

Are You Angry?

How to overcome
a spirit of anger (today)

By Larry A. Darby

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All scripture references are from the King James Bible.

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A Special Acknowledgement

God has used many people and resources to help me learn whatever I know about anger. I do not pretend that the material in this book is original. Anyone who studies anger from a biblical perspective will come to most of the same conclusions. Nevertheless, I want to especially acknowledge the message “Freedom from a Spirit of Anger” by Dr. S. M. Davis. The Lord brought that message into my life at just the right time – after preparing my heart to stop making excuses for my anger. You can order this tape/CD by calling 1 800 500 8853. It was one of the main tools that God used to grant me repentance in this vital area. Thanks to my wife who has helped me enormously with her patience and exhortations. Finally, special thanks to my three children for enduring my anger over the years and forgiving me.

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1. Getting Started

“Our little Bobby is so moody. Sometimes he’s clingy and other times he seems to withdraw into his own little world. And sometimes he has such terrible temper tantrums.”

“We don’t know what went wrong with our teenage daughter. She won’t listen to anything we say and rejects everything we’ve taught her. We’ve always gone to church, had family devotions and spent lots of time together, but now she’s turned into a rebel!”

“I know my husband thinks I’m a nag but it’s the only way I can get him to do anything. He seems so withdrawn from people. I wish he’d be more sociable.”

“Sometimes I feel like I’m about to explode. The littlest thing can tick me off. I love my wife and children dearly, but they constantly do things that make me angry.”

Hello. My name is Larry Darby and I had a *spirit of anger*. Though I’d had this spirit since I was a youngster, I only became aware of it in the last year, at the ripe-old age of fifty-one. I wrote this book because I thought you might be interested in what I’ve learned about this condition. Perhaps my experience will help you or someone you love to recognize and overcome a similar angry spirit.

God did many little things – and some not-so-little things – to help me recognize my angry spirit. Even though I was always aware of my occasional angry outburst, I was blind toward the many “silent” forms that my anger had taken. In hindsight, I see that my angry spirit affected my entire life: my thoughts, my attitudes, my words and my relationships. How could I be so blind to the effect it was having? Partly because anger is a master of disguises and it blinded me. It doesn’t always look like ANGER and is capable of much more subtlety than one would expect from its definition.

Anger, n. ang’ ger [Latin ango, to choke, strangle, vex; whence angor, vexation, anguish, the quinsy,

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angina...The primary sense is to press, squeeze, make narrow] ...1. **A violent passion** of the mind excited by a real or imagined injury; usually accompanied with a propensity to take vengeance or to obtain satisfaction from the offending party...¹ [*emphasis added*]

If you had known me the last twenty years, you probably would not have described me as an angry person. Unless you were in my immediate family, you probably would never have seen me lose my temper. My spirit of anger rarely looked like – or felt like – a “violent passion of the mind” as the dictionary defines anger. I rarely “lost it” altogether and prided myself on hiding my anger most of the time from the people who angered me. Many friends are surprised when I confess my anger today. They, like me, thought that a spirit of anger meant you “lose your temper” a lot.

Angry outbursts are a small part of the problem, like the tip of the iceberg. Overcoming an angry spirit is not about learning how to control your temper. It is about changing our inward response to the things that formerly angered us. Perhaps this book will be the instrument that God uses to help you or someone you love to recognize and overcome a spirit of anger.

Anger blinds people. Yes, it can be an ugly upheaval accompanied by violence, yelling and shattered saucers. But often it looks and feels quite different. It can be subtle, like teasing and cynicism and distrust. It can be quiet like withdrawal. An angry spirit can manifest itself as impatience, jealousy, fault-finding, score-keeping, complaining, a sharp tone of voice, gossip, evil speaking, and poor listening skills. Buried anger is the pressure that propels many “control freaks.” A spirit of anger is much more than losing your temper now and then.

Anger is so good at disguises that sometimes it even looks and feels like righteousness.

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- “Boy, I let that fellow have a piece of my mind. He’ll never do *that* again!”
- “Yeah, I lose my temper with my kids, but that’s the only way they listen to me! I’m doing it for their own good.”
- “It’s not fair what she did. Someone had to teach her a lesson!”

Although I occasionally admitted that I went too far with my anger, in my heart I *felt* that it was serving a useful purpose. And we live in a culture that teaches us to trust our feelings. Unfortunately, anger usually *feels* good. We feel right in retaliating against those who anger us. And sometimes anger seems effective. “Why would I want to give up something that has served me well?” Good question. The short answer is “you won’t.” That’s why I made so little effort (or progress) against my angry spirit for many years.

It is unlikely you will ever overcome anger while you think it has a useful purpose. And if you are a Christian, you will probably not overcome a spirit of anger while you think the Bible condones the use of anger.

Because anger takes many different forms this makes it harder to diagnose and overcome. But that’s okay! All my reader’s who are Christians know that “I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me.”² “All things” includes overcoming a life-long spirit of anger and the behavior patterns that help it thrive. Christians also believe that “there hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”³ God has provided a way for us to overcome the temptations that provoke us to anger and get rid of any angry spirit that has developed.

When God convicted me of my spirit of anger, and led me to a place of repentance, He also graciously gave me complete confidence in two things: His forgiveness, and victory.

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*“For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee”
(Psalms 86:5).*

*“...He that is in me is greater than he that is in the world”
(1 John 4:4).*

It has been six years since God delivered me from a spirit of anger, and I can testify confidently that the deliverance was real.

If you have a problem with anger, then read on and let me tell you what I have learned, and am still learning. If you do have a spirit of anger, I can show you from the Bible, and from personal experience, how to overcome it. Victory over an angry spirit will transform your life.

In case you haven't noticed, this book is written from a Christian perspective. I have been a follower of Jesus Christ since 1986. For those of you who do not follow Him, may I urge you to read the Bible and learn about Jesus Christ? Christianity is about Him, not about what you've experienced of "church." May I also urge you not to read books *about* the Bible? Go instead to the very words that God chose to reveal His Son to ordinary people like you and me. The Bible is God's word though it was written by many men over many years. It will show you clearly what His Son Jesus is like, what he did on that bloody cross, and what it means to follow him. Read the Bible for yourself and you will see that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). If you lack faith in Jesus Christ, read and hear the words by which faith comes, the words of the Bible.

*“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him,
If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;
And ye shall know the truth,
and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32).*

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2. "Oh sure, I lose my temper occasionally, but..."

Friend: "Larry, do you have a problem with anger?"
Larry: "No, not really. Oh, sure, I lose my temper occasionally like everyone else, but not very often, and usually it's for a good reason..."

That's where I was until this year. Sure, I occasionally lost my temper (hard to deny those offensive outbursts!) but after all, doesn't everybody? Besides, if I had to guess how many times it happened, it was probably only once every few months. That's not too bad, right? After all, this stressful world contains many things that provoke us to anger, right?

Yes, I only lost my temper on average one day out of maybe sixty, but what about the other fifty nine days? Did I become a different person on the days that I did not raise my voice? No. Did the people who had experienced my angry words forget about it on the days that my anger was dormant? No. Every day I was the same Larry Darby, with the same spirit of anger. Every day my family knew that with the right provocation, that sharp edge would come back in my voice, the volume would increase, and cruel words might flow. People living next to a volcano do not forget. They stay on guard.

I *always* had a spirit of anger. It just looked different on those days that I did not lose my temper or raise my voice. About every two months it followed the dictionary definition ("a violent passion of the mind...") and the other days it had a different appearance:

- Sometimes it looked like a **sharp tone of voice** ("Could you PLEASE pay attention to what I'm saying!")
- Sometimes it looked like **impatience** ("Why can't you ever be on time?")
- Sometimes it looked like **withdrawal** ("I don't have to put up with this...who needs him?!")

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- Sometimes it looked like **cynicism** (“They’re all a bunch of crooks!”)
- Sometimes it looked like **distrust** (“He said he’d call me for lunch, but I’m not holding my breath.”)
- Sometimes it looked like **a judgmental attitude and evil speaking** (“She runs to the doctor for every little pain!”)
- Sometimes it looked like **complaining** (“I always get in the slowest line!”)
- Sometimes it looked like **teasing** (“Oh, she’s got a great memory...it’s just SHORT!”)
- Sometimes it looked like **sarcasm** (“Honey, the oven works better when you turn it on.”)
- Sometimes it looked like **a controlling personality** (“That’s not the way I told you to do it!”)

And many days my spirit of anger never made it into words. I was just *thinking* bitter or judgmental things toward people. There are many forms of “silent anger.”

The dictionary says that anger is “a violent passion of the mind excited by a real or imagined injury...” One would think that this would be easy to recognize but anger often goes underground and has a delayed effect. That’s where a “spirit of anger” comes in. A *spirit of anger* is like the residue of anger left over after the initial provocation. This spirit becomes a filter through which *everything* gets processed. It affects how we see things, interpret them, and react. That rude and reckless driver has a far different effect on angry-spirited Adam than on non-angry Andrew. Bobby can be kept waiting twenty minutes with no ill-effect, while Billy is tempted with many angry and bitter thoughts. A spirit of anger is a lot more than the occasional angry outburst that we all recognize.

Let us consider Charlie and his mother-in-law. Let’s say that in the past the mother-in-law did some things that hurt Charlie. For example, she opposed his plans to home school his children, trying to turn her daughter, Charlie’s wife, against it. Let us further pretend that these injuries were never resolved.

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The mother-in-law eventually stopped opposing the home schooling, but Charlie never forgot what she had *tried* to do.

Charlie has a spirit of anger toward his mother-in-law. He may have never lost his temper toward her, and maybe never will, but his underlying spirit of anger still affects every aspect of their relationship. For example,

- Do you think Charlie will ever ask his mother-in-law for help, thus allowing her of pleasure of being helpful? Not likely.
- Do you think he will confide any problems to her that he is having with the children, thus enlisting her support and allowing her to feel a part of the family? Not likely.
- Do you think Charlie is ever likely to communicate on more than a superficial level to his mother-in-law...talk about important things that real relationships are built on? Not likely.
- Do you think he will do things to *prove* the rightness of home schooling, and thereby prove how wrong she was to oppose it? Yes. And do you think that such an agenda might affect his children and his wife, causing unnecessary stress and diminishing the family's peace and joy? Yes.
- Do you think Charlie will be extra-sensitive to every fault of his mother-in-law, since each one confirms that she is the kind of person who would try to turn a man's wife against him? Yes.
- Do you think that Charlie might, when tempers flare with his wife, look for ways to compare her to his mother-in-law ("You're just like your mother!") thereby putting additional strain on *that* relationship? Yes, I think so too.
- Do you think that even the nice things that the mother-in-law does for her grandchildren will get interpreted (by Charlie) through a filter such as this: "Yeah, that's a nice thing to do but if she had had her way they'd all be worldlings in the local school."

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As in Charlie's case, a spirit of anger causes stress, diminishes peace and joy, separates people and inhibits intimacy. It casts long shadows.

Remember the definition of "anger" in Chapter 1: "A violent passion of the mind excited by a real or imagined injury..."? Notice the last words: "...excited by a real or imagined injury." This has been my experience also: wherever there is anger, there is ALWAYS some injury that provoked it. These injuries may be "real or imagined," but they always seem real to the injured person. And these injuries, if not resolved, lead to an angry spirit.

Consider Charlie again for a moment. His mother-in-law *hurt* him by trying to turn his wife against his home schooling plans. She *hurt* him by not supporting his plan. Maybe she has hurt him in other ways also. In Charlie's family, and many others, these injuries never got resolved. Is Charlie's mother-in-law the only person who has inflicted him with "real or imagined" injuries? Not likely. If Charlie is like most people, his spirit of anger has been fueled by many injuries from many different sources:

- A wife who sometimes seems more interested in clothes or magazines than in him...
- Kids who do not seem to appreciate what he does for them, or resist his authority...
- Friends who didn't call him to get together when they say they would...
- Other friends who never seem to ask him about the things that are important in his life...
- Brothers and sisters who do not care enough to acknowledge his birthday, even though he always sends them a card...
- A boss who plays favorites at work...
- A co-worker who tries to take credit for every success in the department...
- A neighbor who teases him, though Charlie will never admit how much it hurts...

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- Store clerks that act like they are doing him a favor...
- Traffic that always seems worse on the days that he has an important meeting...

Add up all those injuries over a ten, twenty, thirty or fifty year period and what do you think you have? A lot of pain for sure. And if that pain is not resolved, it also adds up to an-always-present-but-often-invisible *spirit of anger*. And unless Charlie gets rid of this anger, and changes the way he responds to future injuries, it will only get worse.

We live in a world that is full of injuries, real and imagined. Since the Garden of Eden, pain, suffering and hurt is a normal part of everyday life. Even the people we love hurt us in many ways. No wonder we live in a world that is full of anger.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; (Genesis 3:17)

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3. What About Counting to Ten?

Counting to ten is a popular anger management technique and there is an example of something similar in the Bible. There was a king named Ahasuerus who had great wealth and power. In fact, he had so much wealth that it took him one hundred eighty days to show it off! Here is the story from Esther 1 where we see him controlling his temper.

In the third year of his reign, he [Ahasuerus] made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him: When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days [180 days]. And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace; Where were white, green, and blue, hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble...On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to show the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on. But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.

Anger is excited by a “real or imagined injury.” What was the injury that provoked this king to anger? Wounded pride? Probably. Embarrassment? Quite likely. The thought that his wife was ungrateful for whatever he had done for her?

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Perhaps. Throughout history, such injuries have provoked many men to anger. And since this was a king with almost unlimited power, his anger could retaliate in whatever way he desired.

But Ahasuerus was no ordinary king. He had learned to control his anger, at least outwardly. And for that reason he provides an example that we would do well to follow. Let us continue the story.

Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, (for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment)... What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains [officers]?

