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Scripture is taken from the Holy Bible,
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problems people face

Anger



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problems people face
Anger
and how to deal with it

Egerton C. Long

ANGER – THE SIN WE’RE AFRAID TO MENTION

‘Get out of there! I saw that space first!’ The speaker was obviously angry. Rolling down his window, and shaking his clenched fist, he shouted: ‘What do you think you’re doing? You get out of there before I do you over’.

The other driver tried to ignore the threat but the angry man jumped out of his car, rushed over, and dragging the other driver out, began to beat him severely. His two companions joined in the one-sided fight, hitting the driver repeatedly, knocking him in the head and anywhere else they could reach. Finally, leaving the man motionless on the roadway, they drove away. By the time the police and ambulance arrived at the scene, the man was dead, killed in anger over a parking space. We can call this behaviour by its new name ‘road-rage’ but it’s really an example of what we call **unjustified expressed anger**, all too common today.

That may be an extreme example of how in our stressful world so many people behave today. But anyone dealing with the general public, from bus drivers to checkout girls can tell you how often they are abused, especially when there are delays of any kind. A young woman at a service station said ‘I hate wet days. Customers come in grumbling and angry about everything, and then try to dump their feelings

HOW TO RECEIVE JESUS AS YOUR SAVIOUR

If God has been speaking to you as you have read this booklet and if you are willing now to take Jesus Christ as your Saviour, here is what you should do:

Confess – tell God in your own simple words that you are a sinner, needing a Saviour. (Read Romans 3:23)

Accept – tell God that you see Jesus Christ as your only Saviour and will accept Him now. (Read Romans 6:23)

Believe – that Jesus Christ has saved you because you asked Him to do so. (Read Romans 10:13)

If you have made this decision today then sign your name here and tell someone else what you have done. Join a church where you can hear God’s Word preached and have fellowship with other believers.

I acknowledge myself to be a sinner in God’s sight.

I accept Jesus Christ now as my Saviour.

I thank Him for saving me.

Date _____/_____/_____

It will help you and may help them if you talk it over with that person. Silence does not settle an issue, it only prolongs it. Don't exaggerate an issue. 'Speaking the truth in love' is the way we should talk with each other – not in anger.

VICTORY CAN BE YOURS

How can we have victory over any sin? First we **recognise it as sin**. Then we confess it and ask God for His help never to commit that sin again. **We may still fail** but God is our loving Father and knows how weak we are. But if we will consciously ask God for help and victory for that day, He will be right there with His help. Read 1 Corinthians 1:13 often. Believe what it says and **trust God for victory over that sinful side of anger**.

How much have you prayed about your anger and need of victory? If you spend time in God's Word and if you are a believer you will know the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. Read again Psalm 119:9 & 18 and trust God to help you moment by moment. In times to come you will be surprised as you look back over your life and see how when you were tempted to be angry, God helped you overcome the temptation and win the victory. Then praise Him for this. May God bless you and keep you growing in Christ-likeness day by day.

on to me.' Anger seems to be a way of life for many.

Verbal abuse and even physical violence are more common than we realise. Front line workers who deal with the public can tell the most incredible stories about the general lack of 'old-fashioned manners'. Ticket agents at airports are prime targets for impatient travellers.

Perhaps we ought to give that kind of behaviour its real name - 'anger'. Some people today use the term 'aggro' when they encounter hostility or opposition of any kind. It can occur in almost any situation, sometimes with tragic results. An older man became angry when a bank teller was unable to do just what he had asked of her. He started to shout at her, but he was suddenly interrupted by a cardiac arrest. His death, caused basically by the stress of anger, was almost instantaneous. It does not usually have such serious results but anger may adversely affect our health, causing anything from ulcers or higher blood pressure to an asthma attack. **Internalised anger**, directed at ourselves can sometimes lead to the debilitating symptoms of anxiety and depression.

ANGER IN THE WORKPLACE

Stress in the workplace is causing or is blamed for more and more displays of anger and even violence. Where there is a general sense of insecurity or strong dissatisfaction with working

conditions, it is extremely easy for supervisors to vent their feelings on those under them. A major restructuring of a business can sometimes cause a flow on of unhappiness and irritability resulting in employee fatigue and poor performance.

If a boss verbally abuses an employee, a chain reaction may start. Out of frustration and annoyance, that worker snaps at his co-worker or secretary, who in turn goes home angry and takes it out on the family, right down to the youngest who then 'kicks the cat'. This could easily be described as '**misplaced anger**' or '**substitute anger**'.

WHAT ELSE CAN CAUSE US TO BE ANGRY?

