

WHEN ANGER BURNS

A Biblical View on
Handling Anger



Tim Jackson



introduction

When Anger Burns

A Biblical View on Handling Anger

Anger is one of our most powerful emotions. Its intensity can lead us to view anger negatively, as if it is an invasive parasite. In reality, however, anger behaves more like our body's natural, God-given immune system. Sometimes anger flares up appropriately, to fight against whatever

threatens our well-being, or the well-being of those who need protection. Other times it behaves more like a symptom signaling that something much deeper needs our careful attention.

In this booklet, counselor **Tim Jackson** offers help from the wisdom of the Bible so that we may discern between anger that builds up and anger that tears down. Here we gain insight into the roots of potentially destructive anger, and we learn how to feel and give a voice to the kind of anger that nurtures the life of God within us.

Our Daily Bread Ministries

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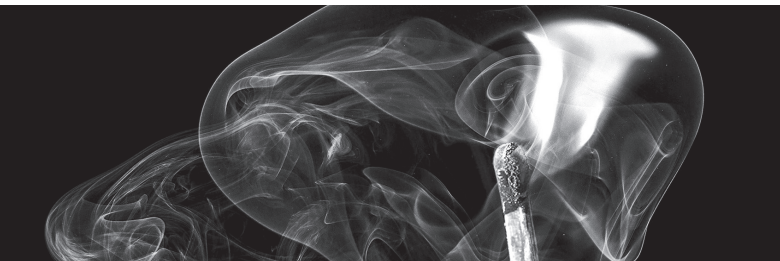
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one

When Anger Burns

At 5:05 a.m. the cry of Angela's infant son awakened her for the *fifth* time that night. She was alone.

Angela dragged herself out of bed and stumbled toward the sound of the crying. "All I want is a little sleep," she said out loud. "Is that asking too much?"

All her efforts to soothe her hurting son were futile. Cory's crying intensified. Angela's irritation escalated. "You have no right to destroy my life by constantly stealing my sleep night after night! Shut up!" she screamed as she shook her son.

At that moment, she realized just how easy it was to lash out physically at her defenseless son. She slumped to the floor and began to sob.

Jill is an x-ray technician who finds it increasingly difficult to get along with an arrogant doctor at the hospital where she works. If she offers a suggestion about a series of tests he has ordered, he treats her as though she is grossly incompetent and demeans her. He rudely walks away from her in the middle of her questions. He refuses to return her phone calls. The last time it happened, Jill hit the

ceiling. Venting to coworkers, she ranted, “Who does he think he is anyway? If it weren’t for the fact that he is the senior orthopedic surgeon in the hospital and I can’t afford to lose my job, I would give him a piece of my mind! Then maybe I’d get a little of the respect I deserve!”

Then there is **Paul**. He and Roxanne were to be married in a month. Driving home from a date one night, Paul’s car was hit broadside by a drunk driver. Roxanne was killed instantly. Paul would never be the same, emotionally or physically. Doctors told



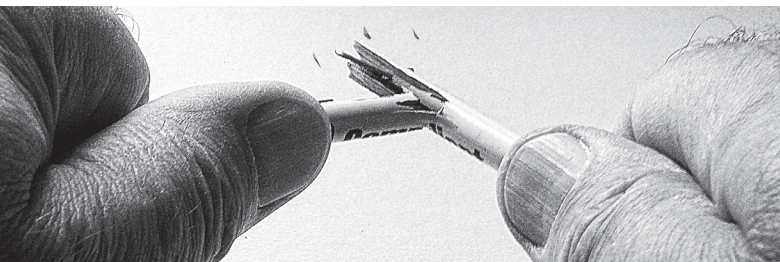
“They are all battling one of the most powerful emotions known to the human race—anger.”

him he would never regain full use of his shattered knee. That meant a change in Paul's profession as a roofing contractor.

During the eighteen months of rehab for his knee, Paul met Cindy. Less than a year later they married. While all seems to have healed, things are not what they appear to be. Cindy complains of Paul's lack of closeness. Whenever she confronts him about something he's done to upset her, he retreats into cool indifference.