Notice that even in his anger, Ahasuerus had the good sense to seek advice before acting. Anger will try to get you to respond quickly to any injury, so anything we do to postpone our response is helpful. The Bible says “the discretion of a man defers his anger...”⁴ Ahasuerus deferred his anger by seeking wise counsel and we can do the same thing, even though we do not have seven wise men following us around. When we who follow the Lord Jesus Christ are tempted to anger, we can PRAY!

God is always willing and able to hear our plea for help, and guide us through any difficult circumstance, including the injuries that provoke us to anger. It does not have to be a long, formal petition. A swift supplication will usually be sufficient: “Lord, help me right now to control my temper so that I don’t say something that I’ll regret.”

*Is any among you afflicted? let him **pray**... (James 5:13)*

*And **call upon me** in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. (Psalms 50:15)*

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*Then **they cried** unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. (Psalms 107:13)*

*Watch and **pray**, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Matthew 26:41)*

Later in Ahasuerus' life there is another example where he showed similar self-control in the midst of anger. He had a counselor named Haman who wanted to kill all the Jews in the empire. (By the way, Haman wanted to do this because he was angry at one Jew who refused to give him the respect that he thought he deserved. Such is the cruel fruit of anger!) Haman had already convinced King Ahasuerus that the Jews were a threat to his kingdom, and promised a big payment for permission to slaughter them. Neither man knew that Esther, the king's wife who replaced rebellious Vashti, was also a Jew. Esther invites both men to a banquet in which she plans to intercede for herself and her fellow Jews. Here is the story from Esther 7.

So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom. Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favor in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail [make up for] the king's damage. Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst [dares] presume in his heart to do so? And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was

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*afraid before the king and the queen. **And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden...***

What a wonderful example of temperance. Here is the mightiest ruler on earth, finding out his trusted counselor has deceived him and plotted to kill the people of his beloved wife, and he goes into the garden to think about it! We could do a lot worse, and I don't know about you, but I *have* done a lot worse!

We all have the ability to control our temper:

- What happens when we are yelling at our child, or spouse, and the doorbell rings? Haven't we all demonstrated the ability to "turn it off" and have a smile on our face by the time we greet the unexpected visitor?
- When our boss tells us about some change in policy that will mean less money in our pocket, do we not control whatever temptation we might have to ventilate our frustration?
- Someone steps on your ankle in a crowd and you angrily turn around. How quickly can you squash that temper when you discover it is someone you know, or someone who looks like he escaped from the State penitentiary?

Like Ahasuerus, we *can* control our angry outbursts. But most of the time we do not want to control them. Why not? Because anger feels right and it offers the false promise that it will take away the pain of the injury. It also blinds us to its destructive side-effects.

On the other hand, counting to ten does not solve a spirit of anger. It may control the brawls and broken bowls, but if the hurt is not resolved, the anger goes underground where it becomes bitterness. This bitterness might take many forms and may become a "spirit of anger," affecting us long after the original injuries are past. As the underlying spirit of anger grows, more and more effort will be required to control the

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outward outbursts and more and more things will set off our temper.

Jim's boss does something really stupid or unfair. He is hurt and anger arises in his heart but he successfully controls the temptation to say what he is thinking. Does Jim's anger disappear or does it go underground? Here are some signs that it has gone underground where it fuels an angry spirit:

- **Complaining** (Does he join with other disgruntled employees for a gripe session?)
- **Retaliation/vengeance** (Does he work less hard because the company is treating him unfairly? Does he bad-mouth the company to other people? Many disgruntled employees are rude to customers to retaliate against their employer.)
- **Cynicism or distrust** (Does Jim begin to have more and more thoughts such as "How are they going to take advantage of us now?")
- **Withdrawal** (Does Jim stop making good suggestions, or working to help the company overcome its weaknesses? "They don't care about me and I don't care about them!")

Even though there was no angry outburst, there is a lot of anger in the above situation. Jim never lost his temper, but the anger did not go away; it just went underground. Once a spirit of anger develops on the job, it robs us of much of the pleasure we could have received from that activity. Loss of joy is one of the main consequences of a spirit of anger, and also a strong proof that such a spirit exists.

Here is another example. Let us say your husband does something really thoughtless or unkind. These things *hurt* you and you feel the anger rising, but because the kids are around, you resist the temptation to say anything. Does your anger disappear or does it go underground? Here are some signs that it has gone underground where it is fueling an angry spirit:

- **Complaining or evil speaking** (Do you tell your friends or mother what your husband has done? Do you nag your husband as a way to ventilate your frustration toward him?)

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- **Judgmental thoughts** (Do you find yourself rehearsing the wrong he has done over and over in your mind? Do you think about all the things that you wish you had said to him?)
- **Cynicism or distrust** (The next time that your husband says he will do such-and-such, do you think something like “Yeah, sure!”? If your husband does apologize, do you doubt his sincerity?)
- **Withdrawal** (Do you give him the cold shoulder? Do you become moody? Do you give one word answers to the questions he asks for the next few days?)

These are all signs of a *spirit of anger*. Even though there was no angry outburst, the anger did not go away. It went underground and it will diminish your peace and joy.

A spirit of anger goes far beyond the occasional angry outburst. A lot of anger is underground, and no longer looks or feels like a “violent passion of the mind.” Before I made any real progress against my anger, I had to come to the place of repentance, not just against the occasional outbursts, but against my underlying angry spirit. I had to admit that I was sinning even when I did not raise my voice or say hurtful words. I had to admit that my resentment toward those who hurt me was sinful. Until we repent of our angry spirit, our efforts to control the outward displays of anger will meet only minor success. Fortunately, we have a God who is willing and able to grant us the complete repentance that we need.

When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. (Acts 11:18)

Once repentance occurs, victory is virtually assured. Yes, it will take time to heal old wounds and damaged relationships. Yes, it will take time to change the way we respond to future injuries and hurts. Yes, we will still lose our temper from time to time. But I can tell you from personal

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experience that wounds do heal and old habits can change. Things that used to provoke anger can be handled another way. I have seen many miracles in my life since I repented of my angry spirit, and so have my wife and children.

Before my repentance, I made some slight progress against my angry outbursts by counting to ten, or walking out of the room, or locking the door to my office when I felt in a particularly volatile mood. Were these efforts better than an angry outburst? My answer today would be “yes” and “no”:

- Yes, they were better because I did not say many nasty things that I might have said if I had not counted to ten, walked out of the room, or locked my door. For that I am thankful. I already said enough hurtful words and I am glad that I did not speak more. The Bible says that “the discretion of a man defers [delays] his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.”⁵ I am glad for the times that I deferred my anger by keeping silent. But if truth be told, I *never* really “passed over the transgression”; it just went underground. If I had really passed over the transgression, it would not have led to bitter thoughts, complaining, withdrawal, and all the other manifestations of an angry spirit.
- On the other hand, my efforts at self-control were not helpful because they gave me a false notion that I was solving the real problem. The fact that I was able to train myself to avoid some of my offensive outbursts, and not speak some of my angry thoughts, led me to think that I was making real progress, and that I had avoided sin. I was ignoring the angry spirit and the unkind *thoughts* that God was certainly able to see.

*And the Spirit of the LORD fell upon me, and said unto me, Speak; Thus saith the LORD; Thus have ye said, O house of Israel: **for I know the things that come into your mind, every one of them.** (Ezekiel 11:5)*

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*But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, **but the LORD looks on the heart.** (1 Samuel 16:7)*

*And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: **for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands all the imaginations of the thoughts:** if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever. (1 Chronicles 28:9)*

So for me, counting to ten – or walking out of the room – or locking the door to my office -- was actually a hindrance to real progress. It helped blind me to the internal spirit of anger that existed even when I did not say a word. It kept me from recognizing the other forms that my anger was taking: bitterness, withdrawal, sharp tone of voice, score-keeping, impatience, distrust, cynicism, judgmental thoughts, gossip, fault-finding, complaining, a controlling personality, and so on.

I was not yet ready to repent of the internal bitterness that I felt toward those who had hurt me. I did not want to admit the simple truth that Jesus taught in Matthew 15: “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man.” My heart needed to be right, and I was only willing to deal with my mouth. My anger had blinded me to its various forms. I think it blinds most of its users. Like me, they are focused on controlling the occasional outburst of temper instead of addressing the underlying angry spirit.

*He that covers his sins shall not prosper:
but whoso confesses and forsakes them
shall have mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)*

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4. Anger Blinds

I was unaware of my spirit of anger for many years even though (in hindsight) it clearly affected every aspect of my life. Since I only lost my temper occasionally, when someone “really” provoked me, I thought the problem was just a matter of getting those occasional outbursts under better control.

Anger blinded me for many years. Once it goes underground as a *spirit of anger*, it takes many forms that do not look or sound or feel very violent. My angry spirit often looked like:

- **Impatience** (“Didn’t I tell you to be ready by five o’clock?”)
- **Cynicism** (“I don’t trust any of those politicians. They’re all crooks.”)
- **Distrust** of other people and their motives (“He said he would call me for lunch, but I’m not going to hold my breath.” “It’s best to expect the worst; then you won’t be disappointed.”)
- **A judgmental attitude** (“Can you believe he went to Bible college and doesn’t even know that?!” “I can’t believe that person is drinking a 32 ounce soda...look at that stomach!” “She goes to the doctor for every little pain!”)
- **Complaining** (An angry spirit leads us to focus on the injuries of life because few of those injuries are being resolved.)
- **Fault-finding and score-keeping**: (“This is the *third* time you’ve left the oven on this month ...”)
- **Teasing and sarcasm** (It may look harmless, but most teasing is a form of retaliation for prior hurts.)
- A **tone of voice** that often had an *edge* even when communicating simple instructions (“No, you don’t put it in *that* way. Turn it around it put it in *this* way. Can’t you see how this one is done?”)

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- **Withdrawal.** (I avoided the people who had angered me and stopped making any effort to stay in touch. My attitude was “Who needs him!”)
- **Controlling personality** (It was only this last year that I realized that my controlling personality was an effort to reduce the injuries that had fueled my spirit of anger.)

Perhaps you recognize some of these conditions in yourself or in people you love. If so, I urge you to consider the possibility of a spirit of anger. The person with this spirit of anger probably does not recognize it, and when it is brought to his or her attention, he or she may strenuously deny it. (“I am NOT angry!!!”) That’s how I was for many years. It still requires effort to admit when I am angry:

Me: “Can you believe what he did!...blah...blah...blah”
My wife: “Yes, I see what you mean. Does it make you angry?”
Me: “Oh, no, I’m not angry.”
My wife: <Silence>.
Me: “Yeah, you’re right. I am angry. Thanks for pointing that out.”

Anger blinds parents

Anger also blinds parents into thinking that it is a helpful tool in child discipline. The child forgets to close the door *AGAIN* and we think that our angry words will solve her negligence. Or, our youngster hits another child and we yell to stop it from happening again. We think that commands given at a higher volume (or with strong emotion) will work better than words spoken in a normal tone of voice. Mom thinks it is natural to raise her voice when her children misbehave:

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Slightly raised voice:	“Billy, you and Becky stop that bickering.” <no effect>
Slightly higher voice:	“I said, stop that bickering NOW!” <still no effect>
Yelling angrily:	“If you don’t stop right now, you’re really going to get it!!!” <they stop bickering>

To the casual observation, it looks like anger “worked” for Mom in this situation. Right? When Mom spoke in a normal tone of voice, nothing happened. When she raised her voice a little, nothing happened. When she finally got good-and-angry, ready to throttle her rebellious rascals, they obeyed. But anger has blinded Mom to the truth. Anger did not get the results she wanted, it actually gave her the results she did not want. Mom had used her anger in the past to train the kids not to obey her until they saw her anger. They knew that she did not really mean what she said until she spoke angrily. Mom had trained them to give her the results (disobedience) that were driving her crazy. And like a drug addict, Mom needs a “fix” of anger before bringing herself to do the unpleasant task of enforcing her command. Anger blinds.

Can parents really train kids to respond to commandments spoken in a normal tone of voice, the first time? Certainly. Many parents have achieved that result without the use of anger. The principle is simple: consistently give out undesirable consequences every single time they do not respond to the first soft-spoken command. Train them to believe that they will receive unpleasant consequences BEFORE any anger arises, and you will get the results you desire BEFORE you use any anger.

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Normal tone of voice:	"Billy, you and Becky stop that bickering." <no effect>
Normal tone of voice:	"Okay, come on in for your spanking."
Apologetic voices:	"Mom, we'll stop..."
Normal tone of voice:	"That's great, I know you'll stop. But you didn't obey me the first time. Now, where did I put that paddle?"
Apologetic voices:	"We're sorry Mom..."
Normal tone of voice:	"That's nice. I'm glad you're sorry and I forgive you. Now let's get on with this spanking..."

Imagine doing something like that consistently, every single time your children disobey or ignore your first command. Do you doubt that it will work within a few weeks? Try it and see for yourself. Yes, it will take extra effort for awhile, but isn't that a small price to pay to obtain "first-time obedience" from then on?

If you think that your anger is necessary with your kids I urge you to perform this simple experiment. Right now your kids only believe that you mean what you say when you get angry. Do it differently for thirty days. Have a meeting in which you announce that from now on, an immediate, firm spanking will be cheerfully meted out every single time they do not come when you call *the first time*, every single time they do not stop whatever you tell them to stop *the first time*, every single time they do not do what you say, *the first time*. Then do it without any anger and with absolute consistency. Never give in. Never give a break, even if they say they did not hear you. And each time you spank them, do it firmly with a smile. Execute discipline with the dignity of an empress. Trust the Bible and

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“chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.”⁶

Anger also blinds us parents to the side-effects that it has upon our children. When our children are young, those side-effects are easy to overlook. We raise our voice, the kids stop what we want to stop, and life goes on. Our anger seems to roll quickly off their back, leaving no scar. If we really lose our temper, we say “we’re sorry” and the child seems to forgive and forget. But over time we notice some disturbing behaviors in our children and wonder where they came from:

- Pouting
- Whining
- Clinging
- Withdrawal
- Complaining
- Hitting other children

Some people will suggest that these are inevitable phases of child development, but do not believe that. You really can have children who are happy, secure and cooperative. Pouting, whining and withdrawal are symptoms of a spirit-of-anger-under-construction. Your anger may not seem to anger your children, but it does. Anger begets anger and stirs up strife, but with young children that anger and strife usually goes underground. Your four-year-old cannot respond to your anger the way she sees you respond to your spouse’s anger. She may have tried that once, and she didn’t like the consequences!