There are many different causes or contributing factors. **Extreme fatigue** may open the door for anger to take over. A mother has had a long, tiring day. Then one of her children spills a glass of milk on the clean floor the mother has just washed. Mother can't help herself: 'What's the matter with you? Can't you do anything right? You make me sick. Here I've spent all day.....'

It may happen in any situation where there have been **prolonged demands** on us physically or even mentally or emotionally. We often label these demands 'stress' and excuse our subsequent behaviour accordingly. For example, a father can be under stress at work and then later deal unfairly with his son or daughter by

The quickest way we can deal with anger is to recognise what the Holy Spirit is saying to us and turn to 1 John 1:9 : 'If we **confess our sin to Him**, He is faithful and just to forgive us, and to cleanse us from every wrong.' Do it and do it quickly, whatever the reason, whatever the motive, whatever the situation, don't prolong it. The Message paraphrases Eph 4:26: 'Don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry.' If there are wrong feelings in the home, get the matter straightened out now. It is not easy to say 'I'm sorry' but it could be the way of victory for you.

SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO ANGER

James has a strong instruction for us (1:19) 'Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.' Most anger is shown by our speech. Too often we react too quickly without investigating the facts. We need time to listen, to be quiet, and to **learn to control what we say**. Proverbs 21:23 is very straightforward: 'If we keep our mouth shut, we will stay out of trouble' (NLVGB). Or turn to Proverbs 15:1: 'A gentle answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger.' It is also said 'The tongue is the only edged tool which sharpens with use' – the wrong use of course!

We need to be honest in our communication with each other. 'Wounds from a friend can be trusted.' Proverbs 27:6. Do you have something against someone? Are you angry with someone?

problem of anger, then we can certainly ask the Lord for His help in this, as we can in every other circumstance.

Secondly, we need to recognise inappropriate, **unrestrained anger** is sin. While we may try to justify it, explain it, excuse it, blame someone else, we will never find victory over it. We need to ask God's forgiveness for our attitude and focus on pleasing Him. God's Word is plain: 'In your anger, do not sin. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger.' Eph 4:26&31. When you are tempted to be angry or when anger has taken over, talk to the Lord about it. Ask for His immediate help and seek His forgiveness. The verses quoted above are alongside the command 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit' (v.30). The word 'grieve' means to cause sorrow of heart to the Holy Spirit living in us.

Part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to speak to us about those things which grieve Him, with the aim of bringing us to repentance and victory and ultimately to make us more like Jesus. Can you pray when you are angry? You need to. God will hear you if you are seeking His help. Can you read your Bible? Can you have fellowship with other believers? Don't let your anger prevent you from doing these things which will help you most of all.

over-correcting or being over-demanding. He needs to be fair with them even if someone has possibly been unfair with him. Children learn from their parents.

Anger may be triggered by an event or a provocation. We tend to become angry when we think **our rights are not being recognised**. You can hear it in siblings. 'She took my clothes without asking me.' 'He put his stuff over here on my side.' Usually those remarks are followed by clothes being dumped anywhere and everywhere.

It can happen in an office also. 'What do you think you're doing? You've got no business doing that, it's my job. That's my car space. That's my desk, that's my area. Get out of there.' Anger can boil over very quickly in such situations and the results can be long lasting. **Bitterness is often anger which has never been dealt with** and is fuelled by continuing thoughts of the offender's misdeeds while we think we are the innocent party!

We tend to forget that anger can disrupt our lives, control our thoughts, ruin relationships, cause pain to our loved ones and others and bring on serious emotional problems. We forget also that it can give a negative impression to others about our own personality. If we are often angry, if we have a 'short fuse', it is time we stopped and looked at ourselves and the damage it is doing.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT ALL THIS?

How can we stop this tidal wave of anger which has taken over our culture and too often our own lives? What can a Christian person do to prevent being caught up in that wave? Christians are not exempt from this problem. How can we deal with difficult situations facing us on a daily basis? The insidious tentacles of anger reach out and devour all who cross its path. **Anger robs us of joy.** It can be is a destroyer of homes, relationships, churches and sometimes life itself.

One favourite place where Satan loves to stir the anger pot is on Sunday mornings when the whole family is rushing to get to church and Sunday school. Sometimes that rush period seems to bring out the worst in us. Instead of thinking of the joy and privilege of worship and somehow be trying to make that day different from the rest of the week, it is so easy to arrive at the church building with every member of the family out of sorts with everyone else.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ANGER?

HOW CAN WE DEFINE IT?