What do Angela, Jill, and Paul have in common? They are all battling one of the most powerful emotions known to the human race—anger. Angela's anger mushroomed to the point of becoming abusive to her child. Jill felt rage toward her coworker but kept it inside. Paul decided the best course of action was to bury his anger and hope it would go away.

Rarely a day goes by that we don't feel some form of anger. That's why it's important to talk about it—what anger is, what it does for us, where it comes from, and how we can learn to handle it in constructive instead of destructive ways. Only when the roots of our anger are exposed will its weeds finally die.



two

The Nature of Anger

Anger is simpler to define than to identify. Expressions of anger range from the overt, in-your-face brand of open hostility to the cool indifference of a silent stare.

At times, anger can feel like an inner fire. We see red and feel hot and sweaty. Our stomach churns, our blood pressure rises, and our breathing rate increases. Our body responds to this internal turmoil with a flushed appearance. We perspire, and our jaw tightens.

Yet anger can also be experienced as compliance on the outside while resentment and hostility simmer

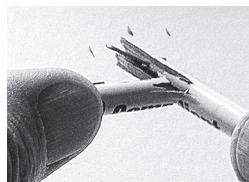
just beneath the surface. The silent withdrawal and lack of involvement of a spouse is often an indication that one is angrily punishing the other for not doing things his or her way. Even the withholding of sex in a marriage becomes a weapon of anger instead of the expression of shared love.

The Bible has much to say about the dangers, roots, and taming of anger. With vivid imagery, the Scriptures describe the flaring nostrils of a person who displays anger (GENESIS 39:19; EXODUS 4:14).¹ Another speaks of anger as an emotion burning furiously hot (EXODUS 22:24; 32:10–12). Anger is also depicted as a fiery outburst that consumes everything in its path (EZEKIEL 22:21–22, 31).

↗ *The Hebrew word for **anger** in Genesis 39:19 and Exodus 4:14 is used to describe Potiphar when he was furious at Joseph. (Joseph had been falsely accused by Potiphar's wife.) The Exodus 4 passage is actually a description of God Himself, and shows our Creator-God as having strong emotions we can identify with as human beings.*

Several passages in the Bible urge us to get rid of any kind of bitterness, rage, or anger (EPHESIANS 4:31; COLOSSIANS 3:8). Yet the Bible does not always paint a negative picture of anger. The vast majority of biblical references to words like *anger*, *rage*, *wrath*, and *fury* refer to the anger of God. These sections, which speak of God's anger with his enemies or with

his own people, far outnumber those that tell us to avoid anger. What the Bible shows us is that anger is neither right nor wrong until there is a motive. Anger can be productive and loving, just as it can be destructive and selfish. We need discernment in order to see our anger from God's point of view.



Anger is neither right nor wrong until there is a motive.

① Selfish Anger. In most cases, the anger that moves a person to do harm to himself or others is selfish. It is the kind of anger that destroys rather than builds up. It is more like a wrecking ball than a hammer.

The first explicit mention of anger in the Bible shows its potential to kill. Genesis 4 tells us the story of Cain and Abel. Both men brought sacrifices to God that reflected their individual occupations. But only Abel brought a sacrifice that pleased the Lord.

“Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast” (v. 5). Here the Hebrew word for *anger* means “burning fury.” God approached Cain and tried to help him deal with his seething rage. The Lord made it clear that he desired to accept Cain, but he had to come on God's terms, not his own (vv. 6–7). God then gave Cain a compelling warning: “If you

do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it” (v. 7).

Cain had to make a choice. His pride was wounded. He was hurt and angry that God would not accept the fruit of his labor the way God accepted the fruit of Abel’s work. Yet God gave him an opportunity to deal with his emotions. The older brother could have repented and offered the sacrifice God had asked for. The Lord in turn would have accepted him. But Cain stubbornly refused to place himself in the protective care of God. Instead, he determined to take matters into his own hands.

