**ANGER (done)**

**Clark:**  Previously on Living and Effective

**Langberg:**  There are all kinds of places in the scripture where, of course, people are saying, "Where in the world are you?" Those are angry questions.

**Clark:**  This is Diane Langberg, practicing psychologist and the author of Suffering and the Heart of God.

**Langberg:**  They're pleading questions, they're frightened questions, yes, but they're also angry. We feel betrayed by God. How is it possible that the one that I trust can be responsible for my loss? He obviously is the one who could have stopped it, and he didn't.

**Clark:**  I'm Richard Clark.

**Smith:**  And I'm Joy Beth Smith.

**Clark:**  The Christian Standard Bible and Christianity Today present Living and Effective season two, a podcast about what happens when the Bible and humanity collide.

Okay, so here's the thing about this episode on anger. It's hard to get good take of anger. No one I interviewed got angry, or even really admitted to ever being angry, even though it's sort of a blatant way. I was thinking about this a lot, and I was like, "Of course they wouldn't be angry in front of me. I'm an interviewer." I've never met these people. I think that anger, in particular, is like too visceral and personal an emotion to share with someone who's a stranger.

Anger is essentially something you share with someone you trust, whether you do that intentionally or not. Fundamentally, the people we're angriest at, are the people we're most intimate with, the people we love and trust. None of these people loved and trusted me. Costi shared a lot with us. Todd Billings allowed us into his home, into his community, introduced us to his friends and his coworkers. But to also say, "Also, can we have a really deep relationship?" I think would be asking a little much.

 They are restraining themselves in the natural way you would with someone who's just like a weirdo asking you questions. That is the reality of anger. But, you can feel the remnants of anger. You can feel that it has happened in the past, and you can feel it around just sort of the facts of what has happened. Last episode we talked about Costi Hinn, and sort of out of nowhere in that interview, he shared that his son had cancer. It was really interesting the way he told us that. I'm just going to play it back one more time, because I think it's important to hear his voice in that moment.

**Costi Hinn:**  Our son, Timothy, will turn one in just a few days. He's been diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. Do I really want ... You think that's what I want? I'm going, "Yeah, God. Give my one year old guy a nice journey with cancer so I can be more spiritual." Nobody wants these things.

**Clark:**  Do you hear that edge in his voice when he actually starts to talk about the possibility of wanting it? Like that idea?

**Smith:**  It's almost sneering.

**Clark:**  Yeah, yeah. I understand that, that's like a natural, human thing. Not just sneering at the possibility of wanting that, but he's sneering at the reality, right? Because the thing that we don't want, that happens to us, it frustrates us. It's anger inducing. You have to think that feeling was something he felt more acutely in the moment that it was happening. I mean, I think any natural person would be furious at the idea of their one year old son being hurt, or in pain, or ill.

**Smith:**  It's interesting that he could immediately kind of ... the retelling of that kind of tapped back into that. It's almost like he synced back into that.

**Clark:**  Yeah, like, he's not trying to share anger with me. But he almost can't help himself. But the other thing is, you have to believe ... or at least I would be mad at God, as well, at least for a portion of this. That's an intimate thing. No one likes to talk about that, or share that with the world, but there's an element of that, and we see it in the Psalms 2.

 I've always been curious about that. Like, is that okay to be so viscerally angry at God? So I asked Todd Billings what he thought about those passages.

There are definitely psalms that feel angry, some of them feel depressed, some of them feel spiteful, bitter almost. For example, Psalm 88 ends with, "Darkness is my only companion." What do you do with those that don't seem hopeful? How do you explain the hope portion there?

**Todd Billings:**  It's still stated to the Lord. You don't state this to the Lord unless you trust the Lord. You don't state something that is so intimate, and even desperate to anyone, unless you trust them. Maybe hope is too strong of a word for Psalm 88, but I don't think trust is. It's hopeful, to me, as someone who prays the psalms, that Psalm 88 is included in the Psalter, because there are times where that's the end of my prayer. I can't make much more sense of things than that. But it's still in the presence of the Lord that I can say, "I feel alone." Bonhoeffer pointed out you're always praying the psalms with and in Christ. So, when you pray, "Darkness is my only companion," you are trusting in the God of the Covenant, even in your desolation.

 Yet, you are also praying in the one who has walked this path before you, in the one who has walked the path of darkness. Jesus Christ. He has experienced desolation. He was the pioneer, not us. I mean, the fact that they're poetry ... At least psalms in that sense, fits with the idea that all of them are praise. Even Psalms of Lament are praise, they're not primarily venting, or therapeutic in their primary purpose.

 This is our think offering. Even our anger, even our laments, and certainly our thanks giving in praise. But all of them are praise.

**Clark:**  It's interesting to hear Billings talk about this, because he has a lot to be mad about. Cancer is bad enough, so you go out of the abstract thinking about Todd Billing's a cancer survivor, and you go into the specifics of what that means. What an early death might mean for his family, for his aspirations, for the things he planned to do. That's when you start getting really frustrated on his behalf.

 How did you expect your life to go?

