Why Do We Hate Each Other So Much?
(5 Reasons Anger Is the New Epidemic)
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So much is changing so quickly in our culture. One of the things that is changing quickly is how deeply we seem to hate each other. Election years and global pandemics only seem to make that trend worse. I wish I could say Christians were exempt from this trend. We're not. In fact, there are a good number of Christians who are fuelling it.

A few years back, my social feeds felt a lot more fun than they are now. Some days the feed is so bad I just give up…it seems like an endless drone of suspicion that fuels anger that spawns outrage that powers division. It's almost as though if you're not outraged, you can't have an opinion.

I've stopped following some people I used to follow because, well, it's just wearying. Sometimes it feels like the outrage just waits to jump on whatever issue seems easiest to follow. It's a parasite looking for the next animal to suck dry.

- So, what's going on? How did we end up this way?
- And is there anything that you and I can do about it?

We'll start here. Even though some days it might feel like everybody is angry, it's not everyone.

IT'S IN MOST OF US

The problem, of course, is more nuanced than simply blaming other people and walking away. Because I feel the spirit of the age inside me at times too. I'm an Enneagram 8, a challenger, as they say. Being an 8 means that on my good days I want to save the world. On my bad days, left to my worst instincts, there are bodies flying everywhere. I feel the spirit of anger rising up in me, too.

As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote:

> *If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.*

All of which leads me to ask why. Why are we all a little (or a lot) angrier? Is this inevitable? There are some surprising things that fuel anger a lot of us might be unaware of. Knowing why all of this is in the air can help us to filter it out of our lives. At least understanding the conditions that can amplify the anger we all feel helps me manage mine.

So why are most of us angrier than we used to be? Why is there so much hate? There are more than a few reasons that anger is the new epidemic.

1. YOU'RE NATURALLY MORE AGGRESSIVE ONLINE THAN YOU ARE IN PERSON

People say and do things online they aren't comfortable doing in real life. Not only do you try to manicure your image, so you look better than you do, but unless you work hard at it, you're more naturally aggressive, more divisive and more hostile than you are person to person.

- The question is why?
- The answer? *Because you're kind of anonymous.* Even if you use a real profile pic and your username isn't something like truthtroll82317, you still don't feel the closeness you do in real life. Distance between people desensitizes people.

Generals have known this for millennia. That's why soldiers wear uniforms and wear war paint. It not only identifies you, but it disguises your humanity. It's easier to shoot you when I can't see you. Before you judge soldiers, think of how you behave in your car. Chance is, you're naturally more aggressive there too—occasionally cutting people off, tailgating, honking your horn, and not caring nearly as much as you normally do.

Every wonder why? Because you are in a 3000-pound armored vehicle. You don't see the guy bothering you as a person. You see him as a problem. So, you get way more aggressive. Think about it. Even in the supermarket, you're ruder when you have a shopping cart in your hands than when you don't.

The same dynamic is at work in social media and our life online. When you're online and you can't see the whites of someone's eyes, it's just easier to shoot. Because the internet is dehumanizing, it's easy to mistreat other humans. Bottom line? It's never been easier to be known and hide simultaneously than it is online.

2. HATE GENERATES MORE CLICKS THAN LOVE

Hate generates more clicks than love.

Long before the endless fake-news arguments of today, TV news and newspaper editors figured out that bad news sells. They learned how to play into our anxiety and fear to get ratings. The 24-hour news cycle and explosion of new media have accelerated those attention-grabbing tendencies.

Social media has put that tendency on steroids. Tristan Harris makes a compelling argument that algorithms Facebook, Google and other social media agencies us intentionally prioritize outrage, because, as Harris argues, the major social and tech companies have figured out that outrage spreads faster than something that's not outrage.

Here's what's sadly true about human nature, or at least human nature in the 21st century: hate generates more clicks than love. I've struggled with this as a writer. I'm committed to making this blog and my podcast places of hope, help and encouragement. But I've also realized that if I title things positively, nobody reads it.

For example, I could have called this post "Love Each Other More. Our World Needs It." But "Why Do We Hate Each Other So Much? (5 Reasons Anger is the New Epidemic)" is a much more compelling headline. I've experimented with titles enough to know that this phenomenon is sadly true. So, I use a little negative to generate far more positive.

When I title things, I avoid hate, outrage and (I hope) sensationalism, and I *always* try to write positive pieces, but the insight and the irony aren't lost on me that leading with a negative title gets a positive piece read. My usual structure is that I lead with the problem most people feel or experience, describe it, and move toward a solution or a few solutions. Hope, followed by help.

3. ANY ATTENTION CAN FEEL BETTER THAN NO ATTENTION

There's an inverse trend happening around us: thanks to technology, we've never been more connected than we are today, and we've never felt more alone.