Unfortunately, we parents ignore the “early signs” of our children’s angry spirit. We learn to put up with the pouting. We learn ways to contain the complaining. We may even learn to like the clinging and the periods of sullen withdrawal. We convince ourselves that they will grow out of these unpleasant behaviors and life goes on...and on...and on. “They’ll grow out of it,” we convince ourselves. And they do. They grow into rebellious teenagers.

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Rebellion is a teenager's most effective expression of anger. All the other stuff – the pouting, the complaining, the whining, the moodiness, the clinging, the withdrawal, the hitting other children – that was all kids stuff. Now they are were old enough to retaliate for all the pain caused by our anger over the years, and most angry children do that by rebellion.

This rebellion may be defiant (“You can’t tell me what to do!!”) or passive (“I forgot you wanted me home by ten.”). If your children are in any kind of rebellion, please believe that it comes from their spirit of anger. And guess where they got it from? Yes, from their angry mother or father or both. Our anger blinded us to what was going on all those years.

Parental anger is the leading cause of teenage rebellion. This parental anger may be directed at the child or it may be directed at the spouse. For example, many rebellious children arise in homes where Mom does not submit to Dad’s leadership, or where other anger exists between husband and wife. Those years of nagging, bitterness and shouting have far-reaching consequences on our children, but anger blinds us to what is going on.

The Bible says that “the rod of his anger shall fail,”⁷ the discipline that we do in anger will not have the results we desire. The Bible also says “the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God,”⁸ but anger blinds us into thinking otherwise. Because anger usually coerces outward compliance when our children, it blinds us to the end result which is often rebellion.

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5. Anger Blinds, Part Two

There is a story in the Bible that demonstrates how anger blinds. Near the end of Jesus' life he was travelling toward Jerusalem. A crowd of people accompanied him and he sent some of them ahead to a particular village to find a place to stay. The people in that village did not want to receive Jesus. We pick up the story in Luke 9.

And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?⁹ But he [Jesus] turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.

Can you picture yourself in that situation as James or John? I can. The people in this village refused to accept Jesus after all he had done! "They deserve to be punished, by golly, and I know just the right punishment: fire from heaven to destroy them all! What do you say, Jesus? Do we have your okay to get this fire falling?"

We do not know the tone of voice that James and John used, but if I were in that situation, I would have used a righteous tone of voice. I would have made it sound like I wasn't angry for my own sake...oh, no! "I don't want to torch this town because they inconvenienced *me*, or made *me* feel foolish or rejected. No, I am just concerned about the welfare and honor of my leader Jesus. I just want to teach everyone a lesson so they give Jesus the honor that he deserves."

James and John did not know what spirit was controlling them. Anger can blind us by appearing righteous! Here were two men— followers of Jesus – eager to destroy an entire village of men, women and children, and feeling right about it! (They made no effort to hide their vengeful thoughts!) They did not recognize the spirit that was governing them. Have you ever

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been blinded by the apparent righteousness of your anger? I have.

Notice how gently Jesus handles James and John. His words (“You don’t know what manner of spirit you are of”) are not angry words, but they are words that are able to help these two men see what was really going on. Jesus practices what the Bible says: “a soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.”¹⁰ We’ll talk more about that later.

The things I did from an angry spirit often looked and felt righteous. No wonder I did not think I had a big problem, or one that really required repentance!

- “She’s got to learn to be less careless!”
- “You can’t be too harsh with a false teacher! He’s destroying souls!”
- “How else is she going to learn to be on time?”
- “I tried to be patient, but that didn’t work!”

And does not history teach us that people can justify horribly hateful things in the name of righteousness?

- “We’ve got to torture these heretics to get them to recant so they don’t go to hell!”
- “If we don’t burn them, they’ll infect other people with their heresy!”
- “I killed those villagers because they were helping the Vietcong who slaughter many innocent people!”
- “Allah demands that we kill these infidels!”

Before we leave the story of James and John, please notice the solution Jesus had for the fact that this village would not receive them: “They went to another village.” Isn’t he amazing! “They went to another village.” The Bible is full of stories like that. Read it for yourself and you’ll see why Jesus is someone you want to follow.

*All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes;
but the LORD weighs the spirits. (Proverbs 16:2)*

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6. Anger Blinds, Part Three

Most Christians are familiar with the story of David and Bathsheba. David was the King of Israel and Bathsheba was the beautiful wife of one of his generals. One day, while his general is away at war, David sees her taking a bath from the roof of his house. He invites her into his house, gets her pregnant and then tries to hide the problem by inviting the husband to come back home. When that plan fails, he devises another plan to have the husband killed in battle. After the husband dies, David marries the pregnant widow. After the baby is born, God sends the prophet Nathan to confront David with his sin. Here is how Nathan handled this difficult task, as told in Second Samuel 12:

And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe [female] lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveler unto the rich man, and he spared [did not want] to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress [prepare] for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's anger was greatly kindled [heated, excited] against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD lives, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold [give four lambs to replace it], because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man....

- Notice David's reaction to Nathan's story: his anger was *greatly kindled* against the man who had taken another

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man's lamb. In fact, his anger was so greatly kindled that he was ready to have the man executed. Imagine how quickly we could empty the prisons with a judge like that!

- David's anger blinded him to right judgment. As the King of Israel, his duty was to execute the law of the land. That law, clearly stated in Exodus 22:1, says "if a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep." David's anger blinded him to justice, and led him to pervert God's law.
- Do you think David felt righteous as he was angrily pronouncing judgment against this greedy, insensitive man? Do you think he felt like his anger was justified since the rich man had been so selfish and the poor man needed someone to protect his interests? I sure would have felt that way if I was in David's shoes. "How dare the rich man be so mean! I'll teach him never to do that again!" Perhaps your anger has served you in a similar way by giving you a righteous excuse for the angry things you have done?
- David's anger blinded him to the fact that he had done exactly what the rich man in the story had done, only worse. Here he was pronouncing the death sentence against someone who had taken away a man's lamb, while he had taken away a man's wife and life. Anger blinds.

Forgive me for getting personal here, but anger may be serving a similar purpose in your life, and mine. I have no idea who is reading this chapter, so I'm certainly not making any specific judgments. But if you have a spirit of anger, consider the possibility that it is at least partially a covering for some unconfessed sin in your life. Is there anything you are doing that your conscience says is wrong? Are you continuing in *any* sin? If so, remember that God's word provides a way to get rid of the sins that we foolishly strive to cover and deny.

He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy. Happy is

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the man that fears alway: but he that hardens his heart shall fall into mischief. (Proverbs 28:13-14)

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:8-10)

Come unto me [Jesus], all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. (Luke 18:13)

All sins have a way of deceiving us, and anger can make that deception a lot more effective.

But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13)

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7. Anger Acts Foolishly

The Bible says that “he that is soon angry deals [acts] foolishly.”¹¹ Have you ever acted foolishly when you were soon angry? I have. In my anger, I often did stupid things. I did things that I immediately regretted. I did things that I wished I could take back. And I’ve often observed foolishness in other angry people.

For example, consider a woman who gets angry at her child at the supermarket. She raises her voice, the only effect of which is to draw everyone’s attention to her dilemma. The rebellious rascal continues defying her, increasing her embarrassment. She tries to grab the impudent imp but he slips away. Next comes the swat. Everyone is watching, secretly cheering for one party or the other. The yelling youngster dodges her aimless arm but the candy rack is not so fortunate. Angry and humiliated, she slips on one of the hapless Hersheys while lunging for her frightened Freddie. The onlookers have a hard time containing their laughter, even those who were rooting for her. He that is soon angry acts foolishly.

I have seen adult men ridicule their children while competing in a game or sport – all for a measly point in a game that does not mean a thing two minutes later! How foolish to think that our vision of the play was so much better than anyone else! How foolish to jeopardize a life-long relationship over the question of whether the ball was in or out, foul or fair, wide or not. He that is soon angry acts foolishly.

What foolish things have you done when you were soon angry? Have you ever accused your spouse or one of your children of some wrongdoing, only to find out they are innocent?

Me: “Greg, what did you do with my stapler!? Didn’t I tell you not to take it out of my office anymore?!!”
Greg: “I didn’t take it Dad. I think I saw it on your desk, under those papers.”
Me: “Oh....”

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I remember losing my temper at my garden hose. It was a sultry summer day when that perverse piece of plastic challenged me to a duel. I pulled on my end, but it remained ensnared upon a distant tree root. I angrily pulled harder. It became my appointed duty to avenge this act of defiance lest other garden gadgets become equally rebellious! The hose was never the same after that, and neither was my back. Imagine being so foolish as to think that I could punish a hose! Who did I think was going to pay for a new hose, or fix my aching back?

Have you ever broken things in your anger? Did it help solve the problem? “Oh, yes. When all the other toilet repair kits learned how I stomped the first one to pieces, they never gave me any trouble after that.” Yeah, sure. He that is soon angry acts foolishly.

There is a Bible story that illustrates how anger makes people act foolishly. It is about a man named Balaam who was going a way that God had forbidden. We pick up the story in Numbers 22.

And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass [donkey or burro], and went with the princes of Moab. And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he [Balaam] was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side. And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again. And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left.

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*And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? And Balaam said unto the ass, **Because thou hast mocked me:** I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I ever wont [prone] to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay.*

Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.

Here are some of the things I learn about anger from Balaam and his burro:

- Notice how Balaam justifies his anger because he thought his burro was “mocking him.” Have you ever been hurt by mocking? Remember that old line: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me!” That’s not true. Mocking hurts plenty. Why do some people get pleasure out of making other people look foolish? Consider the possibility that practical jokes, teasing, sarcasm and other forms of mockery are manifestations of anger. Intuitively, we know that. When our wife teases us about our choice of clothing, we sense that there is a “bite” behind her chuckle. When Cary co-worker plays that potent practical joke on us, we know he didn’t do it out of love. Were you ever mocked by other children when you were growing up? I was mocked for wearing glasses when I was only five or six years old; I also had a mild speech impediment. I was mocked for being a “crybaby.” Later I was mocked for being the “teacher’s pet.” It always hurt, but I learned to hide the hurt without resolving it. How about you?

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- Notice how Balaam's anger would have led him to kill his means of transportation if he had had a sword. Now, that would have solved the problem, right? "That dead donkey will never mock me again!" How soon before his sore feet would have outweighed the satisfaction of killing his bullheaded beast of burden? Not too long. Anger destroys valuable things, things that cost money to replace. It also destroys things that money can't replace, like relationships. You know it happens every day. Maybe you've even seen it happen in your own life.
- Balaam's anger caused him to act cruelly. Did you ever get angry at your dog for vomiting on the carpet? I have. I foolishly forgot that a sick animal can't wait for a convenient time to do such things. ("Uh, Master, when you have a free moment do you suppose you could take me outside because I feel this uncontrollable urge to purge that Purina I had for breakfast.")
- Balaam felt right about beating his mule for its rebellion, while blinded to the fact that he himself was in a far-more-serious rebellion against almighty God. The burro would not do what she was told, but Balaam was doing what God had forbidden. Does it remind you of King David (Chapter 6) who was ready to execute the man who took another man's lamb, while blind to the fact that he had taken another man's wife and life? Watch for how anger enables you to cover your own sins.
- Notice how Balaam's anger blinded him to something even more obvious: HIS BURRO WAS TALKING TO HIM! What a fool Balaam had become! He never noticed that he was having a conversation with a long-eared mammal! Balaam was a very greedy man and yet he overlooked the best money-making opportunity of the ancient world! Who wouldn't pay a shekel to see the world's only talking burro? Foolish, angry Balaam was ready to kill a golden goose!

Anger blinds people and causes them to act foolishly.

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8. Anger Overflows

In Proverbs 27:4, the Bible says that “wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous...” That word “outrageous” is translated from the Hebrew word “sheteph” (Strong’s 07858). It’s an interesting word, whose meaning comes forth when we look at other uses of the same Hebrew word. They are marked in boldface below:

*Job 38:25 Who hath divided a watercourse for the **overflowing** of waters, or a way for the lightning of thunder;*

*Psalm 32:6 For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in **the floods** of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.*

*Daniel 9:26 And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with **a flood**, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined.*

*Daniel 11:22 And with the arms of **a flood** shall they be overflowed from before him, and shall be broken; yea, also the prince of the covenant.*

*Nahum 1:8 But with **an overrunning flood** he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies.*

So, when the Bible tells us that anger is “outrageous,” it is outrageous like an overflowing flood. Have you noticed that anger is like that? That it is not controllable? That it rises quickly? That it damages everything that it encounters? That

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has been my experience. Floods often destroy houses and churches, and so does anger. Anger blinds us to its destructive power.

When we think we can control our anger and use it for good, that is like building neat little irrigation ditches below a dam that is about to break. It doesn't work. We won't make much progress against anger while we think that we can direct it toward some desirable goal. Unfortunately, it usually destroys a lot of valuable things before we see the folly of trying to manage it, and get to the place of true repentance.

Have you ever been cruel or outrageous when you were angry? I have. My child might leave his baseball glove out in the rain, or carelessly knock over a glass of milk. Both situations call for correction, but what starts out as a slightly angry correction soon overflows like a flood, especially if my slightly-angry correction encounters any resistance.

Slightly angry tone of voice:	"How many times do I have to tell you not to leave the stove on?!"
Defensive "it's not-that-big-of-deal" tone of voice:	"I didn't do it on purpose, Dad. I'm sorry."
More angry tone of voice:	"It doesn't matter if you did it on purpose! You could have burned down the whole house!"
More defensive:	"I said I was sorry!"
More angry:	"You don't sound very sorry, and that won't do much good if the house burns down."