**Todd Billings:**  I would find an institution, whether in East Africa, or in the US, would put down roots, and start a long career. I knew I wanted to do writing, so when I wrote my first few books, I wrote them as the first few books of a young professor who plans to be writing for a really long time.

 But the immediate thought was, it was just about my kids especially. So, grief for my kids. Some anger. I remember saying to Tim Brown, who you met, "I've lived long enough, but why does God want to take away my kids dad?" I think 15 minutes longer and then I could use a little break.

**Clark:**  Sure. You're sure you can go 15 more minutes?

**Todd Billings:**  Yeah. Because right after that, I will go back for a nap, take it from there.

**Clark:**  This is not like the life that Todd Billings expected. Don't you relate to that a little bit?

**Smith:**  I think that upset expectations is kind of a foundational part of the life that I have. It sort of defines it in so many ways. It cycles me through grief constantly.

**Clark:**  What do you mean by it cycles you through grief?

**Smith:**  My life looks nothing like what I expected it to. I thought I would be the 22 year old who got married, and who ended up with babies, and a house in the suburbs, and all of the things that you were taught to expect and want. So, I am 30 years old, and I'm single, and living with a roommate off of Craigslist.

**Clark:**  A Craigslist roommate.

**Smith:**  A Craigslist roommate, and a Craigslist couch, and all of the things that you're not supposed to have.

**Clark:**  So we have these examples of anger from the psalms, and we have Todd struggling with the implications of these realities. But then we have Costi Hinn, who came out of the world of hte prosperity gospel and is dealing with a totally different kind of grief, in a totally different way.

**Hinn:**  I'll never forget the night my wife walked in with the report. There were two things that came out of my mouth, it's the only thing I knew how to say. When your wife comes in with a paper, and she's crying, and she says, "Timothy has cancer." I said to her, first, we weren't going to get out of this life unscathed, and I began to cry. She was crying of course, already, and I was holding her. She's like, "I know, I know."

 Then the second thing I said is, "Now we're going to live what I've been preaching." She said, "I know," and then we started crying even more.

**Smith:**  I will say that during this part of the interview I was openly weeping.

**Clark:**  Why were you weeping?

**Smith:**  There's such a genuineness to him. There's something really lovely about that sentiment to me. I appreciate that so much, especially someone like Costi, who came from a world who believed almost the opposite, which was that you could do a lot of things to rid yourself from that, to mitigate the risk of brokenness.

 But, there is almost a hallmark like quality to what he's saying.

**Clark:**  There is actually a moment of anger in that story. Did you catch it?

**Smith:**  No.

**Clark:**  He talks about, how dare we.

**Hinn:**  How arrogant, and how prideful, and how pretentious would we be, if we dare think that everybody else in the world can be sick, and all these millions of families can have children with cancer, but cancer will never happen to our child.

**Clark:**  Again, he's upset at people who think, "We're going to escape from this." I think it's in the moment that that happens to him. I think it's also because of the background you referenced. How dare anyone think they could escape from this out of pure will and faith? So everyone of these sages happens in totally different ways for different people.

 For Billings there's like a slow acceptance that I'm aware of. Probably he got mad in the past ... He talks about the psalms as like a valid way of ... So, he sees it as a valid thing. But the thing that's striking to me is anger does exist. For every one of these people it exists. In the meantime, I'm angry because he's messing up my clean (crosstalk) .

 I'm trying to keep this thing on track, and these people are saying different things.

**Smith:**  We want easy answers people.

**Clark:**  Exactly. It's getting a lot more complex. But thankfully, Todd Billings points out that the psalms actually allow for that kind of completxity.

**Todd Billings:**  We need to say to one another, that we don't know. That we trust that God is good, and that our lives are in the hands of God. I think this is different from a process theist, or even some open theists who would say that God doesn't have a reason for ... that there are some things that happen to us that are completely senseless. That God wouldn't have a reason, or that it's outside of God's power. If you believe those, I don't think you can really pray the Psalms of Lament, which hold God responsible.

 Even as they question God. I mean, it's like in a good marriage, or a good friendship, where if you have an issue with somebody, if you are close to them, you're willing to say, "Hey, you said this vow. What's going on?" You're not going to hide away. A Psalm of Lament confronts God with his own promises, in light of the mess that we're in.

**Smith:**  Did you know at one time I had this brain scan?

**Clark:**  That's a great start to a story. One time I had this brain scan.

**Smith:**  It was for neuro feedback, and the lady basically said all of your emotions fire, all of the emotional parts of your brain fire a little overactive, which is no surprise to anyone who knows me, except the anger sector, which is a little under active. Which she basically implied, in a very nice therapist way, was something from your childhood told you to repress the anger part of your brain.

 So you slowed the neurons in that part of your brain, and told it that it should not fire as often, or as regularly, as it should probably need to. Which I still have trouble with. Even apart from rightous table flipping anger, I know that there's still good kinds of anger. I still don't know what that looks like. To feel angry makes me uncomfortable, I do not like it.

 So, I have to kind of talk to myself, and tell myself that it's okay to be angry, and that it's not a stage to rush through, and I haven't done anything wrong, and that someone else hasn't done anything wrong necessarily. If they have, even that's okay. Anger is a part of life.