In 2018, the British government launched the first ever loneliness strategy, appointing a minister for loneliness to deal with the deep isolation millions of people feel. While this isn't always true, sometimes lonely people will settle for any attention they can get. When you feel nothing, a click, a like or a comment can make you feel something, even if it's not nearly as satisfying as a real conversation, a real connection or true intimacy.

Sometimes I wonder if the trolls who leave angry tirades are honestly just lonely. Just hoping someone notices them. The next time you're hoping to get noticed online, put your device down and grab coffee with a friend instead. And if you struggle with friendship, make a friend. Most people are as lonely as you are. So be the first to reach out.

4. YOU KNOW ENOUGH TO MAKE YOUR WORLD FEEL DARK

One of the challenges everyone is navigating is the flood of information that hits us every day. From your social media feeds to breaking news flashes to the minute-by-minute invasion of notifications, buzzes, rings and haptics that disrupt our day, we're processing more information than any humans who have ever lived. This is not good.

If you flip back a few generations, you'll notice that your great-great-grandparents really only processed the information they needed to know and could act on. You only knew so many people, and when someone died, you knew them and could help by bringing the family food, attending the funeral and being part of the community that could support them.

Now, you get told several times a day about mass shootings, plane crashes, typhoons and wars that kill thousands…but you don't know anyone involved and are mostly powerless to help except to give a few dollars to relief efforts or the latest GoFundMe campaign.

Ditto with new, emails, status updates. You are bombarded every day with information you can barely process, let alone do anything about. You know what that's doing to you? It's making you cynical.

The media runs bad news, and when your friends post about their latest trip, awesome parties, or fantastic dinner, it generates bad feelings (jealousy and resentment and loneliness are profound issues associated with social media). Cynicism roots itself in knowledge. The more you know, the more cynical you become. The reason you were so happy when you were younger is you and I were kind of stupid. Ignorance is bliss.

But now, every single day, you see how poorly we treat each other as humans. You see that you weren't invited to the party, didn't get to hang with your friends, aren't moving into that gorgeous dream house your college roommate is and that 200 people died in a plane crash…and it leaves you sad.

Your character actually needs a lot of refinement, and you need to deepen your spiritual maturity to use social media and navigate the news these days. Or at least I do. But at least this explains why you feel the way you feel so many days.

5. ANGER CAN GET YOU HEARD, EVEN WHEN YOU HAVE NOTHING TO SAY

Many people would say the opposite of love isn't hate. It's indifference. I think that's true. And when it feels like the world is indifferent to you and you're unloved, anger can be a way to get someone's attention. Sadly, anger can get you heard, even when you have nothing to say.   The next time you feel the urge to rage, remember, you're not alone. You are loved.

SO, WHAT DO YOU DO?

The future can be dark, or it can be different. Personally, I'm putting my heart behind different. And better. Here are four questions to ask next time you post, write, blog, podcast, or shoot that email or text.

1) *What's my real motive? Am I trying to help, hurt, or just get noticed?*
2) *Are people better off, or worse off, for having read what I posted?*
3) *Am I calling out the worst in people, or attempting to bring out the best?*
4) *If the person I'm writing to was in the room looking me in the eye, would I say the same thing in the same way?*

I don't always get that right, but I've found these questions really help me filter my emotions and help me process what I'm feeling. Speaking of which, what do you do with the junk you feel—the loneliness, the anger, the outrage?

Here's the best thing I know how to do: Process privately. Help publicly. Processing privately can be as simple as praying about it and waiting 24 hours before you do a thing. Often that's enough.

Sometimes you'll need to talk to a friend. Other times you may need to go see a counsellor. I highly recommend that. After all, the gravitational pull is toward unhealthy, not health. Healthy doesn't happen on its own. You and I need help.

Trust me, the world doesn't need your immediate opinion or my immediate opinion on everything. Twitter and Instagram can wait a day too. No one will die if you don't respond right away. Strangely, though, they might die a little if you continue to assassinate them in the heat of the moment.

And often if you sleep on it and pray about, or even discuss it with another person, you won't feel the same way about whatever was making you mad. It's shocking how often you will just let it go or create an emotionally healthy response instead. Then run everything you can through what I call a 'helpful filter'. If it's not helpful–not constructive—don't write it. Don't send it.

Critique is different than criticism. A critique aims to build up, not to tear down. So it's not like you can never say anything negative. But what you have to say should help people get better and feel better. If you can't figure out how to do that, you're not ready to post.

EVER FEEL LIKE YOUR STAFF ARE UNMOTIVATED AND UNDERPERFORMING?

The best staff **crave** a healthy workplace culture. The kind that reduces the impact of underachievers, increases productivity, and has total buy-in for the mission. As a leader, I'm guessing you do too.

To get those results, you need a mindset and strategy that will help you:

- Delegate and engage your team members.
- Lead both in-person and virtual staff effectively.
- Create meaningful team values.
- Let your team know you're for them (not against them)