

Getting a Grip on Anger

By Peggy Park

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1).

Jesus displayed anger at times, but always as an expression of his righteous indignation. The anger we display is seldom righteous. Much of our anger is the result of a self-centered mind-set. We become angry when people challenge our opinions, disregard our feelings, or fail to treat us as we think we deserve.

How can we control our anger—and even express it—in ways that honor God?

Physical Considerations

Physically, anger can harm us. When we become angry, adrenaline surges through our bodies, elevating our blood pressure. Our bodies come under stress, our faces flush, we clench our teeth, and our arteries constrict. To make matters worse, we often spout words and accusations we later regret and cannot take back.

When we give into anger, we yield control to another person or circumstance when the Holy Spirit should be in control of our actions. Solomon advised in Ecclesiastes 7:9, “Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools” (*New King James Version*). That’s how I feel when I have given into anger.

Spiritual Considerations

Falling into a state of anger makes me feel cut off from the Lord. Even after my anger subsides, it often takes days before I feel at rest in my fellowship with God. Although I know better, I can’t let go of my guilt.

Satan uses uncontrolled anger to interrupt our fellowship with the Lord. Even after confessing our sin and falling once again on God’s grace, we may still find it takes time to restore the intimacy with God we lose in our anger. This alone should give us reason to refrain from letting anger into our hearts.

Anger and Sin

Ephesians 4:26 states, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath.” Although anger is not a sin in itself, we need to recognize what is taking root in our hearts and resolve it before the sun goes down.

In Colossians 3:8 we are cautioned to put off anger. It is first in a list of undesirable behaviors including blasphemy and filthy language. When we are told to put off anger, this assures us it is possible. With the help of God’s Spirit, we have the power to resist anger. Proverbs 19:11 tells us it is a man’s glory to overlook a transgression.

Avoiding Anger

One way to avoid anger is to lay our agendas and opinions aside and listen to what others have to say, refraining from thinking about our next response or argument while they are speaking. Give others the courtesy of your full attention. Repeat what you think is being said so there is no confusion.

Before expressing your anger toward others, take into consideration their background and life experiences. Most of us can be classified as the “walking wounded” in at least one area. Sometimes our wounds surface at the most inconvenient times.

Consider that someone else may have a better way than yours to approach a given task. This can be especially helpful in the church when members express their various opinions in meetings and ministry activities. We can help others grow if we allow them to express opinions and perform tasks without insisting on doing it our way. We can give others freedom to act even when we think we can identify potential pitfalls in the way they plan to accomplish a task. Trial and error can be good teachers.

On the other hand I have been pleasantly surprised when another person’s idea worked far better than my own. One way new leaders are trained is by allowing them some freedom to act.

Ask, “Is this worth the conflict, or is it an area where I need to be flexible?” This doesn’t mean we should let ourselves be pulled off course by suggestions we know from experience to be unworkable. At times, we must exercise authority when we are in charge of a job, a household situation, or a family responsibility. But this should always be done with respect.

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When Anger Erupts

Satan wants to stir up dissension in the body of Christ. Not long ago I was faced with several opportunities to take offense at others in the span of just a few weeks. Interestingly, each offense took place in a Christian context.

My prayer partner and I have made a commitment not to pour additional fuel on perceived offenses. We call this "not fueling the offense." When tempted with anger, it is helpful to have someone listen to you, pray with you, and point you to the truth found in Scripture.

When tempted to show my anger toward my brothers and sisters in Christ, I try to remember that Jesus also lives in them, and that if I come against them, I am in a sense coming against him also.

I also try to remember that the Spirit who dwells in me cannot be in conflict with the Spirit who dwells in another follower of Christ. If we are engaged in an anger-

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fueled conflict, at least one of us is not being controlled by the Spirit. I am learning to extend mercy, be gracious, and give myself and others time to grow and mature.

In addition, I try not to say the first thing that comes to my mind in a moment of anger. Instead, I stop and ask myself, "Do I want to hurt this person?"

The Bible calls us to live in unity with one another. We may not always agree with others, but we can make sure Christ is always at the center of our relationships. *

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From Anger to Peace

Our society is filled with people who are overwhelmed by anger. These resources can help you put aside your irritation and rage and pursue peace.

The Anger Workbook

by Les Carter and Dr. Frank Minirth
(Thomas Nelson, 1992)

Enemies of the Heart: Breaking Free from Emotions That Control You

by Andy Stanley
(Multnomah Books, 2011)

Getting Rid of the Gorilla: Confessions on the Struggle to Forgive

by Brian Jones
(Standard Publishing, 2008)

The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict

by Ken Sande
(Baker, 2003)

Surviving in an Angry World: Finding Your Way to Personal Peace

by Charles F. Stanley
(World Publications, 2010)