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Even more defensive: “There was nothing around
the stove to catch on fire!
And it’s only the second
time I left it on!”

Really out of control: “No, it isn’t! It’s the fourth!
Let’s try to be honest,
okay? Maybe you don’t
care if the house burns
down, but I do! And you’d
better start caring...
...blah, blah, blah!!!”

Or consider the “road rage” that many of us have witnessed. Red vehicle cuts in front of blue vehicle, perhaps after tailgating it for awhile. Now the angry blue driver decides to teach reckless red roadster a lesson, risking life and limb to make his point. What makes a person willing to risk everything to “pay back” such an imagined injury? Anger. Anger that blinds. Anger that overflows like a flood. Anger that makes us act foolishly. It happens all the time.

Many people die because of anger and many more are hurt and alienated. The vast majority of murders are not committed by strangers, but by people who knew the victim well. They spent enough time together to anger one another and build up loads of bitterness, jealousy or hatred. Then the right spark led to an explosion.

Have you ever heard someone say “A little anger is useful. It gets people to take you seriously.”? I used to feel that way.

- “How else is that service clerk going to let me return this defective doo-hickey if I don’t threaten an ugly scene?”
- “How is my daughter ever going to learn to stop that irritating habit if I don’t yell a little?”

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Maybe you think you can control your anger and use it to accomplish some good purpose, but I've learned that I cannot. For me, it's just like the Bible says: wrath is cruel and anger is like an overflowing flood. I've said a lot of cruel things, and every one of them was in a moment of anger. I'd love to take every one of them back, but I can't. I said them, and they hurt people. Once the flood flows over the dam, the damage is "cooked in the cake." I *never* intended my anger to get out of hand. I *never* thought it would take me to the point where I spoke spitefully or said cruel things to people I love. But once I gave place to my anger, cruel and outrageous words often followed.

Have I apologized to my children and wife for my cruel and outrageous words? Yes, many times. Even before I acknowledged my spirit of anger, I would apologize for the times I "went too far" and said things that "I didn't mean."

- "Honey, I'm sorry I accused you of lying, that's not what I meant ..."
- "Daughter, I don't really think you're stupid. I should never have said that. Please forgive me."

It is good to apologize for the cruel and outrageous things we say in anger, and it is wonderful when our victims forgive us. But isn't it far better to refrain our lips in the first place? That will only happen when we really believe that anger is like an overflowing flood that we cannot control, and stop giving it a place in our life. We need to repent of the angry spirit that leads us to say cruel and outrageous words; only then will we get the offensive outbursts under control.

What is it that usually makes a trickle of anger become an overflowing flood? For me it is when the target of my anger resists my reproof and/or gives me back a little of what I am giving them. I dish out an ounce of anger, and they give me back an ounce and a half. Does that happen to you? Anger invites retaliation and has a way of multiplying. It begets more anger. That is one of the reasons that it often gets out of

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control, becoming cruel and outrageous, an overflowing flood. Your anger provokes the other person to anger, and before you know it things are out of control.

How bad is “wrath, strife and hatred”? Here is what the Bible says:

*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, **hatred, variance**, emulations, **wrath, strife**, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)*

9. A Bible Story About Anger

Once I discovered the anger in my life, I started noticing anger throughout the Bible. In fact, our family spent about a month studying every Bible story in which anger played a part, a wonderful exercise that I recommend for your family. If you have the Bible on a computer, do a word search on “wrath,” “wroth,” “anger,” “angry,” “fury,” and “furious” and it will pull up lots of great verses. I recommend starting with the ones that deal with human anger, and save God’s anger for later.

Many Bible characters, both the good and the bad, had a problem with anger. For example, you will find a lot of anger in the lives of Moses and Jacob. This, I think, is another proof that the Bible is not an ordinary religious book. God, the author, made no effort to cover up the faults of His people.

Here is a Bible story about two brothers in which anger played a leading role. For those of you not familiar with the story, Isaac is the father of two boys, Esau and Jacob. Though the boys are twins, Esau is the “firstborn,” and in those days that entitled him to something special out of the inheritance called the “birthright.” Some fathers would also give what is called a “blessing” to their children that could affect their descendents for many generations. Here is the story from Genesis 25.

And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob. And Jacob sod [cooked] pottage [soup or stew]: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint [tired, famished]: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom [red]. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright [his right as the older son to a larger share of the inheritance] And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright

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unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.

What are some possible injuries that could lead to anger in Esau and Jacob?

- How about the fact that both the father and mother had favorites? I am the parent of three children and I can testify that each of them is easily hurt by any semblance of parental favoritism.
- Is it possible that Jacob was hurt by the fact that Esau was a cunning hunter while he himself was a “plain man dwelling in tents”? Have you ever been hurt by your incompetence relative to other people?
- How about the fact that Jacob did not care enough for his brother to freely share his food when Esau was famished? Would you be hurt if your brother or sister treated you that way?
- How about the fact that Jacob took advantage of his brother’s hunger to acquire Esau’s birthright? Ouch!

There is no evidence that these injuries were resolved. Although there is no outward show of anger, unresolved injuries are a breeding ground for an angry spirit. We see this anger boiling over when Isaac later plans to give a special blessing to his favorite son Esau. Rebecca hears about the plan and helps her favorite son (Jacob) deceive Isaac by impersonating Esau in order to get the blessing for himself. Here is the part of the story where Isaac and Esau discover the deception.

And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed. And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father. And he said, Thy

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brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing. And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he [Esau] said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son? And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept...And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob...

The entire sad story is found in Genesis 27.

- Wives, does it hurt when your husband pursues a plan that you disagree with? How about if he does not even consult you first? How do you resolve that hurt? Does it lead to anger or bitterness? Do you sometimes work against your husband's plans?
- Husbands, how do you feel when you see your wife working against your agenda? Hurt? Angry? That has certainly been my experience.
- What about Jacob's lies? Would it hurt you to find out your son – or your brother – did that to you? Can anyone find a place in the story where Jacob apologized to his brother or his father? I cannot.
- And finally, how would you feel to be told that your "plain" younger brother was now made your lord, and that your descendents would be the servants to his descendents? After all, you are the cunning hunter. You are the favorite son of the father. This is not fair! Unresolved hurts lead to anger and that is what we find in Esau. He hated his brother and planned his murder.

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Did you notice something else: even though Esau had freely sold his birthright to Jacob, the way he remembered it was “Jacob took away my birthright.” Has your anger ever given you a selective memory? In an angry outburst, can you remember with perfect clarity how many times your spouse or child has done a particular wrong, but you can’t remember anything you did that contributed to the problem? In a moment of anger we discover that Esau remembered that earlier injury quite well. That’s what “bitterness” is all about and it is one of the fruits of a spirit of anger.

Jacob fled from Esau’s anger and stayed away for about twenty years. As far as we can tell, his mother Rebekah died by the time he returned. Anger separated Rebekah from her favorite son and it will separate you from the people you love.

*An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man
abounds in transgression. (Proverbs 29:22)*

10. Anger Overflows, Part Two

We have seen that the Bible describes anger as an overflowing flood. When a river starts rising, it seem to be under control while the dam or the levee holds. But once the dam breaks, everything changes quickly. There is no chance to “go back.” What seemed peaceful and calm one moment immediately becomes an overflowing flood. “Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous...”¹²

Add to this the fact that anger *blinds* and we have the recipe for disaster. Not only does it overflow quickly, but it blinds us to what is going on. For many years I thought that I could control my anger and use it to accomplish some good result. I was wrong.

Anger usually manifests itself with words. Some angry people may jump immediately to violence, but most of us use words, words that may be loud or cruel. And what effect do our angry words have on the person who injured us? Yes, they hurt them and provoke *them* to anger. Then they respond with angry words and that increases our hurt and anger. Anger often accelerates through words.

God knows our weaknesses, and warns us of the danger of speaking quickly.

*Wherefore [for that reason], my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, **slow to speak**, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God. (James 1:19-20)*

Being slow to speak will prevent a lot of wrath and anger, and once anger does get started, carefully chosen words can appease it.

Notice that James 1:19-20 also tells us that our wrath does not work the outcome that we desire: it does not produce righteousness. Anger lies when it says it will work some good result. Elsewhere the Bible says “the rod of his anger shall

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fail.”¹³ The discipline that we perform in anger will *fail*. It won't lead to the outcome that we want or expect.

One reason that anger overflows is because it begets more anger. Here is how the Bible says it.

A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. (Proverbs 15:1)

An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression. (Proverbs 29:22)

Have you experienced the truth of those verses? Have you noticed that angry words spoken to your spouse, your child or your co-worker stirs up their anger and cause strife? Likewise, have you noticed that “a furious man abounds in transgressions”? Here is an example from the Bible where that happened. Notice what provoked this man to commit these wrongs.

And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubims a huge host, with very many chariots and horsemen? yet, because thou didst rely on the LORD, he delivered them into thine hand...Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars. Then Asa was wroth [angry] with the seer, and put him in a prison house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. And Asa oppressed some of the people the same time. (2 Chronicles 16:7-10)

Anger is like an overflowing flood but because it is also blinding, many people think they can keep it from getting out of hand. That's where I was. I admitted that cruel words and

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shouting were wrong, but I thought I could eliminate them without addressing my underlying angry spirit. I gave anger a place in my heart and in my mind and tried to overcome the ugly side-effects. It did not succeed.

If you are struggling with anger, I urge you to repent of the underlying spirit of anger. Admit that you have not resolved the hurts that have fueled your angry spirit. Admit that it is sin to harbor bitter thoughts toward those who have hurt and angered you. Put it all away, just as God commands.

“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

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11. At Whom Are You Really Angry?

Imagine this scenario: You are flying to an important meeting and there is a delay that causes you to miss your connection. Maybe the problem is weather related. Maybe it is a mechanical difficulty. Maybe a bomb scare. Maybe (you suspect) the airline simply cancelled the flight because there were not enough passengers to make it profitable. After waiting in a long line, you are face-to-face with an airline clerk to re-route your itinerary.

She is not as friendly or apologetic as you would like and you are tempted to anger. Maybe you speak some words or use a tone of voice that provokes her to additional unfriendliness. Now you can almost feel the steam coming out of your ears!

At whom are you really angry?

- If bad weather caused the delay, who controls the weather? Only God. Could God have given you clear flying weather? Of course. "For with God, all things are possible." (Mark 10:27)
- If the delay was caused by an equipment failure, could God have prevented the problem altogether, or made sure the mechanic fixed it earlier? Of course. "For with God, nothing shall be impossible." (Luke 1:37)
- Likewise if it was a bomb scare, could God have prevented it, or delayed it to a time when it did not affect your travel plans? Yes. "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God." (Luke 18:27)
- Could God have fixed or prevented ANY problem that kept you from getting to your destination on time? Yes.

So at whom are we really angry when troubles or problems arise?

Or how about that accident you had in the parking lot. Yes, you probably could have prevented it if you had been more

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careful. But is it not also true that God could have prevented the accident despite your carelessness? Yes.

Of course we do not like to admit that we are angry at God. What folly to risk retribution by blaming the Almighty for the frustrations of life. But consider that since the Garden of Eden, we humans have been struggling with the fact that God is God, and we are not. He is the boss, and we are subordinates. He controls circumstances, and we cannot. He makes the rules, and we either follow the rules or suffer the consequences. And even when we follow the rules, God is not obligated to make things turn out the way we would like.

Let us review that familiar story in the Garden of Eden.

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eat thereof thou shalt surely die. (Genesis 2:16-17)

And unto Adam he [the LORD] said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. (Genesis 3:17-19)

It is often a struggle to accept what the theologians call the *sovereignty* of God. He created everything and gets to make the rules. He gets to decide the punishment for rule breaking. He does things according to His plan, the way He wants to do them, when He wants to do them.

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But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. (Psalms 115:3)

And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he [God] does according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay [stop] his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Daniel 4:35)

Part of the temptation that induced Eve to eat the forbidden fruit was this promise by the serpent: "For God does know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."¹⁴ We fallen people have been struggling with similar temptations ever since. We want to be like "gods" and control our destiny and our circumstances. Our efforts often fail and this leads to frustration. Frustration is an injury that often excites anger.

I remember a time that I was trying to light a candle on a birthday cake. Match after match went out. Something was wrong with the wick and my finger got singed. My frustration was so great that I think I might have screamed if there were not people in the next room waiting to sing Happy Birthday.

We can get frustrated in spiritual endeavors as well. For example, perhaps we pray for assistance in a certain situation and aid does not arrive as we expected, or when we desire. Or we just can't seem to make any progress against a particular besetting sin. Or God seems far away even though we think we are trying to draw near to Him. These frustrations can arouse anger that we often try to deny.

How can we overcome the anger that arises in our heart toward our Creator? One way is to remember this incredible promise that He has made for those times when circumstances hurt and anger us.

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And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

- That missed meeting? God plans to work it for your good.
- That broken lamp? God says it will work for your good.
- That accident in the parking lot? Look for ways that it will work together for your good.
- That painful word spoken by a loved one? It really can work together for your good.
- That rude salesclerk? All part of God's desire to do you good.

How do these things work together for good? I don't know. But since it is a promise of God we ought to believe it. In my life I have often seen "bad things" turn into "good things" so I have every reason to believe that it is also happening in all the other instances where I haven't yet seen the "how." I remind myself that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."¹⁵ If we saw and *knew* how these troubles were going to work for our good, where would *faith* come in?

Please consider the possibility that a lot of Christian anger arises because we have so little faith that all things work together for good to those who love God. We react angrily to many injuries before giving God a chance to show us how He will work it for our good. As our faith increases, the fuel for our angry spirit will decrease. How do we get more faith? "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."¹⁶

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. (Jeremiah 29:11)

12. Real or Imagined Injuries

Anger, we have seen, is defined as “a violent passion of the mind excited by real or imagined injuries...” Until I admitted that I was angry *because* I was hurt I made no progress against my angry spirit. I think it is important for everyone to recognize the injuries and the pain which lead to our anger. Consider the possibility that anger and its various by-products are ways we have chosen to communicate “I am hurt!”

