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Main Idea: Don't let anger make your heart Grinchy.
Scriptures: James 1:19-20; Ephesians 4:26-27

We're only [X] days away from Christmas, and I don't know about you, but I'm pumped! Christmas is seriously one of my favorite times of the year. I love the lights everywhere, Christmas cookies, Christmas movies, all of it. I love Christmas.

But you know what I don't love about Christmas? The packed stores. The traffic. The long lines. Everyone scrambling to buy last-minute gifts and load up on food. And honestly, I don't love how some people act during all of that. You see people getting impatient, cutting in line, arguing over parking spots, acting like the whole world revolves around them.

Have you ever noticed that? It's supposed to be the most joyful time of the year, but somehow people end up being ruder, more stressed, and less kind. It's weird how that happens, right?

And that brings us to today, because we're kicking off a brand-new series called *Merry Grinchmas!* The truth is, if we're not careful, we can all start acting a little Grinchy during the Christmas season. It's way too easy to get annoyed at the crowds, frustrated with rude people, or overwhelmed by the busyness. If we're not careful, our hearts can shrink a size or two as was case for the Grinch.

So, this series is all about learning how to keep our hearts from shrinking and instead, letting God grow them bigger during this Christmas season. Over the next few weeks, we're going to unpack some of the things that can turn our hearts a little "Grinchy" during the Christmas season, stuff like anger**,** kindness (or the lack of it)**,** and self-centeredness**.** We're going to look at how these attitudes creep into our lives, how they affect the people around us, and most importantly, how God can help us choose a better way.

Throughout this series, we're going to pull out a lyric each week from the classic Christmas song, "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch" and use it to help

us dive into our topic. These lyrics will give us a perfect way to talk about what can happen to our hearts if we're not careful.

So today, we're starting with the very first line of the song. It sets the tone for the whole story: "You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch." And that brings us to our focus for today: anger and bitterness**.**

The Grinch wasn't just a little irritated. He was as bitter and angry as someone could possibly be. He was completely full of frustration and resentment, especially toward the people of Whoville. Their joy annoyed him. Their celebrations bothered him. And because he never dealt with his anger, it grew into something dark and destructive. In fact, his bitterness led him to do one of the meanest things imaginable. He literally tried to steal Christmas from the Whos. His anger drove him to hurt others, all because he never dealt with what was going on inside his heart.

What are some things that make you angry?

[Leader Note: Ask a few students to share, then share a couple of your own examples.]

We all have things that set us off. Maybe someone cuts you off on the road. Maybe someone slides right in front of you in line like they didn't even see you standing there. Or maybe someone eats the last of your favorite food. We've all been there. Anger is something every one of us deals with. And here's something you might not expect: **The Bible tells us that getting angry isn't automatically wrong.** In fact, even Jesus got angry. Let's look at one moment from the Gospels:

12 Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. 13 "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'" ***(Matthew 21:12-13, NIV)***

Jesus walked into the Temple, God's house, and found people taking advantage of others, cheating them, and turning a place of worship into a shady marketplace. And Jesus didn't just quietly shake His head. He got angry. He flipped tables. He confronted people. But here's the difference:

Jesus didn't sin in His anger. His anger was what we call righteous anger, which is anger over injustice, dishonesty, and disrespect toward God.

So, what are some situations where it's okay, and maybe even right, to get angry?

[Leader Note: Let students share.]

Things like injustice, people being mistreated, racism or bullying, poverty and hunger, sickness, suffering, and unfairness, and evil in the world are properly the subject of righteous anger. Those things should bother us. God's heart breaks over them, so it makes sense that ours would too. But here's the flipside: not all anger is righteous anger. A lot of the anger we feel is rooted in misunderstandings, hurt, frustration, impatience, or pride. And that's where we can get into trouble. When our anger leads us to say things we shouldn't say, act in ways we regret, or hurt people around us.

So, the big question becomes: **What do we do with our anger?** How do we handle it in a way that honors God? That's where our key Scripture passage comes in. James, who grew up with Jesus, watched Him live and handle tough situations, left us some practical advice when he wrote:

19** My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, **20** because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.* ***(James 1:19-20, NIV)

Point #1: Slow down your reaction.

When some people get angry, the first thing they do is react immediately. For some, that means punching a pillow or slamming a door. Others might want to yell, stomp around, or say the first thing that pops into their head, even if it's not helpful, kind, or something they actually mean. And then, there are the people who just unload on anyone who gets within five feet of them.

But here's the truth: when anger drives our reactions, it never leads us toward the kind of life God wants for us. That kind of anger doesn't heal friendships. It doesn't fix problems. It doesn't make things better. And it doesn't make us more like Jesus.

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Main Idea: Envy and comparison shrink your heart.
Scriptures: Exodus 20:17; Romans 12:15; Matthew 22:37-39; Acts 20:35

- Where do you notice comparison showing up in your life the most?
- What's one thing you often compare – grades? looks? talents? social stuff?

Have a student read Exodus 20:17.

- How would you explain "coveting" in your own words?
- How are coveting and envy similar?

Have a student read Romans 12:15 and Matthew 22:37-39.

- Why is it hard to be happy for someone who gets something you wanted?
- What's one small way you could celebrate someone else this week?
- How does celebrating others break envy's power?

Have a student read Acts 20:35.

- When have you felt joy from giving or serving someone?
- What's something simple you could give this week without expecting anything back?
- Why do you think giving makes us feel fuller than receiving?

Prayer: Ask the students for prayer requests and then close in prayer.

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