology, christology, pneumatology, study of the Holy Spirit, eschatology, study of the end times, ecclesiology, study of the church of archaeology, study of sin. Soteriology, study of salvation. There's also philometology.

We didn't study that in class. That's the study of kissing. I was dating my wife, then I got a. In that class. All right, but all the ologies, we were all good at the ologies.

Study of God. We had it all in our heads. I don't know that we had it all in our hearts. I know I didn't always have it in my heart.

So here's the one thing. One thing I learned in seminary. One thing. You're like, wait a minute. You spent three years there and all that?

Yeah, three years. One thing. One big, big, big thing. And here's what I learned. The mercy of God is enormous.

Say that with me. The mercy of God is enormous. One more time. The mercy of God is enormous. I was going to use the word ginormous.

I didn't think it was a word. I looked it up. It is Merriam Webster says so. 1948. It appeared in the dictionary of british military slang.

So ginormous is now a word. I'll tell you that right now. But mercy of God's enormous, ginormous, whatever. That's what I learned in seminary. The one thing I learned, but I learned it through two different situations that had nothing to do with what was happening in the classroom.

None of the ologies were part of that. Yeah, those are important. I'm not diminishing that. It's important to know those things. But it's so easy to know a lot about God but not know him and experience him.

So there are two different stories I'll tell from my seminary years that I learned about the enormous mercy of God and how that mercy crushes self righteousness. It also crushes shame. But the mercy of God is enormous. Right. Story number one is this.

My first year of seminary and second year I had a significant. Sorry. I had a significant addiction to pornography. And you're thinking in seminary? Yes.

In seminary you're going to be a pastor? Yes, I was going to be a pastor. Pornography? Yes. So you can imagine the shame upon shame that I felt.

And some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. It wasn't just shame, but then it was like, I'm supposed to be a pastor. I had no doubt that Satan was just having a really, really good time laughing at me because I was like. And I thought, God surely has forgotten me. And I actually thought maybe I should just quit seminary because I can't.

I'm getting defeated over and over again. So one particular morning, it was a Saturday morning, and that had been a particularly brutal week for me in terms of this addiction. I remember going to my college mail or the seminary mailbox. It was mailbox D 859. I don't know how I remember that, but I do.

And Saturday morning, I was like. I was feeling about this low. And most of the lowness was because I was just overwhelmed with shame. I was desperate, but I felt ashamed. I felt God doesn't even know me anymore.

I don't blame him if he left the room. And I opened up my box, and in my box was this note, and it's anonymous. Nobody knew. Nobody knew of my addiction. God did.

Nobody else knew except God. I read this note, and it was somebody who had known me from some other classroom settings. They wrote it anonymously, and they just simply said, I'm really encouraged by your zeal for God and how you love God and your devotion to God. But then they said, but I am quite sure that because of that, the enemy is after you. And they said, I just want you to remember one thing.

And this is what they wrote. They said, I think God wants me to tell you this. Be confident of this. He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 116.

I walked to the corner of that mail room, and I cried. I was like, God, how did you know? Like, of course he knows. How did you tell them? I don't know this person.

I still don't know. I never will know. Probably. Maybe in heaven I'll know. But God rescued me.

That was the beginning of my healing, because I thought, he hasn't left me. Because one thing I've, one of the biggest lessons of mercy of God is Jesus is never finished with me. He's not finished with any of you.

Your story's not over. Your story with Jesus is not over. He's not finished with you. I don't know what you're struggling with. Maybe you're not right now.

Maybe you will. Maybe you know somebody who is. Your story isn't over. He doesn't leave you on your own. He finishes what he starts.

He who began a good work will carry it on the completion of Christ Jesus.

Second story.

I cheated on an assignment in seminary. Now you're thinking, why in the world did Sean invite this guy to speak? Pornography? Cheating. Wow.

And I'll just say this. If I'm welcome on this pulpit, everybody's welcome. It's his church. Because that's what God wants to do. He rescues people.

So it was a Hebrew assignment. Hebrew is a brutal language. It reads right to left instead of left to right. It's dots and dashes, and it's like. It's horrible.

I mean, it's God. Sorry, God, it's not horrible. Old Testament's written in Hebrew. But it was a brutal assignment for me. It was a time, my academic career, where I was exhausted.

I'd been in school, like, 18 months straight. I took summer school. Stupid idea. So we had this assignment that was on chronicles, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah, but all the answers had to be in Hebrew, and it was probably 8 hours worth. And I thought, God, I don't have that time.

I don't have the energy. Surely, God, you would understand if we cut some corners and there was a group of us that figured out how to cut corners and what should have taken 8 hours, probably took 2 hours, and I got 98%.

So I'm good, right? I'm good. God understands. I needed the extra time and energy.

So I'm this guy. I'm this pharisee guy. I'm getting a's in my classes. I'm doing all my spiritual disciplines. One morning, I was doing my spiritual discipline of praying.

I was on my knees praying, and like, God, I want to bless this. Pray for this person. And I felt like a huge block in my spirit. And what I heard absolutely clearly in my ears was, if I cherish sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. This is from psalms.

Book of psalms. One of the dangerous things about memorizing scripture, by the way, the Holy Spirit will always bring it up at the right time. If I cherish sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. And I actually thought, this is Satan. He's just trying to keep me from praying.

And then I clearly heard God say, no, this is me, and you know exactly what I'm talking about. If you cherish sin in your heart, I will not hear you. It's like, God, you understand? God, you know, this was a hard assignment. I'm exhausted, and I didn't have time, and surely you understand this is okay, and blah, blah, blah.