Sometimes it is easy to spot the injury that provokes us to anger. For example, your child kicks the soccer ball in the living room and breaks your favorite lamp. You get angry and shout. The injury includes:

- The cost of a new lamp. Money doesn’t grow on trees, you know.
- The time spent cleaning up the mess (unless the puny punter is old enough to do it himself, in which case you still need to supervise his work so he doesn’t miss anything or cut himself on the broken glass).
- The insult to your authority: Parents understand that when our kids break the rules, it is usually a form of rebellion against us and our authority, and that hurts.

Sometimes the injury is more subtle, though equally real. For example, your husband continues to read the newspaper while you talk to him. You may be used to it by now, and take it for granted, but let’s be honest: it hurts to think that our husband gives more attention to Beetle Bailey than to his life-long mate.

Or how about this situation: Husband Harry comes home from work with some really interesting news from the office, looking forward to telling it to his wife. But when he walks through the door she is on the phone to one of her girl friends. She gives him a quick wave and continues talking...and talking...and talking. And then to add insult to injury, when she finally hangs up she starts talking about *her* day!

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Where is the injury? Harry had a plan and that plan was frustrated. Frustration hurts. He expected to walk through the door and have his wife eagerly listen to his news and it did not happen that way. "Hope deferred makes the heart sick..."¹⁷ Harry's pride is also wounded, and wounded pride is like any other injury: it can provoke us to anger. It really doesn't matter that his wife did not hurt him intentionally (though we who have lived with a spirit of anger wonder whether any of these injuries are really unintentional!) When it comes to anger, it really doesn't matter whether an injury is real or imagined. Either way, it hurts. Either way, Harry feels put down. It *feels* as though his wife prefers Tania to him. Unresolved hurts fuel a *spirit of anger* which can cause strife and diminish peace and joy.

Wife: (cheerfully, when she finally gets off the phone)
"Hi honey. How was work today?"

Harry: (withdrawn, pouting tone of voice) "Oh, fine."

Wife: (still cheerful, but suspecting something is wrong)
"Anything happen?"

Harry: (with sarcasm) "Nothing that's as interesting as talking to Tania."

Wife: (a little defensive) "Honey, I haven't spoken to Tania in weeks, and we had to work out the details on that field trip coming up this Friday. I couldn't just hang up as soon as you walked in the door, could I?"

Harry: (sarcasm rising): "Oh, of course not. We don't want anything to interfere with a field trip to the zoo!"

Wife: (getting angry at his sarcasm) "So the whole world is supposed to stop because you walk in the door...!!" Etc.)

Harry is communicating his hurt, but it does not seem that way. Like most men, he did not want to acknowledge that

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he was hurt and thereby appear weak and vulnerable. We men would rather lose our temper than appear weak or vulnerable. (In fact, most of us would prefer swallowing salamanders.) His sarcasm is retaliation for the hurt that he did not want to admit. The wife does not understand what is really going on, or if she does, she makes no effort to soothe his pain. Instead she responds to the pain she feels from his sarcasm and the angry cycle accelerates.

Retaliate or withdraw?

Eventually this husband may get to the point where he stops retaliating openly and instead withdraws from the pain. Withdrawal is an angry response even though it usually looks quite peaceful on the outside. It is a way we try to avoid the pain that is angering us. When Harry withdraws from his wife, there may not be any strife, but intimacy is broken as he stops caring about his wife's apparent indifference toward him. He stops wanting to share news with her. Withdrawal is a reliable symptom of a *spirit of anger*.

Withdrawal is born of anger. The shield of withdrawal enables Harry to avoid open strife until just-the-right provocation sets him off. If and when that happens, his wife will be surprised at the ferocity of his explosion!

I knew a couple where the husband went long periods of time without an angry word. Even though his wife seemed to nag and belittle him constantly, he never seemed to notice. Then his wife would do one little thing – the same thing that she has done twenty times before without effect – and he would jump all over her. She was shocked. “Can you believe he reacted so harshly to such a little thing?!” What she forgot is that his spirit of anger was festering all those other times while he used the shield of withdrawal to protect himself. Just because he was not responding to the other injuries did not mean they were painless. They hurt plenty, but he chose the weapon of withdrawal until he reached the tipping point.

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Sometimes anger takes the form of retaliation and other times it goes the way of withdrawal. And retaliation can take different forms. If you have a spirit of anger, do not be surprised if it does not fit some textbook model. Nevertheless, it will usually include some of these forms:

- Sharp-toned voice
- Angry or cruel words
- Physical violence such as throwing things or striking
- Withdrawal
- Teasing, sarcasm or mocking
- Judgmental thoughts which may or may not be verbalized
- Fault finding or score keeping
- Cynicism and distrust
- Impatience
- Evil speaking
- Rebellion
- Complaining
- Controlling personality

Your spirit of anger may look different from mine, but both arose from real or imagined injuries that were never resolved. Nobody likes to hurt. We want to stop the pain and keep it from happening again. Both retaliation and withdrawal offer that hope.

Admit the pain

Injuries hurt and we do not like to hurt. Let us admit that it usually hurts to admit we've been hurt, because it makes us vulnerable to a second helping. This is especially true when we admit the pain of teasing. Most of our parents taught us to "toughen up" when we showed our hurts.

When I was a young boy, I had a tendency to cry a lot. That stopped on the day that one of the neighbors called me a crybaby. The pain of being called a crybaby hurt more than whatever injury had provoked me to cry. My little eight-year-old-heart resolved never to cry again, and I pretty much kept that

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resolution. To this day, it takes a LOT of pain to bring tears to these callused eyes.

We do not like pain so we get angry instead. Anger is a way that we try to deny the pain, reduce it, or stop it from happening again. Who wants to feel the hurt of being called an ugly name? “No thanks,” we reply, “We’d rather retaliate.” Who wants to feel the hurt of thinking that your wife prefers her friends to you? “No, thanks,” we would reply if we were honest, “We’d rather withdraw or retaliate.” Who wants to feel the hurt of acknowledging that our kids do not really enjoy our company?” “No thanks,” we would reply if we were honest; “We’d rather withdraw by taking up a hobby which excludes them altogether.” Who wants to acknowledge all the daily hurts that we receive from family, friends, strangers and bosses? “Not I,” most of us reply. “It’s too painful. We’d rather get angry.”

No wonder there is so much anger in the world!

Acknowledging that I was angry *because* I was hurt was a vital step in overcoming my spirit of anger. Like most men, I did not want to admit that I was hurt. “No, that doesn’t bother me,” you could often hear me say. But I was fooling myself. Many things bothered me! And what bothered me about those things was that they *hurt*.

At the risk of paraphrasing one of our former presidents, you need to feel your own pain. If you have a spirit of anger, you need to admit that you’ve been hurt, and you’ve been hurt a *lot*. When you get to that point, you can resolve the hurts and pull the rug out from under your spirit of anger.

Hurts come our way almost every day. When God pronounced the curse on Adam for his sin, He said, “in sorrow shalt thou eat of it [the ground] all the days of thy life.” Life is full of sorrow and pain. Our hurts may be real or imagined. They may be intentional or accidental. They may be big or small. They may come from strangers or from loved ones. Admit that they hurt, for wherever there are unresolved hurts, anger has a breeding ground.

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Do this simple exercise. Write down two or three things that anger you. Be as specific as possible. And then see if you can identify the injury.

- For example, do you get angry when a truck changes lanes in front of you on the highway? Why? What is the hurt, the injury? That driver's lack of consideration? Fear? Pride?
- Are you angered when someone tells you a lie? Where is the injury? Does the deception communicate a lack of respect or lack of love? Does it hurt your pride?
- Does it anger you when your conversation-mate is looking around the room for someone better to talk to? Where is the hurt?
- Have you ever been angered when your kids "forgot" to do their chores? Why? Where is the injury and the hurt? How does it feel to realize that your son can remember all the Cardinal's batting averages but he can't remember to take the trash out two minutes after your request? Does it feel like lack of love? Lack of respect? Here is another possibility: does it hurt to realize that you failed to train him properly? Does it hurt to see our faults reflected in our children's behavior? After all, where did they learn those bad habits that irritate us so?

Anger, whether withdrawal or retaliation, helps us cover the pain and falsely promises to prevent it from happening again. When we admit that we are angry because we are hurt, we are on the road to overcoming an angry spirit.

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven...a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4)

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13. Does it Hurt?

Unresolved hurts, over time, give rise to a spirit of anger. Sometimes this spirit *looks* angry, like cruel words and shouting. Many more times it manifests itself quietly, like withdrawal, impatience, teasing, sarcasm, cynicism, a controlling personality, a judgmental attitude, complaining. These are various ways that we try to deal with the pain that gave rise to our spirit of anger.

It does not have to be that way. Injuries do not need to provoke anger or fuel an angry spirit. Hurts do not have to be the door to anger. The Bible says that “there is a time to every purpose under heaven...a time to weep, and a time to laugh.”¹⁸ When we are happy, we laugh. What should we do when we are hurt? Shouldn't that be the time to weep? Then why do we so often make it the time to get angry?

When we *are* hurt, isn't that the appropriate time to *be* hurt? Until I admitted that simple truth, I made no progress against my spirit of anger.

It is hard to admit we are hurt because it appears weak and makes us vulnerable. But Jesus Christ, the Son of God, allowed himself to be hurt, and he was no wimp.

He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as

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a sheep before her shearers is dumb [silent], so he opens not his mouth. (Isaiah 53:3-7)

Or consider what this Bible story can teach us about feeling our pain.

Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou had been here, my brother [Lazarus] had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! (John 11:32-36)

If you are familiar with this story of Lazarus, you remember that Jesus already knew he was going to raise him from the dead while he wept (see the rest of John 11, especially verses 4 and 23). So why weep? *Perhaps because it was the time to weep! Perhaps Jesus was showing us that its okay to feel hurt when pain and sorrow come our way.* It is okay to acknowledge and reveal our pain and sorrow. That sounds pretty simple, but I can tell you from personal experience that it was a HUGE step forward in my life. And my wife would tell you the same thing.

Anger has deceived us into thinking that when we are hurt, that is the time to be angry. Anger wants to become our preferred response to the injuries that come our way. But when we are hurt it is not supposed to be the time to get angry, or build up bitterness, or withdraw from the person who hurt us. It is first-of-all the time to *be* hurt. In some situations being hurt might involve tears, but it might also involve the simple communication of your pain: “Sally, that really hurt me.”

There is another Bible story that illustrates this point. Ezra was one of the God-fearing Jewish leaders after they

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returned to Jerusalem from captivity in Babylon. In Ezra 9 he discovers that the people had fallen into the same wicked deeds that had caused their earlier captivity. It was certainly something that could have provoked him to angry words of reproach and blame. But notice what he does instead:

And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished. [astonished] (Ezra 9:3)

Instead of getting angry, he allowed himself to feel the pain and he communicated it plainly to those around him. And notice what that pain led him to do.

Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat astonished until the evening sacrifice. And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness; and having rent my garment and my mantle, I fell upon my knees, and spread out my hands unto the LORD my God, And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. (Ezra 9:4-6)

When you are angry, how often do you remember to turn to God in prayer? Not often, right? But when we are hurt, and admit the pain, are we not much more likely to “cast our cares upon Him”?¹⁹

On the day that I wrote this chapter, I had an interesting experience that reminded me of the importance of acknowledging the hurts that excite us to anger. I was playing touch football with my three children. (Touch football means you just touch the person who has the ball). On a particular play, my oldest daughter, a strapping sixteen-year-old, plowed into me as I was passing the ball. She clobbered me between

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my cheek and my eye and I went down hard, not knowing what had hit me. Whatever it was, it was harder than my head. She was unhurt but I was in excruciating pain. While lying on the ground, temporarily blinded, several angry and sarcastic thoughts raced through my aching head, the kinds of thoughts that I have often uttered in my angry past. I came close to uttering them again but by the grace of God something else happened: I cried. Yeah, I admit it: I cried like a baby. I was down on all-fours sobbing some very real tears.

In my pain I remembered to pray, something I never remembered to do when I was angry. Pain is a marvelous prod to prayer. “And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.”²⁰ When we let ourselves feel the hurts that come our way, we recognize our frailty and are far more likely to go to the Lord for the help that we need.

To finish my touch football story, I was soon off the grass, hugged my daughter, and we all headed home. It was wonderful. No harsh words or bitter thoughts. The lesson I learned was well worth a bruised cheekbone. If only I had known this stuff ten years ago! How much less pain I would have inflicted on people I love! How much more joy and peace I would have experienced if I had let my hurts be hurts, instead of fuel for anger.

When I handled this injury for what it literally was – a painful injury – I didn’t need to handle it the *other* way: as something to get angry about. I think you will find the same thing.

Please do not think that I am suggesting that tears, or some other display of pain, will dissolve your spirit of anger. I do not believe that. But I do know that admitting your hurts will get you to the place where you can overcome your spirit of anger. How? **Once you admit you’ve been hurt, you are in a position to forgive the person who hurt you.**

Sounds simple, doesn’t it? It is! And powerful!

It is a sure-fire solution to any spirit of anger. Forgive the people who have hurt you, whether the injuries were real or

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imagined, big or small, recent or long-ago, from a stranger or a loved one. Do it in prayer, right now, in the presence of God Almighty. This is not psychological mumbo-jumbo: it is God's way for us to handle our hurts and put off the anger that arises from the injuries of life.

Until I admitted I was hurt, I did not recognize my need to forgive the people who had hurt me. Christians know that unforgiveness is not a good place to be. Jesus taught us to pray "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors..."

- Admitting our hurt looks weak and passive. Anger looks strong and capable.
- Acknowledging our hurt often has brought more hurt. Retaliation feels good and takes our mind off our pain.
- Telling someone he has hurt us takes effort. Withdrawing from the person who hurt us is easier.

Recognizing our pain is not about whining, finding fault or score keeping. It is not about sitting around a circle and bemoaning the faults of our parents or the insensitivity of our spouse or the unfairness of our boss. The cure for an angry spirit is not placing blame, pointing fingers, or feeling sorry for ourselves. In fact, it is just the opposite: it is the ultimate acceptance of personal responsibility.