Knowing that he was powerless to lash out directly at God—the true object of his anger—Cain pounced on the one with whom God was pleased: his brother Abel. Cain brutally murdered his brother. His heart became so hardened that when God came to him and inquired where his brother was, Cain snidely remarked, “I don’t know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” (v. 9). God told him, “Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground,” and he put a curse on Cain, condemning him to be “a restless wanderer on the earth” (vv. 10–12).

The last time we see Cain he is still determined to live his life in an angry war against God. Instead of accepting God’s curse on him and being a wanderer, he again defies God and builds a city (v. 17). Cain is

a prime example of a man angrily protecting and providing for himself rather than humbling himself and accepting God's direction and correction (1 PETER 5:6).

Cain paid dearly for his self-protective strategy. Because he trusted his own feelings more than God, his name has become synonymous with the murderous potential of selfish anger. Cain's error reminds us that anger rooted in self-centered efforts to care for ourselves never works. Such anger seeks to destroy, not build. This is the kind of dangerous emotion James had in mind when he said, "Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires" (JAMES 1:20). Such anger is far different from the godly anger that is good, constructive, and loving.

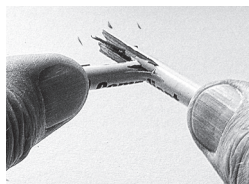
② Productive Anger. The Bible provides clear prohibitions against destructive anger. This has caused many to believe the Bible teaches that all anger is sinful. Let's look at one well-known passage. We misinterpret Ephesians 4:26 to say, "Don't be angry, because it's sin. Don't let the sun go down while you're still angry." But a careful look at Ephesians 4:26–27 does not support the assumption that anger in and of itself is sinful. The apostle Paul says, "In your anger do not sin." But he doesn't stop there.▀ This command is qualified by three prohibitions that follow.

John Stott, in his commentary on Ephesians 4:26, says, “The verse recognizes that there is such a thing as **Christian anger**, and too few Christians either feel or express it. Indeed, when we fail to do so, we deny God, damage ourselves, and encourage the spread of evil” (THE MESSAGE OF EPHESIANS, P.185).

Be Angry. God knows that anger is an important and necessary emotion for a healthy person living in a fallen world. The preceding verse sets up the context of truth-telling in relationships. “Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor” (v. 25). Being honest about our anger is something to be embraced. The command is this: Be angry about how your sin harms you and others, and how others’ sin harms them and you.

Paul realized the potential for devastating harm that can come from unbridled rage. That is his reason for giving three qualifying prohibitions that follow this call to be angry.

The command is not to avoid anger, but to avoid *sinful* anger. If we don’t keep our antagonistic emotions on a tight leash, they will cease to be useful in restraining sin and instead will begin to multiply it.



Once faith and love are gone, we spiral downward into cynicism and vindictive living.

“Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry”[¶] (v. 26) commands us to deal with our anger as soon as we are aware of it. Don’t stuff it inside and brood over it. It will only fester. Take it out of the dark and expose it to the light. Let the truth burn away your selfish rage before it grows and deepens and hardens.

¶ *This command likely reflects the Old Testament practice of paying off debts and returning borrowed goods prior to sunset so as not to cause undue hardship on others in need (DEUTERONOMY 24:10–15). Likewise, we are commanded to **deal with anger promptly** so that we will avoid undue relational hardship.*

“Do not give the devil a foothold” (v. 27) reflects a progression in Paul’s series of commands. Satan knows how to exploit selfish anger. Once he has us nursing and justifying our selfish anger, he knows we are not far from hatred, vengeance, a refusal to forgive, and violence.

Anger toward those who possess more than we do rationalizes stealing (v. 28). Anger stirred up by a bad conscience enables us to deny the truth, twist it, and say all kinds of unloving things about others (v. 29). Our anger can grieve the Holy Spirit (v. 30), and if we resist his gentle prodding our anger can degenerate into the sin of bitterness (v. 31). Bitterness depletes our passion for life. It displaces faith and love. Once

faith and love are gone, we spiral downward into cynicism and vindictive living.