We've all done that with God, right? We've justified what we've done like, well, you have to understand, it's been a hard life. So that morning I decided, okay, I've got to go talk to Doctor McGarry. Doctor McGarry was a professor of the course. His nickname was Mad Dog.

He spit in class. He talked like that, and he was very almost felt a little standoffish. So I was like, I need to go tell him about this. And I was not only scared to death, I was so. I was steeped in anxiety and shame because I thought, if he fails me on this paper, which he probably will, I'll have to retake the class.

It was a big assignment. If I retake the class, then I knew the dollar amount that would cost me and the time. And I thought, God, you surely don't want me to tell him this. God's like, no, if you cherish it in your heart, I'm not going to hear you. I do want you to talk to him.

So the first hour class that morning came over. What the class was. I wasn't paying attention because I was just doing the math about money and time. And then I was just praying, God, I just, could you have Doctor McGarry be in his office after this class? Because I couldn't go the rest of the day without talking to him.

I just thought, so I knock on his door, he's there. Hadn't talked to him ever before in my life. I was scared to death of the guy. Mad Dog, right? And I said to him, I said, I think I cheated on this assignment.

He asked me to explain. I told him what we had done as a group. I didn't name the other guys. That's between them and God. I told him we had done as a group how we save time.

Aren't we so efficient, Doctor McGarry? I said, but I think that was, I had a hard time getting the word out. I think it was cheating. He said, yeah, it was. So then my demeanor turned to a guy in a courtroom, almost like I throw myself in the mercy of the court.

What do you want me to do, Doctor McGarry? I thought two options. He's going to give me a zero or he's going to say, redo the assignment. I'll give you another one to make up for it. That'll be even harder.

Both of those killed me. I was like, what do you want me to do? I had my head down. He's like, you know what? The fact that one man's ministry is saved will be saved by his sensitivity to the voice of the Holy Spirit because I told him the Holy Spirit was after me that morning.

So the fact that your minister will be saved by your sense of the Holy Spirit, then whatever you got on that homework assignment is what you get. I got 98%.

I was stunned. I mean, stunned. And I walked out of his office and I had to go cross campus and I had to run because I was late. I really don't remember my feet ever hitting the ground. I was like this stunned moment of elation.

Because here's one thing I want to say about the mercy of God. My sin is a big deal to God. It was a big deal to God that I was cheating. His mercy is bigger? Your sin is a big deal to God?

My sin is a big deal to God. His mercy is way bigger. Way bigger. His mercy is what? What's the word?

Enormous. God's mercy is what? Again, now, this time say enormous to me. God's mercy is enormous. No, God's mercy is enormous to me.

All right? It's not just this theological concept out there, it's to you. So I left running with my feet not touching the ground. And the song that came to mind right to my head, it was playing loudly in my head. I wasn't singing it loudly, it was just playing loudly.

Okay? And it was the old hymn. There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins. And sinners plunge beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stain. All, all.

And I just thought, God, this is what? This is your mercy. And mercy crushes self righteousness. Mercy crushes shame. His mercy is enormous.

I went back 20 years later and told Doctor McGarry, sorry, I don't remember anything you talked about in class. I remember the lesson.

I remember the lesson of God's mercy you taught in your office.

I wouldn't be here today, I wouldn't be a pastor if it wasn't for Doctor McGarry showing me mercy. I wouldn't be here today if this anonymous person wouldn't have shown me mercy because God directed them to see, we don't need more knowledge about mercy. We all need to experience mercy. So here's the question I'll ask you. One is, where do you need God's mercy?

Maybe there's an issue in your life, you just got to deal with it. Trust that God is merciful. He's not going to beat you over the head and make you earn your way back to the right place. The second question is, for many of us is who needs your mercy? Who's the person that irritates you, that you think you're better than that?

You just maybe need to show them mercy. I'm not saying be soft or be like it doesn't matter. Whatever hurt you have matters. You show them mercy that opens something up in your heart where the spirit of Jesus starts to fill you and you actually love that person. I heard a talk recently, and I'll finish.

A woman who was sexually abused as a child. And one of the things she said in her talk was, I want my abuser to be in heaven with me. I was just like, wow, that's mercy. But she believed that. So I'm just asking, who needs your mercy?

Maybe it's the person who goes way too slow on the roundabout. Maybe you don't yell at him at your car. Or maybe it's the person who's hurt you. Or the person who needs your forgiveness. Who needs your mercy?

Because we're the fountains of the mercy. The fountain is filled with blood from Emmanuel's veins. Then we then are the fountains of his holy spirit to other people. Who

needs your mercy? So we're going to finish on the screen, there should be a bible passage from Ephesians, chapter two.

And it just talks about the mercy of God as it's expressed to us in the life of Jesus. So I'm going to ask you all to read this with me out loud and loudly. All right, here we go. But God is so rich in mercy. That phrase again.

But God is so rich in mercy. One more time. But God is so rich in mercy. And he loved us so much that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. Let's pray together.

God, you are rich in mercy.

Mercy is enormous, ginormous. And it's meant for us, each person in here. So, God, whether we need to be desperate for your mercy in our life, or we need to be the ones who are pouring out our mercy toward others, who need to see Jesus through our mercy. Whatever you're calling us to do, that's what we want to do. We love you, Jesus.

Why would anyone follow anyone except you? Amen.