Your spirit of anger will not dissolve because you are able to point out all your past hurts, like a soldier displaying his scars. Nor will your spirit of anger disappear because you "feel the pain" of those prior wounds. Knowing who hurt you, or how you got hurt, or how much it hurt, is just a first step. It puts you in the place where you can overcome your spirit of anger by forgiving all those folks who have hurt you. Admitting the pain that built your spirit of anger becomes a heroic acceptance of responsibility.

*And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
(Matthew 6:12)*

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For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

I'll end this chapter with a picture: Jesus is hanging on a cross. He's been whipped, scorned, beaten, betrayed, forsaken by his disciples and by God the Father. There was a whole lot of hurting going on. And what is the first thing Jesus said?

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

This is someone you want to follow.

14. The Antidote to Anger

The exercise described in this chapter made a real difference in my life and the lives of my family members. It is a practical way to *do* what we have been talking about. It will help you or your loved ones overcome a spirit of anger.

Take a pad of paper and write down the people in your life who have angered you. Do not limit your list to the people who have provoked an angry outburst, but also include people toward whom you feel any bitterness or resentment. Examine your feelings toward your spouse, kids, parents, friends, neighbors, co-workers, pastor, boss. Does so-and-so do things that annoy you? Put them on the list. Have you withdrawn from anyone over the years – friends or family members? They belong on the list. What did they do that led up to the withdrawal? Is there anyone in your life whom you distrust...you don't believe the things that they say or do not trust their reliability? Write their names down. If you have gossiped or evil-spoken about a person, they definitely belong on your list. Who really "tries" your patience? Write down their names, whether you've ventilated your temper on them or not.

For each name, write down the specific things you can remember that this person has done (or is still doing) that angered or irritated you. Try to focus on what it was that *hurt* you. Obviously, you won't remember everything, but if you have a spirit of anger, you'll be able to build quite a list.

Some of the injuries will be very obvious, like neighbor Nathan who returned your lawnmower with a big chip in the blade, and never offered to pay for the damage. Other hurts will be subtle, like Aunt Alice who never remembers to send a birthday card. Some hurts will seem petty when you write them down; that's okay because anger can be excited by real or *imagined* injuries. For example, you may have to admit that you really resent Karen for the way she is always primping her hair, or talking in that bored tone of voice.

Here are the kinds of things that might appear on your list:

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- Bill angers me with his poor listening skills – he never seems to care about what I'm saying, or remember it five minutes later. It hurts me that he obviously doesn't care about me.
- Linda said some things about me to Joan that were private. It hurts me when people know personal things about me and my family.
- My child will never do what I ask the first time. It really hurts that she has so little respect for me and my authority.
- Brad teased me in such-and-such a way. It really made me feel stupid.
- Barbara never returned those audio tapes that she borrowed, and acted like she had when I finally got around to asking for them. I KNOW she never returned them, and I had to buy new ones.
- My wife keeps reading her catalogs when I talk to her. Makes me feel unimportant.
- My husband keeps reading the paper when I talk to him. Makes me feel unimportant.
- My son wrecked the car and our insurance rates skyrocketed. Plus the \$300 deductible I had to pay. He never listens to my driving advice. Thinks he knows everything.
- My kids never ask how they can help out around the house. They do their chores grudgingly and never help out on their own initiative. That hurts me because I don't think they appreciate all I do for them.
- John always finds a way to tout himself at our department meetings. His mistakes always get blamed on someone else, including me. That hurts.
- My father uses that edgy tone of voice whenever he tries to explain something. It really hurts.
- My husband never gets around to fixing things until I ask him 5 times. It hurts that he doesn't seem to care about me.

Write it down even if you know that the other person did not do these things to intentionally hurt you. Your items do not

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have to be “big” things...a spirit of anger can be built on lots of little injuries over many years.

When we are forced to write down our injuries on paper, some interesting things happen. For example, you may discover certain patterns that reveal your “hot buttons”...situations where you are especially prone to injury and anger. You may also discover that some of your grievances against people are very prideful and selfish. For example, you may be harboring bitterness toward Barbara because she doesn’t invite you to her parties. Or you resent Randy because he doesn’t agree with you about politics, or certain church issues. I was surprised how much I am “hurt” by people who do nothing more than reject my view on certain things. It’s good to learn these things about ourselves in order to handle the new injuries that come our way. Remember that even imagined injuries can excite us to anger.

When you do this exercise, you may also find that it helps you see the many ways you are hurting other people. For example, when you write down that it hurts you when your wife continues to read her catalogs while you talk to her, it may convict you of all the times you’ve continued to read the newspaper as she talked to you. When we write down the “hurt” of having your children forget to do the things we ask, we better realize how much our unreliability has hurt other people. I think you’ll find this a very helpful exercise in many ways.

Now, rest assured that we did create this list to wallow in a profitless pity party. Our goal is not to feel sorry for ourselves because of all the injuries we have had to endure. No, we are about to take personal responsibility for all those hurts. We are about to stop blaming anyone else for our anger. This is where the rubber hits the road in overcoming a spirit of anger.

Formally forgive everyone on your list for every specific thing that you feel they have done to hurt you. Do it out-loud as a prayer to Almighty God. We are not playing a psychological game. We are doing what the Son of God gave his people the power and the commandment to do.²¹ We are going on record

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with the Judge of all the earth so let us be very specific in our prayers. For example,

- “Lord, I forgive my mother-in-law for the times she interfered with my plans to home school the children. And I ask You to forgive her too.”
- “Lord, I forgive Mary for gossiping about me to Linda, and I ask You to forgive her too. And forgive me for the months that I have harbored bitterness toward her for doing this.”
- “Father, I forgive Robert for apparently having no interest in me or the things that are important to me. Please forgive him for his selfishness and enable me to be helpful to him in this regard. And Lord, please forgive me for the resentment I have often felt toward him.”
- “Lord, I forgive that reckless driver who caused me to have an accident, and I ask You to forgive him also.”

I know it seems touchy-feely. I know I'm repeating what you already knew the Bible teaches. But do it anyway. If you have a spirit of anger, you have not forgiven many people for many things that have hurt you over the years. You have a spirit of anger because you do not have a spirit of forgiveness.

- Acknowledge that you are angry because you are hurt.
- Admit that your angry spirit has arisen because you have not resolved those hurts.
- Acknowledge that these hurts are fueling your spirit of anger.
- Admit that the bitterness you have felt toward other people – whether it was ever expressed in words or not – is sin.
- Ask God to forgive you for all your past anger and bitterness, in whatever form it may have taken.
- Ask God to specifically forgive all those who you felt had injured you in the past.
- Overcome your spirit of anger.

When I did this exercise the first time, I experienced an incredible release that can best be described as *peace*. It was

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like the air being let out of a balloon. Why does it work? Because it is God's way, and God blesses those who follow His ways. Hadn't I already said many general prayers in which I had forgiven those who "trespass against me?"²² Yes, but they didn't address my problem because I had refused to admit most of the hurts that had quietly fueled my anger and bitterness. Until I admitted the hurts, I did not recognize the need to forgive the people behind the injuries. And until I admitted the sinfulness of my underlying spirit of anger (not just the occasional angry outburst!) I felt no need to get rid of it.

Remember Stephen? Here was a man who knew how to keep anger from finding a place in his heart.

When they [the Jewish leaders] heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him [Stephen] with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge [account]. And when he had said this, he fell asleep [he died]. (Acts 7:54-60)

The solution to my angry spirit was right there in the Bible all along. Anger had blinded me to the fact that I was hurt, and therefore I was dealing with a situation that required forgiveness. And what I needed was not just the general forgiveness that we might include in our public prayers on Sunday morning ("Dear Lord, please forgive all those who have trespassed against us ..."). That ritual never helped me overcome my bitterness toward Billy while I was denying that

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Billy had hurt me. What I needed was to specifically forgive a lot of specific Billys for specific things they had done that hurt me. From the moment I “went on record” before God as forgiving so-and-so for such-and-such, the rug was pulled out from my accumulated anger. I began to experience peace and joy in a whole new fashion.

Do not take my word for it. Do it yourself. Be very honest and very specific. Forgive every painful injury that you can remember. Be thankful and thrilled that God has provided us such a simple way to get rid of such a destructive burden.

I recommend you repeat this exercise frequently, as often as you notice any form of bitterness toward any person. For example, whenever I find myself “rehashing” things that “John” did to me, or said, I stop and pray for John again, along with a prayer of forgiveness for myself for my recurring resentment. (“Father, you know that I already forgave John for that thing he said about me, and please forgive me, Lord, for still harboring some resentment toward him. Help me to put this matter out of my mind for good.”)

Forgiving people takes personal responsibility for your pain and the anger that arose from it. When “John” angered me, I was focused on what he did wrong. When I recognized the hurt that gave rise to the anger, I saw my frailty and my need for help. When I forgave “John” for hurting me, I made myself accountable to put away the resentment I had felt toward him.

But first I had to repent of my *angry spirit* – all the quiet forms that my anger had taken over the years. By the grace of God I had to admit that I was sinning even when I didn’t raise my voice or say cruel words. I had to admit that my anger was sinful no matter how many provocations I had endured.

I cannot change all the Billys who have hurt me, but by the grace of God I can change myself, and that is enough to change my attitude toward Billy. It is also enough to overcome an angry spirit.

The exercise I have described helped me and my family overcome the unspoken anger that had accumulated in our

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lives. I am confident that something similar will help anyone overcome a spirit of anger. But what about new injuries? After all, it is likely that the people who have hurt and angered us in the past will continue to do so in the future, or new people will come along to take their place. Here is what I have discovered: the *new* injuries and hurts are often prompting me to an immediate prayer of forgiveness. (“Lord, I forgive my wife for that tone of voice she is using, and I ask you to forgive her too.”) These spontaneous prayers are becoming more and more frequent in my life. I’m beginning to experience more and more what God meant when He told us to “pray without ceasing.”²³

Once I went to the Lord in prayer with the “old” hurts, the new hurts are usually much easier to handle. Every injury – every pain – every frustration – becomes a prod to prayer: “Dear Lord, I forgive that person for cutting in front of my car, and I ask you to forgive her also, and please do whatever it takes to make her a more cautious driver.” What a peaceful alternative to angry words and bitter thoughts!

Let your hurts and injuries motivate you to ongoing communication with the Lord and you will see, as I better see, how “all things work together for good to those who love God...” All those pains that God let come into my life? One of the ways He wants to work them together for my good is by drawing me closer to Him. They are reminders of how much I need Him. When we accept our hurts for what they are – and not use them as a stepping stone to withdrawal or retaliation – we are more apt to “cast our burdens upon Him”,²⁴ which is exactly what God wants us to do. When we let ourselves *feel* our hurts, we are more likely to respond to the call of Jesus which goes out to those who are hurting: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”²⁵

Do not let the injuries of life become fuel for anger and bitterness, robbing you of peace and joy. Rather let these heavy burdens point you to Jesus and experience the “rest” that Jesus promises. Do what the Bible plainly tells us to do when we are afflicted:

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Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. (James 5:13)

Remember Job and all the injuries that God allowed Satan to inflict upon him, even though he was a righteous man? All that pain could have stirred up a lot of anger and bitterness. Or it could accomplish this:

Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. (Job 1:20-21)

Do you want to be like Job and worship God intimately in the midst of your trials and pains? Do you want to draw closer to God? Then feel the pains and hurts that come your way and let them remind you of your frailty and your need for the Lord. Injuries do not need to become fuel for an angry spirit; they can become a catalyst for ongoing communion with the God who loved you so much that He sent His son to die for your sins. Every hurt becomes an opportunity to come to God afresh and let Him be God in your life. Every hurt becomes a bell reminding us of our weakness and our need for help from the One who has “borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.”²⁶

When we treat injuries for what they are – pains that our heavenly Father wants to help us bear – won't we experience the truth that “all things work together for good to those who love God...”? Won't we better understand why God let that injury come our way, since He knows how prone we are to forget Him when everything is going smoothly? Isn't ongoing communion with God – hour by hour throughout the day – what God desires and what we know will bring us the most peace and joy?

Watch ye therefore, and pray always... (Luke 21:36)

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15. Anger in the Bible

Once I recognized my own angry spirit, I began noticing anger in a lot of places, including the Bible. The story of Jonah is my favorite illustration of this problem. God had told Jonah to go to the city of Ninevah and announce their imminent destruction. Jonah chose to get on a ship heading the other way. God raised up a great storm and the ship men eventually figured out that Jonah was the cause of the tempest. They threw him into the sea and God prepared a big fish to swallow his saturated spokesman. He spent three days in its ample abdomen and when he repented and prayed to the Lord, God had the fish deposit him on the beach.

Jonah traveled to Ninevah and announced that in forty days, the city would be destroyed. The people and the rulers believed him and proclaimed a fast, turned from their evil ways, and cried unto God for mercy.

And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest [turn away from] thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry?

So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But

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God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: And should not I spare [save] Ninevah, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand [120,000!] persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

Jonah, a man of God, is angry that the Nivevites had dodged the destruction that he thought they deserved. He proves to us that being a Christian does not protect us from a spirit of anger. One of the signs of an angry spirit is the desire for revenge and satisfaction in the misfortune of people we do not like. Have you ever had thoughts like that? What did you think when your least favorite politician did something that got him in a lot of trouble? Or how about when your obnoxious neighbor – the one that irritates everyone on the street – lost his job? Needless to say, these are not good thoughts.