A fine line separates loving anger and selfish anger. Complete avoidance of anger is another way of giving Satan an edge. Many people avoid anger at all costs because they have experienced the volatile emotion of anger in themselves and in others. According to Ephesians 4:26, that is not an option God gives us.

We play into the devil's hands when we fail to love enough to be angry. Anger and love are not mutually exclusive. Righteous anger in a compassionate person can lead to the well-being of others.



three

The Root of Selfish Anger

A couple sat at opposite ends of the couch in my office. “He just sits in front of the TV and watches sports. When I try to talk to him, he never hears me,” she fumed. “I might as well be a million miles away. Then, when he comes to bed he wants sex. Of all the nerve! He makes me so mad I could just scream!”

This wife’s anger seems to come from a source outside of herself—namely, her husband. At first

blush, we might agree. But are we merely reactors to our environment? What kinds of things affect us?

External Sources of Anger

Generally, we see the cause of our anger as something outside of ourselves. We feel we're merely reacting to external stimuli. "After all," we reason, "if we hadn't have been treated so poorly, we wouldn't have gotten angry." External factors do affect us.

People Are Selfish. Whether we admit it or not, we all essentially live for ourselves more often than not. Looking out for number one is as natural as breathing. We're bent that way because of inherited sin.

Life Is Unfair. Have you ever asked, "Why don't I ever get a break? I work just as hard as the next guy—maybe harder. So why does he get the promotion and I don't? Other people seem to get all the breaks."

Life Is Hard. Does it seem as if your life is cursed at times? The truth is, *it is!* We are living under a curse. Life is difficult. It's filled with thorns and thistles. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble" (JOHN 16:33).

🔎 In Genesis 3:14–19, we read **the result of Adam and Eve's decision** to defy God's command not to eat the forbidden fruit. The serpent was cursed "above all livestock and all wild animals" (v. 14); the woman would endure severe labor (v. 16); and the earth itself was cursed (v. 18). Yet God also hints at the coming Messiah who will "crush" the serpent's (Satan's) head (v. 15).

Although the selfishness of others, the unfairness of life, and living under a curse are all realities to contend with, the Scriptures also teach that the real source of anger is *internal* rather than *external*.

Internal Sources of Anger

Our anger is often caused by our realization that we are not getting what we want when we want it. Like an infant feeling the hunger pangs of an empty tummy and demanding food, we too feel the pain of disappointed desires.

In James 4:1–3 we are told why there is so much angry conflict in our lives:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

Desire. The desires at war within us fuel our conflicts. We want something that matters to us. Something gets in our way and prevents us from getting it. And we get angry.

God created us with the desire for love and respect, and with a longing to be enjoyed and to know that we matter. All of the lesser desires for a car, a raise,

a nicer house, a spouse, a child, or better health are linked to these core desires for love and relationship. Ultimately, the desires that do battle within us are those things we believe we must have to survive.

Take **Bill**, for example. He wants a new car because he thinks he needs it to feel successful as a businessman. He asks God for it. He finds a nice sporty red one. He's excited. He applies for a loan and gets turned down because he doesn't make enough money. So he asks for a raise, but his boss says no. Bill feels angry with his boss, the bank, and himself because his goal of getting that car has been blocked. Disappointment is appropriate. But Bill's anger indicates that the car meant more to him than it should have.

But what if our desires are not as trivial as a new car? The body's demand for rest, the longing for love, the desire for respect, and the hunger to make a difference are indeed legitimate. These are basic longings of the human body and heart. They cry out for satisfaction. But in an imperfect world of self-centered people, even those legitimate desires will never be fully satisfied by the best of relationships or optimum circumstances.

Fear. The fear that grips our hearts grows out of a lack of faith and confidence that God is really who he says he is. Our painful experiences reinforce our misguided belief that no one, including God himself, has enough goodness and strength to provide the safety and security we desire.

Once we eliminate God from the picture, we must find some way to survive in this world. So we take matters into our own hands to get what we want. When we do, we become idolaters.▀ Since we can't control God, we fashion a god of our own making that we think we *can* control. We become like Cain: angry rebels who hate God.

