

How to live in an age of rage

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Sermon Audio file

How to Handle Living in an Age of Rage

Series: The Hall of Mirrors | Scripture: 1 Samuel 20:30-34; Galatians 6:8; Matthew 12:34; Ephesians 4:31

(AI generated from spoken recording transcript)

Introduction: The Age of Rage

We live in a mad age of unrestrained emotion. Political leaders speak incoherently out of anger. Politicians stoke rage and riots follow. Social media algorithms are engineered to provoke fury. The media profits from keeping us angry. This is the world we inhabit.

The chapter we have reached in Steph's book is titled 'Unrestrained Emotions' — and it asks how we navigate the traps the enemy sets for us through our relationships and emotional responses.

A Masterclass in What Not to Do: King Saul

1 Samuel 20:30-34 gives us a vivid picture of what happens when emotions go unchecked. Saul had nursed jealousy — the girls sang that Saul killed his hundreds but David his tens of thousands — and he caressed that jealousy until it festered into rage.

The result? He vented at his own son Jonathan, cursed his wife, demanded David's death, and hurled a spear at his own child. Venting, cursing, violence. Saul is the masterclass in how not to handle emotions. His unrestrained feelings ultimately led to his undoing — and, in the end, to his suicide.

Many relationships break down because we simply believe whatever we are thinking and feeling in the moment — without pausing to ask whether our hearts might be getting it wrong.

Three Patterns of Handling Emotions (and Why None of the Defaults Work)

1. The Stiff Upper Lip — Bottling It In

The traditional British approach was to suppress emotion entirely — to be reserved and unexpressive. The Falklands War story says it all: 'I've lost my leg.' 'No, you haven't — it's over here.' While this avoided emotional explosions, repression is not the same as health. Pushed-down feelings do not disappear; they fester underground.

2. Numbness — When Trauma Shuts Feelings Down

In deeply difficult or traumatic seasons, emotions can become inaccessible altogether — a protective numbness sets in and we cannot name what we are feeling. Sometimes we need a friend, a counsellor, or

even a simple 'feelings chart' to help us identify and put language to our inner state.

3. Venting — The Age of Rage Default

The modern reaction to emotional suppression is the opposite extreme: just let it all out. 'It's good for my mental health to vent.' But spewing emotions at others is not healthy - not for us, and certainly not for the people on the receiving end. We live in an age that profits from our anger, but that does not make unbridled venting good.

What Emotions Actually Are: An Engine Warning Light

Feelings come - that is simply a fact of being human. But they do not come first, and they should not rule. Emotions are a God-given means of discerning what is going on around us. They reveal our goals and motivations. They are like an engine warning light: the answer is not to ignore the light, nor to panic - it is to open the bonnet and check what is actually going on.

The trouble is that our hearts, as Jeremiah reminds us, can be deceitful. We process things wrongly. We feel things inaccurately. That is why feelings cannot be allowed to rule - we must think and work things through. As Galatians 6:8 puts it: whoever sows to the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life.

If we allow feelings to come first, we will give up just before the breakthrough. Many people quit five minutes before the blessing arrives.

A Better Way: King David and the Psalms of Lament

David was far from perfect, but he learned to process his emotions well. Read the Psalms — about half of them are laments. He told God exactly how bad things were, processing honestly what he was going through. And then, at the end of those psalms, he would arrive at praise. He processed his way through to a revelation of God's goodness.

When everyone wanted to kill him, 'David encouraged himself in the Lord' (1 Samuel 30:6). A lament, perhaps — and then: but God, you are good. David used good friends too; Jonathan was one of his closest.

The pattern: express the pain honestly to God ? process it through ? arrive at praise and breakthrough.

Practical Steps for Processing Emotions Well

1. Name what you are feeling

It can be genuinely hard to identify our emotions — especially in difficult seasons. Seek out a trusted friend or counsellor who can help you put words to what is going on inside. Do not go through it alone; isolation makes processing harder and distortion more likely.

2. Bring it to God — go for a walk, lament, pray

Prayer walks, time outdoors, the Psalms — these are practical ways of processing with the Lord. Even when it does not feel like it is working ('I feel just as bad as when I left'), God is still working: 'Even when I don't feel it, you're working.' He may speak through the next day's Bible reading. Stay in the habit of daily Scripture.

3. Wait before you respond

Before hitting reply, posting, or firing back — pause. Someone texts you to moan? Ring them. Someone sends a voice note? Go and see them in person. Go up a level relationally instead of down. Write the reply, then delete it. Sleep on it. The response you give the next day will almost always be better.

Matthew 12:34 is a good filter: 'The mouth speaks what the heart is full of.' If that verse sat at the top of every social media feed, most posts would never be written.

4. Remember who is standing in front of you

When someone vents at you, it is painful — words have power because people are made in the image of God. But that also means the person doing the venting is an image-bearer too: a precious, loved person, whether or not they love the Lord. Watch your heart in response.

The Counter-Cultural Response: Ephesians 4:31-32

'Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.'

When there is rage and bitterness around us, Paul's instruction is radical: be kind. Be compassionate. Show the opposite of what has just been done to you. And the engine of that kindness is forgiveness — because God has forgiven us so much, we are able to forgive others.

We have well-rehearsed excuses for holding on to anger. Paul does not let us stop at 'be kind' — he adds 'just as in Christ God forgave you.' That redefines everything.

Conclusion

God is not calling us to the old British default of bottling everything up, nor to the modern default of letting it all out. He is calling us to a third way: process well, lament honestly, think before you respond, and treat others with the kindness that flows from knowing how much we ourselves have been forgiven.

Do not give up just before the breakthrough. Lament your way through to the place where God breaks in.

Closing Prayer

Father God, thank you that we can live well in this age of rage. When algorithms around us are designed to increase anger, you have given us something radically different — the power of forgiveness, bought at the cross. Help us to be kind and compassionate, to lament well, and to reach the place of your breakthrough. In Jesus' name, Amen.