*...he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished.
(Proverbs 17:5)*

Rejoice not when thine enemy falls, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbles: Lest the LORD see it, and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him. (Proverbs 24:17-18)

We have learned that anger is excited by real or imagined injuries. People or circumstances hurt us and anger is one way we try to deny the pain, reduce it, or prevent it from happening again. What about Jonah? Where is the injury or

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hurt that could help explain his anger? Here are some possibilities:

- Perhaps he felt foolish. After all, he had told the people they would be destroyed, only to have God change His mind. "Look, Jakbar, there's the man who said Ninevah would be destroyed in 40 days....seven weeks ago! Ha...ha...ha."
- Perhaps he felt like he had endured a lot of suffering for nothing. Swimming three days in a stomach full of seafood is no picnic, and what difference did it make? Ninevah was standing before he was sent on this mission, and it was still standing forty days later.
- Perhaps Jonah felt that God loved those wicked Ninevites more than He loved Jonah. That could be a painful thought. Have your children ever felt less loved at those times when you were spending extra time or lavishing extra compassion on one of their siblings? Such thoughts can hurt a lot, even when they are not true. Remember that anger can also be excited by *imagined* injuries.

Those are just some possibilities. It is not necessary that we understand which injuries led to Jonah's angry spirit, but we do want to admit that anger is excited by injuries. The right way to resolve these injuries is to forgive the people that we feel have hurt us and cast the burden of our pain upon the Lord. We discussed that in Chapters 13-14.

What are some other things we can learn from Jonah's anger?

- Notice how Jonah got angry at a little thing, the death of a gourd. Have little things ever provoked you to anger? Do you ever feel like screaming because that credit card company still shows 68 cents due on your account after three phone calls? That's me. Have you ever lost your temper at your kids when they forgot to put the milk back in the refrigerator again? When you have an angry spirit, it really doesn't matter how "big" the provocation: if it is not one thing, it will be another.

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- Notice how anger took away Jonah's joy. He had just accomplished what every preacher dreams about: the repentance of hundreds of thousands of people! What a joy that could have been! What excitement to see everyone from the king down to the peasants turn from their evil doings. And all Jonah wanted was an early death! If you are a Christian and joy is a stranger in your life, I urge you to consider that an angry spirit chased it away. We'll talk more about that later.
- Notice how anger blinded Jonah and caused him to act foolishly. Had not his rebellion recently rewarded him with three days in a big belly? Why in the world, then, would he argue with the Almighty about the death of a gourd!? As the Bible says, he that is soon angry acts foolishly.
- Anger blinded Jonah to the fact that God could give him another gourd to replace the one that had died. He did not think to pray to God in his anger. Do we remember to pray when we are angry? Not often. But when we let ourselves *be hurt* by the hurts that come our way, we are much more likely to remember to take our problem to the Lord, and cast that burden upon Him. ("Is any among you afflicted? let him pray..." James 5:13)
- Anger blinded Jonah to the fact that the lives of the children of Ninevah deserve more compassion than a dead gourd. God had to remind him of that simple truth.
- And notice how God dealt with Jonah's anger. He asked a gentle question: "Doest thou well to be angry?" No angry words. No threats. No thunderbolts. Isn't that a God you want to follow? And when Jonah refused to answer the question, God was silent! He did not try to win an argument. He left Jonah alone. Sometimes we need to leave people alone while they are angry.
- When God asked the second question ("Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?") Jonah gave an angry response: "I do well to be angry, even unto death!" How did God respond? Did He toss threats and thunderbolts? No. He

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asked another gentle question to help Jonah see how anger had blinded him. He handled this angry person the way we should handle the angry people in our life.

A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. (Proverbs 15:1)

Make yourself accountable

After our family studied Jonah's anger, we gave each other permission to exhort one another when we detect anger or bitterness. "Dad, you seem angry" has been often heard in our house. We also try to use questions to exhort one another, like God used with Jonah. Questions are a non-threatening way to help people see the angry passion that has temporarily blinded them.

Me: "Look at that stupid driver!"
My child: "Are you angry, Dad?"
Me: <pause> "Yeah, I guess I am. Sorry. There's no need to be angry at him. Let's pray instead."

* * *

Me: <sharp tone of voice> "Isn't that a lot of money to spend on such-and-such?"
My wife: "Yes, I guess it is. Are you angry?"
Me: "No, I'm not angry! But money doesn't grow on trees!"
My wife: <silence>
Me: "I guess you're right. I was angry. Will you forgive me?"
My wife: "Of course, dear. How about if I return this one and look for something cheaper?"

The Bible says, "Exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the

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deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13). God knows how much we need mutual exhortation because He knows the deceitfulness of sin. Anger is one of the most deceitful sins because it has so many disguises and some of those disguises look righteous! Keep in mind that anger blinds the person using it. If you have a spirit of anger, I urge you to make yourself accountable to the people in your life, so they can help you see what you are not able to see. Give them your sincere permission to tell you anytime you seem to be angry, or seem to display any of the symptoms of a spirit of anger. These include impatience, withdrawal, distrust, cynicism, complaining, nagging, judgmental attitude, controlling personality, score-keeping, teasing, sarcasm, scolding, evil speaking or gossip. Do whatever it takes to convince your family and friends that you *really* want their feedback, because your prior anger may make them a little hesitant to take you up on your offer! And when someone does suggest that you seem to be angry in a particular situation, NEVER disagree with them.

Me: “Look at that stupid error! He doesn’t know how to play baseball!”
Faithful exhorter: “Larry, you seem to be angry.”
<Wrong response> “No I’m not.”
<Right response> “Yeah, you’re right. Thanks for pointing that out.”

* * *

Mom: “I told you to put that away!”
Child: “I’m sorry Mom. Are you angry?”
<Wrong response> “No, I’m not angry, just disappointed at your irresponsibility... blah... blah... blah...”
<Right response> “Yeah, you’re right. I was angry. Thanks for pointing that out. Will you forgive me for using that tone of voice?”

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Whether you think you are angry or not, you *seem* to be angry if someone has the courage to bring it to your attention. Anger often deceives us because it is not always a passionate emotion. In fact, those of us with angry spirits are so used to it that it usually feels downright “normal.” So, if someone else thinks you seem angry, agree with them and thank them for the feedback.

Here is another exercise that our family has found helpful: “debrief” regularly with your accountability partners. Talk about your successes against anger, and your failures. Rejoice in every instance when someone overcame anger, even if it was just a little victory. Be sympathetic, supportive, and patient regarding the failures and backslidings. Believe that it is only a matter of time, by God’s grace, before the victories increase more and more.

And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. (Romans 15:14)

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16. Are You Slow To Anger?

Sometimes we justify our anger by the fact that God gets angry. His anger is mentioned throughout the Bible. In fact, the first mention of God's anger is toward Moses, one of his people. It is certainly true that God gets angry and sometimes He acts in anger, but it is also true that He is slow to anger.

... but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsook them not. (Nehemiah 9:17)

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. (Psalms 103:8)

The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked... (Nahum 1:3)

Anyone who reads the Old Testament will marvel at the longsuffering of God, His patience, and His slowness to anger. The people of Israel kept doing evil over and over again, and what does He do? He waits. He instructs. He exhorts. He chastens.

How much does it take to provoke you to anger? Is "slow to anger" how your family would describe you – if they were honest? The Bible highly commends those people who are slow to anger.

He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit is better than he that takes a city. (Proverbs 16:32)

The discretion of a man defers his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression. (Proverbs 19:11)

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A wrathful man stirs up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeases strife. (Proverbs 15:18)

Do you want to be better than a mighty warrior...in God's eyes? Be slow to anger. Do you want to be better than someone who conquers a city...in God's eyes? Rule your spirit. Do you want glory...in the eyes of God? Pass over a transgression. That doesn't mean you forego correction of your children, since other parts of the Bible *require* that duty. But we can "pass over a transgression" by "deferring our anger" and correcting our children without anger.

I used to think that I was "slow to anger" if I didn't raise my voice till my daughter forgot to hang up her coat three times. God is a lot more patient than that with me. If you want to justify your anger by the fact that God gets angry, may I urge you to follow Him in being slow to anger?

Overcoming a spirit of anger equips us to be slow to anger because it deals with the heart and the thoughts. It is far more than controlling the occasional angry outburst. It is not about learning how to control our temper. Overcoming a spirit of anger changes the way we *think* about the injuries of life. We will not *feel* like responding quickly to the things that used to anger us.

If we could hear a recording of our thoughts at the end of the day, then many people would have to admit their spirit of anger. Since such a transcript is not available, why not pray that God will open your eyes to angry and judgmental thoughts as soon as they arise? I have asked for such a thing and I'm seeing stuff I never noticed before! What an eye-opener! If you ask for such a thing in faith, you know that He will grant your request.

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. (Mark 11:24)

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How slow to anger should we be? The Apostle Peter once asked a similar question, and here was Jesus' response.

Then came Peter to him [Jesus], and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. (Matthew 18:21-22)

And as we strive to forgive people over and over again for the things they do that hurt us, let us also strive to make it the kind of forgiveness that God practices.

I, even I, am he that blots out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. (Isaiah 43:25)

As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. (Psalms 103:12)

Who is a God like unto thee, that pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retains not his anger for ever, because he delights in mercy. (Micah 7:18)

17. What About Righteous Anger?

We have seen that anger blinds people in many ways. One of the ways that I used to justify my anger was by pointing out that Jesus got angry. It is right there in Mark 3. And since we know Jesus did not sin, it must be alright for me to get angry too...right? That's what I thought. After all, don't we Christians love that slogan "What would Jesus do?"

Here is the only incident in the gospels where we are explicitly told that Jesus got angry.²⁷

And he [Jesus] entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. [many of the Jews felt that it was wrong to heal someone on the day of rest, the sabbath.] And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. [they would not answer his question] And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians [followers of Herod] against him, how they might destroy him. (Mark 3:1-6)

Please let me share three things about this story that I never noticed in the days of my unrepentant spirit of anger:

- Jesus *looked* on these people with anger, but he *spoke* no angry words. If we want to be like Jesus, let us set the same goal. Would you describe your anger as the "silent" kind? Not me! Most of my anger is followed by angry words.
- When Jesus was angered, he was also *grieved* for the people who refused to answer his simple question. Can

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you say that about the people that have angered you? I can't. No, grief is a far cry from what I feel toward people who provoke me to anger. So if I truly want to follow Jesus' example, shouldn't I make sure that grief accompanies my anger? If there is no grief, could that be a sign that my anger is inappropriate in that situation?

- Just because Jesus did something, does not automatically mean we should follow. For example, the Bible says that Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matthew 4:1) And yet Jesus taught his disciples to pray "lead us NOT into temptation." (Matthew 6:13).

There is a similarly instructive story in the Old Testament, where the LORD gets angry at Moses. The LORD has told Moses that He is sending him back to Egypt (which Moses fled 40 years earlier) to lead the Israelites to their long-promised home. Moses does not want the job, and offers several excuses, each one of which the LORD answers. We pick up the story as Moses continues to try to avoid the assignment:

*And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore [up to now], nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say. And he said, O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send. [that is, send someone else, anyone but me!] **And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses,** and he said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he comes forth to meet thee: and when he sees thee, he will be glad in his heart. And thou shalt speak unto him, and put words in his mouth: and I will be with thy mouth, and with his*

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mouth, and will teach you what ye shall do. And he shall be thy spokesman unto the people...(Exodus 4:10-16)

Here we see divine anger, but notice the absence of angry words. Though He is angry, the LORD calmly asks a question and explains how He will take care of Moses' latest objection. No threats. No shouting. No thunderbolts.

God takes vengeance in anger

There are over one hundred verses in the Bible that talk about God's anger and wrath. Most of them are associated with God executing justice or vengeance. Here are some examples.

Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless. (Exodus 22:22-24)

And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp. (Numbers 11:1)

And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor [a false god]: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. And the LORD said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the LORD against the sun, that the fierce anger of the LORD may be turned away from Israel. (Numbers 25:3-4)

There is no doubt that God executes vengeance and justice in anger. We usually call this "righteous anger" or "righteous indignation." Does God's righteous anger justify

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the type of anger that you and I practice? I used to think so, but then I saw this simple truth:

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:19-21)

God is the Creator. He makes the rules, and He gets to punish the rule breakers. And if He says that vengeance is His, that's one of the rules I want to live by. Yes, He executes vengeance in anger. Yes, He reserves that right unto Himself. For that reason, I no longer use God's righteous anger to justify the anger in my life.

Now some may say, "Doesn't God appoint agents to act on His behalf in executing justice here on earth?" Yes, that is certainly true. God uses people like you and me to execute some justice and some correction on this earth. For example, God has appointed parents to discipline their children.

"Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying." (Proverbs 19:18)

"Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul." (Proverbs 29:17)

Likewise, God has ordained "powers" (governments, officials, etc.) and given them authority to make laws and punish lawbreakers in society.

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers [governments, authorities] For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

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*Whosoever therefore resists the power, resists the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: **for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.** (Romans 13:1-4)*

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: (1 Peter 2:13-15)

Here is the argument that I previously used to justify my anger: “God executes justice in anger and I am acting as His agent when correcting my children or contending for the faith, so I can use anger also. Since God is angry at false teachers in the Bible, and I am contending against this false teacher, I can (and should!) employ anger as His agent.” Or this: “Since God gets angry at His children sometimes when they do something wrong, it is okay (and appropriate) for me to get angry at my children when they do something wrong.”

The question is simple: Is anger an appropriate tool when we are acting as God’s agent to execute these God-given responsibilities?

Let us consider first the case of public officials who have been given the duty to enforce the laws and administer punishment. We saw above (Romans 13:4) that such people are “ministers of God ...to execute wrath upon those who do evil.”

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- A policeman apprehends a suspect at the scene of a brutal murder. All the evidence points to his guilt. Maybe he has blood on his hands. Maybe he even confesses to the crime. What would we think if the policeman angrily beats the prisoner on the way to jail? Or “just” cursed him with foul names? Would we not wonder whether he would fairly investigate all the evidence? Would we not wonder whether this suspect is going to get a fair trial?
- When a judge presides over the same case, what would we think if he displayed his anger toward the accused, either with angry words or an occasional slap on the face? Would it not call into question the judge’s impartiality and rightly lead to a new trial under another judge?
- What would we think about the executioner who is given the task of putting the noose around the now-convicted murderer? Would we not feel it barbarous if he spit on his face, mocked him with angry words, and punched him in the stomach as he led him to the gallows?