▀ ***Idolatry*** is traditionally thought of as worshiping a carved figure, as in pagan or animist religions, but an idol is anything that takes the place of God in our lives. Hence, it is "a god of our own making."

Rebellion. It's a vicious cycle. In our angry rebellion against God, we look to others to provide what only God can supply—security in an insecure world. But now that we're in charge, we feel *less* secure. We fear we don't have what it takes to make it on our own. So we need others to agree with our plans. But we fear they won't cooperate and give us what we want. We see other people as having the power to make or break our plans for life. When they fail to cooperate with our agenda, we become enraged with *them* because they are a threat to our fragile sense of security. Then we get angry with ourselves because we feel weak in needing anybody.

To compensate for our fear of what others might do to us if they really knew how insecure and desperate we are, we make angry demands of them in hopes that we can intimidate them into cooperating with us.

Unfulfilled Demands. Our angry rebellion against God forces us to demand that others fill in for him. When others fail us, as they inevitably will, unfulfilled demands give rise to angry battles.

James said that having self-indulgent motives is the reason we don't receive the things we ask from God (JAMES 4:3). Most of what we ask for has nothing to do with a deepening desire to trust God and serve others more effectively. Our desire is not to let God meet our heart's desire in his way and timing, but rather to have something of his creation that we think is necessary for our well-being. When obstacles block that desire, anger flares up. Anger hurts less than our fear and helps to dull the pain because it makes us feel more in control. We believe that a world under our control is safer than a world under his control. But God is not interested in encouraging that illusion.

Asking God to meet our needs is one thing. But when our desires become demands, we change from dependent children into arrogant rebels.

The solution for our anger requires a growing confidence in the presence and promises of One we cannot see. Through the disappointments, losses, and frustrations of life we must learn that our well-being lies not in our demands but in his loving and capable hands.



four

What Can Anger Do for Us?

Why do we hang on to our anger? We nurture our anger because we believe it functions for us in these ways: (1) It protects us from additional pain, (2) it deflects responsibility away from our inadequate love for others, and (3) it keeps people at a manageable distance. Let's look at each of these functions of anger.

① Self-protection. Rather than facing our pain by acknowledging our disappointed longings, we choose to be angry because anger is easier to control than pain and disappointment. What we tell others by our anger is, "Don't expect much from me because I'm

too wounded to care about you.” When we expend all our energy protecting ourselves, there’s nothing left to protect others from our failure to love them.

② Deflection. Anger often shows up when we are caught red-handed in a wrong. Instead of feeling the weight of our sin and accepting responsibility for our actions, we get angry. We use our anger as a weapon against those who expose and shame us. We try to turn the tables on them to get the attention off ourselves. We try to intimidate them into accepting the message, “I’m not the problem here; you are!”

③ Distancing. Anger can also be an attempt to make sure that others don’t get close enough to discover our weakness. Like porcupines, we use barbs of antagonism and intimidation to keep others at a distance, protecting the soft flesh of our flaws and insecurities.

Think of the people you find intimidating. Often they use anger to create space for themselves. They may come across as strong and confident. But they can’t afford to allow anyone to get close enough to see their fear or their insecurity.

DEALING WITH ANGER

Ways We Mishandle Anger

Once our anger is ignited it can rage like an untamed forest fire. James made it clear that our hot-tempered anger doesn’t accomplish God’s purposes in our lives: “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to

speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires” (JAMES 1:19–20).

Selfish anger directed toward *others* will lead to murderous activity toward those whom we feel have threatened, hurt, belittled, shamed, or controlled us. Anger directed toward *ourselves* will fuel suicidal behavior that strips vitality from life. Either way, anger handled our way always results in devastation.