**Clark:**  So, what in your childhood told you to repress that anger?

**Smith:**  I had angry role models. Seeing that played out is formative. Anger can be very scary, and it can be very big. Anger has a lot of power. Very rarely is anger used for anything but intimidation, or suppressing other people.

**Clark:**  Well, it's used for expression sometimes.

**Smith:**  Expression, yes.

**Clark:**  But you weren't seeing that.

**Smith:**  That's right. I never saw it in a constructive way. I only ever saw anger in this big blowout way.

**Clark:**  Yeah. Anger is like something else. It's like almost a super power that can be used for good, or evil, to overstate it a little bit.

**Langberg:**  Death makes us feel very little. It makes us feel vulnerable, it makes us feel insecure, it makes us feel out of control, and that makes us angry.

**Clark:**  Here’s Diane Langberg again.

**Langberg:**  We don't like those feelings, and anger helps us feel bigger. People have things like chest pains, or they feel like they can't breathe, or their hearts racing, or their stomach's weird, or their palms are sweaty, or whatever. Their sleeping is disturbed, their eating is disturbed. So, the body is involved in that, too.

 You've got all this adrenaline and everything running around in there, and that helps build anger. Grieving is physical. If you've ever been to another country where they're not so proper as we are in terms of the way we think it needs to be done in a neat little way. People who really grieve, it's a full body thing. Even those of us who sit prim and proper in pews, don't do that, also have to deal with the full body thing.

 So I think that we need to make room for that, and not ... Tell them that they wouldn't be acting, or thinking, or feeling the way they are if they had faith. Which, that's about as crushing a thing as you can do to somebody who's grieving, now they have more to grieve.

**Smith:**  I remember the first time I was 25, and I watched this Mister Rogers episode. He talks about, "If you're angry, you can play the piano, or you can hit a pillow, or you can go outside and run." I was like, Mister Rogers, this incredible man, who has this huge, amazing influence ... the message wasn't, "Don't be angry," the message wasn't, "You shouldn't be angry." It was, when you're angry, do these things, here are these constructive outlets for anger.

 As a 25 year old woman, it was a message to me that I needed to hear. Anger is inevitable, it is a part of life, and there are good outlets for anger, and there are bad outlets for anger. People who, when they are grieving, manage their anger really well. There are people who, when they are grieving, kind of spew it on everybody. Sometimes you just can't help that because grief is grief is grief. Sometimes you can't help it.

**Clark:**  I think this also gets to why it's so important to work to express our anger, honestly, to God. God can take it, like, God more than anyone. It's like a hierarchy, a standard office hierarchy. I'm going to complain to my boss, I'm going to rage against my boss, but it's not ideal if I'm ranting to the person I'm supervising. It's ideal if I'm going up instead of down.

 Maybe a more specific and helpful way of expressing your anger is to just say, "God, I'm furious," and knowing that he can take it.

**Smith:**  Because there's so much in life that I want to hold God responsible for. That's a scary concept to me. Maybe it's that I do it because I did grow up with parents who, if I were to be mad, responded with mad. So, the idea of holding God responsible is like, so if I go to God with anger, am I going to be met with that tidal wave in response? I mean, obviously, the answer is no.

**Clark:**  I hate conflict. I hate the moment before I have a hard conversation with someone. Anxiety churns in the pit of my stomach. The small talk, right before I launch into why we're really there, is so painful, so tense. It's like a bubble that grows, and grows, and grows until it bursts, and we can finally get to the topic, the big point of confrontation. Because I know that as long as there's something between me and someone else, our relationship can't move forward.

 I feel this way in prayer sometimes. I dread what's coming. I tense up over the small talk. I mourn the stagnation. Sometimes I'm too scared to do what I need to. But other times I manage to take that leap of faith, and I tell God everything. That I am furious. I am frustrated. I am disappointed. Here's why, this isn't what I thought you'd do for me. Happiness and needs are meant to be met. Where is God in this emptiness?

 Like any genuine friend, God listens. He doesn't reject me. He takes my concerns as valid. But it can be easy to avoid this confrontation altogether. That's the appeal of Peter Popoff. When you're uncomfortable yelling at God, he's happy to be a mediator who siphons your anger and frustration. In exchange, he offers you empty promises. And if remember, Popoff was caught offering empty promises red-handed thanks to an intercepted recording: the names, addresses, and ailments of his audience were revealed to Popoff through an earpiece, not the Holy Spirit. So when someone is so clearly exposed as lying about reality, their followers will finally reject the pretense of a guaranteed escape from their grief. Right?

**Oppenheimer:**  I saw him on TV one night.

**Clark:**  Here’s Mark Oppenheimer.

**Oppenheimer:**  I think I was in a hotel room, and I was flipping through channels, and I came across Black Entertainment Television, BET, and there was Peter Popoff. I just had a sense that I'd seen this guy before, that he was one of these 1980s televangelists

 I also thought that he had been disgraced, and I was right. I went and dug up some old research. Peter Popoff was one of the great debunked figures of the 80s. So, I was shocked that he still had a career.

**Clark:**  On the next chapter of Living and Effective Season 2