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I'm a list maker. When I want to keep track of things I need to get done during the day, I make a list. Tasks to get done. People to call. Things to buy at the grocery store. It works fine unless I forget to look at my list.

How many of you are list keepers too? The letter to the Ephesians suggested something that should go on our list every day: "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger." Sometimes we think we're not even supposed to get angry, but anger has its place in our lives, especially when we see something terribly wrong.

This week I encountered several situations that made me angry:

During a meeting I heard of a local company that hired some workers from Texas. The company moved them here, got them a motel room, and promised to pay them a certain amount each day. Two workers from this company came to a local agency seeking assistance to get transportation back home, for after a few weeks of working, they still had not received any payment. The person who hired them may have been making them work

without pay for the expenses incurred in getting them here, but that was never explained up front. This scheme is called human trafficking, where unscrupulous employers trap workers in a system that's hard to escape. Upon hearing this story, I was angry.

In another situation, I encountered a family arguing over financial matters, accusing one another of wrongdoing. Both sides hurled insults at each other as I tried to help them find a peaceful solution. I found myself angry at their inability to compromise and listen to one another.

Some of us may be feeling angry about the COVID situation. Anger at recommendations to wear masks again. Anger at those who won't get a vaccination, which puts everyone at risk as the new Delta variation spreads even more rapidly.

Anger is a normal response at an unjust situation, and when the author wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus, I wonder what anger they were experiencing that prompted him to write to them about this strong emotion. Whatever the reason for the anger of those Christians 2000 years ago, the

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writer suggested that they not use it to harm someone, and he suggested they put it aside before going to bed. Carrying the anger around all night does no one any good. If you toss and turn with anger all night, you're awake, but the situation with which you're angry will not be affected by your loss of sleep.

In the early centuries of the church, anger was identified as one of the seven worst sins, in addition to pride, greed, envy, lust, over consumption, and laziness. Contemporary theologian Frederick Buechner wrote:

Of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back — in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.¹

Anger eats away more at the person holding onto the anger than the object of one's anger.

Letting go of anger is a spiritual practice, just as important as prayer, reading the Bible, or meditation. Letting go of anger takes practice, but doing so each day before the sun goes down will help all those involved.

The writer of Ephesians also suggested several other practices on the list of things to do before the sun goes down: speaking the truth to one another, avoiding stealing, and using kind words instead of slander. Sometimes our words can get us in trouble, and even when using kind words, we could still be misunderstood, which can lead to huge consequences, as was the case when

Longtime Presbyterian mission worker Lois Kroehler — who spent most of her life aiding the Cuban church — once told of a visit she and American civil-rights activist Jesse Jackson paid to Cuban President Fidel Castro. Through a government translator, Jackson prayed that a healing Balm of Gilead might be provided for Cuba.

The translator thought he'd heard that God might deliver a bomb to the island nation. Castro, Kroehler reported, nearly swallowed his cigar.²

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Big difference between a balm (B-A-L-M) which is an ointment of healing, and a bomb of destruction. I think we could add to the list in Ephesians the practices of listening careful to one another and using patience to gain understanding.

Sometimes we may even discover that our anger is misplaced, as was the case with

a woman who was shopping and took a break for some coffee and cookies. She sat in the one unoccupied chair across from a man reading a newspaper. She sipped her coffee and reached for a cookie, only to see the man across from her also taking a cookie. She glared at him; he just smiled at her, and she resumed her reading.

Moments later she reached for another cookie, just as the man also took one. Now feeling quite angry, she stared at the one remaining cookie—whereupon the man reached over, broke the cookie in half and offered her a piece. She grabbed it and stuffed it into her mouth, as the man smiled at her again, rose,

and left. The woman was really steaming as she angrily opened her purse, her coffee break now ruined, and put her magazine away. And there she saw her bag of cookies.

All along she'd unknowingly been helping herself to the cookies belonging to the gracious man whose table she'd shared!³

Knowing that we all make mistakes, and at times our anger may be misplaced, the letter to the Ephesians offers another suggestion on the list of things to do before the sun sets: offer forgiveness. Whether you find yourself angry or discover anger directed at you, I think this ancient letter offers us a helpful list of things to do before the sun goes down. So, this week, as you're making your shopping list, add a few items to get before the sun sets: set aside anger and offer forgiveness. They just might help you sleep better throughout the night.

¹ *Wishful Thinking*, Harper & Row, 1973, 2.

² Tammy Warren, "Secretary turned lifelong missionary dies at 91," PresbyterianMission.org, August 12, 2019.

³ Hodgin, Michael; *1001 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #862.