① Repression. We learn early in life that anger is a frightening emotion, so we avoid it at all costs. Most often, we end up pretending we are not angry in hopes that it will go away and no one will get hurt. *After all, we reason, anger is not socially acceptable.*

When a child grows up in a home where she is regularly subjected to angry, demeaning outbursts from her alcoholic father toward her mother, she vows that she will never become like him. So she stuffs her feelings inside and marries a man who is emotionally dead and nonthreatening to her. In later life, this woman may end up depressed because of his lack of meaningful involvement. Her way to try to protect herself fails to bring her the joy she longs for.

Much depression is a result of anger. Many depressed people choose to shut down and no longer engage with their world because they have discovered that all their efforts to make life work on their terms have failed. It seems hopeless.

That's a description of the prophet Jonah at the end of the Old Testament book bearing his name. He wanted God to destroy the city of Nineveh. Instead, God spared it. Jonah was angry with God. Preoccupied with his own agenda, he completely missed the compassionate heart of God. The prophet's depression was fueled by his obsession with his own needs, which blinded him to the needs of others (JONAH 4:1–10).

Those who stuff their anger inside say that feelings only clutter their lives and make it too messy. So the best way to handle emotions, especially something as volatile as anger, is to pretend. Over time, they end up feeling nothing at all—neither pain nor joy. They may function well but they touch no one deeply.

② Shallow Confession. Very close to repression, this mishandling of anger too easily says, “I’m sorry. I know I shouldn’t feel angry. It’s sin and it’s wrong. Please forgive me.” But the quick-confession mentality doesn’t take the time to understand where our anger comes from or what it is directed toward. We need to explore our anger and expose its roots.

③ Volcanic Expression. Outbursts of anger are aided by the myth that says, “If you want to be real, you must be honest about your feelings. Don’t hold back.”

While we must learn to express our feelings, it must be done with discernment and regard for others. Those who express anger without love are “emotional dumpers.” They back up their truckload of emotional

garbage and unload it all over your front lawn. God never gives us the luxury of expressing our emotions without regard for the damage it does.

✎ *The prophet Amos recorded **God's outrage** against people who vent their anger without compassion: "For three sins of Edom, even for four, I will not relent. Because he pursued his brother with a sword and slaughtered the women of the land, because his anger raged continually and his fury flamed unchecked, I will send fire on Teman that will consume the fortresses of Bozrah" (AMOS 1:11–12).*

God alone is in a position to express vengeful judgment. He alone is patient and loving enough to use anger to give people the punishment they deserve. That is why Paul told us, "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord" (ROMANS 12:19). Now that we have seen how not to handle our anger, we can move toward constructive ways of dealing with our anger.

DEALING WITH ANGER

Handling Anger in Godly Ways

① Acknowledge Your Anger. Don't pretend that you don't get angry. We all do. Don't water down your anger by labeling it as "frustration" or "irritation." Call it what it is. Be honest with yourself, and then with God. He knows anyway. Pour out your heart to him and tell

him what you are feeling. Many of the psalms of David begin as a prayer to God expressing his fear and anger.

② Learn to Get Angry Slowly. Angry words spoken quickly are usually regretted later. Take time to make sure that you have good reason to be angry. Avoid jumping to conclusions. Listen and ask questions. Second-guess your own reactions. God himself is slow to get angry, and our goal in life is to let him form Christlike characteristics in us.

Use moments of solitude to reflect prayerfully on your anger. Examine your motives. Ask questions like these:

- ▶ What did I feel angry about today?
- ▶ Where is my anger coming from?
- ▶ Why did I feel so threatened that I believed my anger was justifiable?
- ▶ Is my intense anger over something that's actually insignificant?
- ▶ Is my anger for the benefit of another? Or is it directed against another?
- ▶ Did my anger further God's interests or my own?
- ▶ Did I provoke anger in someone else today?

After having wrestled with these questions privately, ask a trusted friend to help you test your thinking. In asking yourself these probing questions, you will be able to discern if your anger was characteristic of Jesus's example of handling anger. Because Jesus was secure in his relationship with his Father, the anger he

expressed did not reflect quick, touchy, self-protective hostility. Rather, he got angry at the evil that opposed his Father's plan and threatened to do harm to the people he loved.