If we can define anger, pinpointing its features and recognising how it can start, we might begin to see how we can have victory over this prevalent problem. A dictionary says: 'Anger is extreme or passionate displeasure.' How would a psychologist define anger? 'A hostile emotional

Many things are involved in dealing with anger. **Forgiveness**, for example, is often needed. **Forgiving and forgetting** is the very best way to deal with a situation where you have been hurt. Remember – if you don't forget, you haven't actually forgiven. Showing love instead of anger may be a strong ingredient in seeking a solution. Think of the words of Proverbs 18:19: 'It is harder to win back the friendship of an offended brother, than it is to capture a fortified city.' (LVGB) Or these words: 'Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.' Colossians 3:13

And don't forget, in minor incidents which may provoke you, if you can **develop a good sense of humour** it really helps! You probably will laugh about it later, why not when it happens? 'People with good sense restrain their anger. They earn esteem by overlooking wrongs.' Proverbs 19:11(NLVB) or look at Proverbs 16:32: 'It is better to have self-control than to conquer a city'.

DEALING WITH PROLONGED ANGER

One of the first questions to be faced in dealing with continuing, inappropriate anger is to ask ourselves: '**Do I really want to change** or am I happy with periodically losing my temper, abusing people, or just getting it off my chest?' If we really are serious about dealing with the

to let everybody know how we are feeling at any given time.

But if anger is to be expressed openly, make sure it is **appropriate anger** and that it is expressed appropriately. It can be said that ‘this God-given emotion is to be used as a building tool, not a wrecking ball.’ Look also at the circumstances in which you have become angry. Is it the proper place or time to express your anger? Would it be better to wait until the other person might be in a more receptive mood? Expressing your anger may ‘get it off your chest’ but it could do more harm than good at that particular moment. In your anger you may say things badly or exaggerate the whole situation and say things that are permanently damaging.

MANAGING ANGER

The best way to handle anger is to ask God to help you have a victory over whatever it was that made you angry. Holding on to anger can lead to bitterness over a period of time. Some people remember every offence done to them or they may say ‘There’s a principle at stake.’ Many times it is pride not principle which is involved. It may not be easy to let your anger die, but in this you will have the help of the Holy Spirit if you ask Him for it. He is standing, waiting to be asked for His help in defusing the situation.

reaction against another person or situation always linked with personal displeasure.’ There are **many terms which describe the emotions that are contained in anger** – aggression, antagonism, impatience, resentment, bitterness, indignation, fury, jealousy, hostility, annoyance, rage. Sad to say, most of us are all too familiar with each of these. A pastor once said: ‘Anger is one of the two universal sins of mankind. Fear is the other.’ Perhaps we ought to add pride and greed to that list.

ANGER IS GIVEN TO US BY GOD

Anger is a God-given emotion, in the same way as love, compassion and fear have been given to us by God. But He has placed **clear restrictions** on each of these emotions. For example, in Ephesians 4:26, Paul used a quotation from Psalm 4:4: ‘Be angry but do not sin.’ The New Living Bible paraphrases those words: ‘Don’t sin by letting anger gain control over you.’ The Message adds: ‘Don’t stay angry. Don’t go to bed angry. Don’t give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life.’ It is obvious God has placed a definite limit on the use of anger.

ANGER MUST BE CONTROLLED

The terrible danger in this God-given emotion is that we can so easily lose control of it and it then becomes hostility and aggression, either verbally or physically. An example of this can be seen when **we are right in our position**

on a certain matter, but may be wrong in our attitude and in the way we express our opinion. An example of this may be seen in a group meeting. A member can lose his or her temper when what they say is not accepted by the other members. We need to be sure it is a right principle we are standing up for and not just our determination to control the situation. Men and women have left various groups or clubs, simply because they did not get their own way and became angry about it. It can arise between friends or even in a family situation, between husband and wife, or parents and children.

It is the opposite of 'speaking the truth in love'.

Anger is like the stone thrown into a pond. Its ripples affect many people around us. Or it can be like a pressure cooker. Annoyances, bitterness and envy can build up and then explode. Some people say: 'Well I just blow off then forget about it.' But the problem is that 'steam burns' and others can be deeply hurt by such behaviour. The hurt caused may remain for a long time.

Sometimes a person who is obviously very angry will say: 'I'm not angry. I just don't like the way things are being done.' Their actions belie their words. Proverbs 25:28 says: 'If you cannot control your anger, you are as helpless as a city without walls, open to attack'. (GNB)

and skin complaints or anxiety. It can cause accidents. An angry person may drive without realising where he/she is travelling. Repressing anger is not a real solution.

There are some people who show their anger by the '**silent treatment**'. It may not really be a form of repressed anger but it too can have deadly effects. The silence says: '**You are wrong** in what you did. **You have hurt me** deeply. **You know what you did**. I am innocent. You are guilty'. He or she will not speak but their silence is eloquent in a wrong way. It denies the other person the right of reply or to give an explanation. It is selfish and unfair and may cause serious division in a family, church or office. There is no love in that kind of treatment. Often it is directed at someone with whom we are intimately connected. We seem all too able to hurt the ones we love most or who love us the most. It is wrong to hurt them in this way.

Some people show anger by making hurtful, cutting comments with a smile on their face or by using strong sarcasm to belittle another person. All of this causes hurt and pain to others.

EXPRESSED ANGER

We may be more familiar with this aspect of anger than with the repressed anger. It is more obvious! Anger can be expressed in many ways, verbally, physically, or by a look or even a slammed door. It seems part of our culture now

WATCHING OUR REACTIONS

Provocation is something with which we are all very familiar. Our reaction to it will be an indication of how much the Holy Spirit has been able to develop in our lives that section of the fruit of the Spirit called 'self-control'. There is hope in this for all of us. Even a person who has been angry most of his or her life can **be transformed by the touch of the Holy Spirit** living in them. But let's look at how we handle our anger now and then think of what the Holy Spirit can do to help us. That is the ultimate secret in our victory over anger.

REPRESSING ANGER

Most people have difficulty handling anger. Many people have been taught from childhood that it is wrong to express anger openly. Consequently they **'repress'** it, or to use a colloquial term, they 'bottle it up' and try not to show it in any way. Sometimes a person who represses their anger will say: 'I never get angry'. Perhaps they ought to say: 'I will never admit that I am angry'.

But it is a dangerous habit to repress anger. Over a period of time it can lead to serious health problems or a situation which can be harmful either to the person concerned or to those with whom they work or live. Some psychiatrists suggest that repressed anger may cause headaches and hypertension, asthma

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT ANGER?

It is both surprising and challenging to see how much the Bible has to say about both **appropriate and inappropriate anger**. There are at least nine references in the Bible to when anger was appropriate or justified and properly displayed. In each case strong words were spoken or determined action taken. But there are even more references which speak against uncontrolled anger. Jesus himself said: 'You have heard it long ago, 'Do not murder.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement'. Matthew 5:21-22 (NIV)

God, Himself, becomes angry when His children disobey His direct word. But there are great differences between God's anger and most of the anger we display. God's anger comes out of His concern for His people. Often ours is because we don't get our own way. His is controlled anger, ours too often is uncontrolled. His is designed to correct, ours may be designed to destroy or to get revenge. God has said: 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.' Perhaps He said that because He is the only one who has sufficient control to keep it within bounds!

APPROPRIATE ANGER

There are many instances in the Bible where

appropriate anger was demonstrated. On several occasions it was when God's word and God's will were being disobeyed. At other times it was when God's nature and purposes were misunderstood or wrongly portrayed. **Jesus himself became angry** on a few occasions. When He saw a man in a church service that had a useless hand, (Mark 3:1-6) He noticed also the hard faces of those who were watching. They were opposed to Jesus healing the man on the Sabbath. We are told He became angry because of their lack of love and understanding of the true, loving nature of God and their 'holier than thou' attitude regarding the law.

Two well-known incidents in the life of Moses illustrate for us both justifiable and unjustifiable anger. While the Israelites were camped at Mt. Sinai, Moses went up to the top of the mountain to meet God. In his absence, the Israelites turned to idolatry (Exodus 32). As Moses came down the mountain, he had in his hands the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments. But at that very moment those commandments were already being broken. Verse 19 states that when Moses saw what the people were doing, he burned with anger. It was **justifiable anger**. Moses was a man of God providing leadership to God's people and in this context where there was clear disobedience to God's laws, Moses' anger was justifiable. Those are important words. The lesson for us to learn is that our own

life needs to be right with God before we begin to get angry on God's behalf with His people.

The number of occasions in our lifetime where we may experience justified or appropriate anger may be few and far between. If you see wrong being done to another person or group of people, you may feel led to speak out strongly against that injustice. In doing so you will need to be careful. Anger can be very near the surface of your feelings at the time. Seek help from an older Christian and seek the Lord's guidance. Don't act rashly. Make sure of your facts before becoming involved. Don't let your anger (or strong feelings) warp your judgement. Remember Jesus' example. His anger was always used on behalf of others, never for Himself.

WHEN ANGER IS WRONG

Moses also demonstrated **unjustified anger**. When God told him to speak to the rock so that desperately needed water would spring out, Moses went beyond what God commanded. He spoke roughly and even angrily to the Israelites (Numbers 20:9-11). God said: 'Speak to the rock.' But in his anger, Moses struck it twice. It would be easy to say that the people had provoked him, with their complaining but God did not excuse his actions, which were obviously done in anger. As a result, Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land.