③ Change Your Beliefs About God. Most of our feelings are based on deeply held beliefs about where life and security and significance are found. Our anger problem is rooted not in feelings, but in what we believe about God.

The challenge according to the New Testament, therefore, is not to change our feelings but to change our thinking. In the awareness of what God has done for us[■] the apostle Paul urged us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (ROMANS 12:2). In time, renewed patterns of thinking will result in changed feelings.

▶ *In chapters 1 through 11 of Romans, Paul brilliantly traces the problem of the human condition, our need for salvation, and God's provision for our reconciliation to him through the death of Jesus Christ. In chapter 12 he tells us **how to respond** to that great gift of salvation.*

All emotions, including anger, are useful to help us track down the real beliefs of our heart. Feelings of rage can be used to trace the roots of that antagonism. In the process we can discern if that anger is rooted in our confidence in God or if it is a self-centered response rooted in a selfish spirit demanding that things go our way.

Whether we believe our well-being is in the hands of God, in our circumstances, or in others is a key factor in learning how to deal with anger.

④ Confession. This is not merely a confession that you had sinful, angry feelings. It goes much deeper, to the faulty belief system that fuels your anger. It means repenting of your stubborn commitment to survive in life on your terms instead of on God's terms. It means repenting of the angry resentment you have held toward him for not doing things your way. It means repenting of your belief that he really isn't all that good, and that he can't be trusted. And it means repenting of all the damage your angry demands have inflicted on God and on others. This will likely involve reaching out to those you've harmed with your anger and asking for forgiveness.

But repentance means turning *toward* something as well. It means a conscious commitment to abandon yourself into the loving arms of your heavenly Father, who delights in giving good gifts to his children. It means choosing to live by the belief that he exists, and that he rewards those who look for him, even when things don't turn out the way you think they should. It means trusting him as the only provision for your hungry soul and believing that you have nothing to fear because of your confidence in his abiding goodness and love.

When repentance takes place at that level, our

insecurities begin to be replaced with confidence. Angry demands will become repulsive and unnecessary. Anger's power will weaken as it is replaced with the courage to love the way you have been loved. At that point you can begin to exercise control over your anger.

⑤ Under New Management. While what we feel cannot be directly changed, we can change what we *believe* by surrendering ourselves to the Spirit²¹ and Word of God. Under his influence we will find our anger increasingly shaped and restrained by a new kind of self-control.

21 *When we come to Christ in repentance, he gives us his **Holy Spirit**, which produces virtues in us that we could not create by our own efforts. The apostle Paul said that self-control, i.e., controlling our emotions, is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (GALATIANS 5:22–23).*

Because God is slow to anger, we can expect that when our life is under his management we will take on some of the same patient qualities. Because God's heart was revealed to us in his Son, we can also expect to begin growing in what the Bible calls "the mind of Christ."

Paul talked about having this mind of Christ when he wrote, "In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" (PHILIPPIANS 2:3–4). Jesus found his security not in circumstances or strategies of self-protection. Instead, his confidence was in the

knowledge that whatever he needed would be provided at just the right moment by his heavenly Father.

Jesus could sacrifice his life for others because he knew his future was not in the hands of those who mocked him and drove spikes into his hands and feet. Their power over him was merely a temporary allowance necessary for him to live and die for those he loved.

Placing our anger under God's management will not dissolve and evaporate all anger. But it will free us to express a new and godly anger toward the kind of sin in ourselves and others that slowly angers the heart of God.

Trusting our anger and our well-being to God will help us better understand this mind of Christ. It will also help us develop a healthy fear of the anger that God reserves for his enemies.

The good news is that by believing the truth about God's Son and what he did for us on a Roman cross, we can avoid the coming day of God's judgment. The apostle John wrote, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them" (JOHN 3:36). The offer is a gift in exchange for belief. It is not a reward for performance. It is pure, undeserved kindness.

How we respond to God determines how we work through the more immediate issues of our anger. But ultimately, how we respond to him will determine our eternal destiny. 🌿



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