I think we all agree that public justice can and should be administered without anger. Anything else appears unjust. Knowing human nature as we do, displays of anger would lead us to question whether the officials had fairly gathered all the evidence and judged the facts. We rightly distrust policeman or judges who seem to have a personal bias against an accused criminal.

Now, most of us are not policemen, judges or executioners. But we are parents, and we often need to discipline our children. Is it possible and appropriate to do it without anger? Let us examine the verses in Proverbs which address parental chastening.

*He that spares [holds back] his rod hates his son: but he that loves him chastens him betimes [promptly, early].
(Proverbs 13:24)*

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Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare [hold back] for his crying. (Proverbs 19:18)

Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him. (Proverbs 22:15)

Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beat him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. (Proverbs 23:13-14)

The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself brings his mother to shame. (Proverbs 29:15)

Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul. (Proverbs 29:17)

These are all plain verses, and they teach a truth that is much maligned in our modern culture. We parents have a DUTY to chasten our children; we should do it promptly; we should do it even if the child cries; and we should do it with both the rod (so-called corporal punishment) and reproof (words).

Please notice that the above verses promise certain positive results:

- the rod will drive foolishness from the child (Proverbs 22:15)
- the rod will deliver the child's soul from hell (Prov. 23:13-14)
- the rod and reproof give wisdom (Proverbs 29:15)
- correction will cause your son to give you rest and delight (Proverbs 29:17)

Are not those the results we desire for our children? If our rod and reproof drove away foolishness, delivered the child's soul from hell, gave him wisdom and caused him to give us rest and delight, would we not shout "Hallelujah!"?

Now, please notice that these positive results are promised if we simply do what the verses say to do, and NONE

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OF THEM MENTION THE NEED FOR ANGER! So why in the world would we think that we need to add anger to the prescription in order to get the desired results?! God has already promised these good results without using anger, but anger has blinded many parents to that simple truth.

Is it not presumptuous for us to hear a promise of God (which is conditional on us doing A, B and C) and conclude that we must ALSO add "D" (anger) to get the promised results? Consider this analogy: A physician tells his patient to take a particular pill three times a day to cure his rash. The patient, sure of his superior knowledge, takes the pill as directed but *also* rubs alcohol all over his skin. Will the rash go away? Maybe. But there may also be serious side-effects.

We can trust the promises of God. He promises good results when we chasten and reprove our children. He tells us specifically how to do it and He never mentions anger. Therefore I have stopped justifying the use of anger when correcting and disciplining my children. If you are adding anger to the rod and reproof, you may get acceptable results for awhile, but eventually you will see the negative side-effects, especially rebellion. We'll talk about that in Chapter 23.

Here is additional proof that God does not want us to add anger to the rod and reproof:

"Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." (Colossians 3:21)

What is the most effective way to provoke someone to anger, including your children? Anger! "An angry man stirs up strife."²⁸ Anger toward our children will provoke them to anger, which in turn will discourage them.

The Bible also tells us to put away ALL anger, with its various fruits:

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour [yelling, loud voices], and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all

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malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:31-32)

Does anyone see an exemption here for parents chastening their children?

But what if things have gotten to a point in your house where your son or daughter has really forsaken you...he or she is in open rebellion? Is that the time to really get angry, like God did when He took vengeance on those who forsook Him in the Old Testament? Well, you might first ask yourself whether you were slow to anger, gentle and patient *before* they reached the stage of open rebellion? Or were they often the victim of your anger before they became rebellious? If so, I urge you to do whatever you can to undo those past mistakes before you use their current rebellion to justify more anger. Repent of your angry spirit. Confess your faults. Show that you really want to change. Start praying together, just the two of you, every day. Study together what the Bible says about anger, just the two of you, and don't do all the talking. Make yourself accountable by giving your child permission to tell you every time you seem angry, and never disagree when they do. If your child says you seem angry, apologize and thank him or her for pointing it out.

Yes, God executes vengeance and often does it in anger, but He is SLOW to anger and He reserves the right of vengeance to Himself.

Recompense to no man evil for evil... (Romans 12:17)

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. (Romans 12:19)

Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee. (Proverbs 20:22)

18. But What About Ephesians 4:26?

Before I repented of my spirit of anger, I justified it in several ways. I told myself that it was working a good change in the victim of my anger (see James 1:19-20). I took comfort in the fact that God often gets angry (see Chapter 17). And another justification that I sometimes used for my anger was this verse from Ephesians 4: “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”

I can still hear myself thinking something like this: “See, God tells us to be angry, as long as we don’t let our anger fester overnight.” That’s what I used to think, but I do not think that way anymore, and here is why.

1. The verb tense for “be ye angry” is what the scholars call “present passive imperative.” “Imperative” means it’s a command. “Present” means it is something currently taking place. “Passive” means the subject is being acted upon, rather than acting. Yes, people and circumstances will anger us, but when we start *acting* on that anger, we are no longer following the passive verb tense found in this verse.
2. A few verses later, in Ephesians 4:31, we are explicitly told “let ALL... anger...be put away from you.” Likewise in Colossians 3:8 we are clearly told to “put off anger.” So while Ephesians 4:26 does say “be ye angry,” (passive verb tense) I know from verse 31 that the proper follow-through is to put it off.
3. Although Ephesians 4:26 does acknowledge that we will be angered, it explicitly forbids sinful displays of that anger: “Be ye angry AND SIN NOT...” What do those sinful displays include? Other parts of the Bible tell us that these typical angry responses would be sinful:
 - “bitterness” (Ephesians 4:31)
 - “wrath” (Ephesians 4:31)
 - “clamour [loud speaking, yelling]” (Ephesians 4:31)
 - “evil speaking” (Ephesians 4:31)

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- “malice” (Ephesians 4:31)
- “talebearing” (Proverbs 26:20, 22)
- “lying” (Exodus 20:16, Revelation 21:8)
- “unforgiveness” (Ephesians 4:32, Matthew 6:15)
- “grudging” (James 5:9)
- “hatred” (Galatians 5:20, 1 John 3:15)
- “variance” [contentions, strife] (Galatians 5:20)
- “emulations” [rivalry] (Galatians 5:20)
- “strife” (Galatians 5:20)
- “revenge” (Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 5:38-39, Romans 12:19)
- “envying” (Galatians 5:21)
- “murders” (Galatians 5:21; see also 1 John 3:15 where we are told “whoever hates his brother is a murderer...”)
- “evil thoughts” (Zechariah 7:10, Zechariah 8:17)

Therefore, if my anger manifests itself (either immediately or later) in any of those ways, I know I am not following Ephesians 4:26. I have failed to “sin not.” For example, if two weeks later I have bitter thoughts toward someone who spoke evil about me, the sun DID go down upon my wrath. My anger went underground and I did not pass over the transgression. I don’t know about you, but that is how my anger usually came forth – not as an immediate temper outburst, but as a ongoing attitude that made me judgmental, withdrawn, harsh speaking, mistrusting or contentious. I was being angered AND sinning. I was not living by Ephesians 4:26.

In Mark 3 we noted that Jesus was angry but spoke no angry words (see Chapter 17). Let that be our goal when we are angered.

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. (Matthew 5:22)

19. Do YOU Have a Spirit of Anger?

“No, I don’t think so because I only lose my temper occasionally, when something really provokes me! And I never hit anyone or get really vocal.”

An angry spirit is not about how often we lose our temper, or how much violence or vocal volume accompanies our anger. You may have a spirit of anger that never shouts or shatters saucers. There are many other ways that an angry spirit can manifest itself, damage relationships and diminish your peace and joy

If you have read this far, you probably already know whether or not you have a spirit of anger. You also have enough information to recognize an angry spirit in your friends and family members. In this chapter we will review the clues that point to a spirit of anger.

Losing your temper

Frequent angry outbursts should convince anyone that he has a problem. But what is considered frequent? Once a week? Once a month? Once every three months? I don’t know. I had a robust spirit of anger and lost my temper (usually with cutting words) maybe once every two months.

“But I get provoked to anger more than other people!” some might say to justify their more-frequent outbursts. “My kids are really disobedient.” “My job is very stressful.” “My wife nags me all the time.” “My husband is so irresponsible.” Maybe. And maybe not. Maybe you have a spirit that makes you more likely to respond angrily to circumstances that can be handled quite well without anger. Maybe more things set-you-off because you are already “primed” to explode. Maybe your angry spirit makes you hyper-sensitive to wrongs that you could learn to pass over. If you lose your temper more than rarely, you probably have a spirit of anger.

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Ask people whom you live with

Another way to gauge your spirit of anger is to ask the people who are closest to you. Remember that you will need to “interpret” their answer, because if you *do* have a problem with anger they may be afraid to tell you! Any vague answer probably means “yes.”

You: “Dear, do you think I have a problem with anger?”
Your spouse: “Well, that’s hard to say. Maybe now and then, but then don’t we all?...”
<interpretation> “Yes”

* * *

You: “Billy, are you sometimes afraid of me losing my temper?”
Your child: “Well, I don’t know Dad (Mom). I guess I never thought about it.”
You: “I really want to know, Billy, because I think that I might have a real problem with anger, and I want to overcome it. Have I hurt you a lot with my angry words?”
Your child: “I don’t know.... You always seem have a good reason for getting mad ...”
<interpretation> “Yes, I am afraid of your anger. Yes, you have a spirit of anger.”

Are your children rebellious?

If your children have a spirit of anger, that is a reliable sign that you, your spouse, or both of you have an angry spirit. The Bible says “make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways...”²⁹ Children spend years “going with” their angry parents and learning their angry ways.

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The Bible also says “an angry man stirs up strife...”³⁰ If you have an angry spirit, it has hurt and angered your children over the years. Depending on your child’s personality, the effect of your anger may go unnoticed while they are young. In fact, many angry-spirited parents do not encounter open strife from their children until the teenage years. Then they can be heard saying things like “I don’t know what happened! Our Margaret has become so rebellious!”

Rebellion is anger directed at authority. It is a reliable sign that your children have a spirit of anger. That spirit did not develop overnight. They learned it from angry people that they went with, just as the Bible says. The anger that they encountered did indeed “stir up strife,” though it took a long time for that strife to gestate.

Given our sinful nature and this painful world, it is probably inevitable that your children will occasionally get angry. That is not the same as developing a spirit of anger. The question is how are they trained to handle their occasional anger? Do they learn to forgive those who hurt them – not just with nice Sunday school words but by observing their parent’s behavior? Do they learn that it is wrong to harbor bitterness and entertain judgmental thoughts – not just with words but by observing their parent’s behavior? Do they learn that complaining and withdrawal is not the right way to respond to those who hurt us – not just with words but by observing their parent’s behavior? If they have angry-spirited parents, they are not likely to learn those lessons since the parents themselves have not learned them.

Keep in mind that young children usually cannot express anger the way they see anger in adults. They may have tried that once or twice and did not like the unpleasant consequences. So what are some signs of a spirit-of-anger-under-construction in young children?

- Does your young child have regular “temper tantrums”? How do you deal with these? Do they provoke you to anger (“an angry man stirs up strife”)? Or do you ignore these

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occasional outbursts, believing that they are an inevitable phase of childhood?

- Are your children clingy, withdrawn or fearful? Parental anger can lead some children to take the path of least resistance and avoid doing anything that might stir up Mom or Dad.
- Are your children sullen, whining or complaining? These all suggest that there are unresolved injuries in this child's life, which in turn is fuel for a spirit of anger.
- Do they hit other children? This is a reliable sign of Mom or Dad's spirit of anger.

If your child has an angry spirit, this will usually manifest itself as rebellion during the teenage years. Not all rebels look the same. Some are defiant while others are passive. Signs of defiant, open rebellion include:

- The child breaks the rules and argues about them.
- He or she is antagonistic toward other family members.
- Frequent strife and angry outbursts.
- The child openly rejects parental values and adopts values that parents find repulsive (clothing, morals, hairstyle, friendships, politics, religion).

Signs of passive rebellion include:

- "Forgets" rules frequently but usually offers an excuse.
- Withdrawn from other family members.
- Sullen, complaining attitude. Bored with family life.
- Seems to "go along with the motions" regarding parental values, but you know their heart is not in it.

If your kids show signs of rebellion at any age, they have a spirit of anger. I urge you to consider where they learned it. Mom and/or Dad will need to overcome their own spirit of anger and then work diligently to help their children do the same.

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Sharp tone of voice

My angry spirit often manifested itself in a sharp tone of voice, and this is still a major struggle for me today. When someone angered me, I often did not raise the volume of my voice, but I always sharpened the edge. (“*Can’t you understand what I’m saying?!*” “*Didn’t we agree you’d be ready by 6 o’clock?!*”) When my eyes were opened toward my spirit of anger, I noticed that I often use a sharp, edgy voice even when I am not angry. For example, when I give my kids simple instructions on how to do a job, I often use a tone of voice that suggests that I already knew they will do it wrong! That’s a spirit of anger.

How about you? Do your kids seem to get nervous when you are telling them how to do something? Do they sort of “freeze up” when you explain how to do a math problem? How about your child’s incompetence? Does it bring out the sharp tone of your voice? If your daughter doesn’t mix those ingredients the way you just told her to, does the tone of your voice change? A sharp tone of voice points to a spirit of anger. Listen to your voice and be honest. If you have any doubt about whether you employ a sharp tone of voice, your kids and spouse will know.

Examine your thoughts

The fact that you do not say many angry words or use a sharp tone of voice does not prove the absence of an angry spirit. Some people are naturally more verbal, and have a hard time keeping any thought unsaid. Others with a more timid personality find it easy to keep their mouth shut. If this is you, examine your *thoughts* toward people who have hurt you. Do those thoughts suggest a spirit of anger? Symptoms might include:

- Rehearsing the wrongs people have done toward you. I used to find myself raking leaves and going over conversations in which someone said something that really irritated me. This suggests a lack of forgiveness and a

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spirit of anger. God wants us to forgive and forget such things.

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:32)

*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, **forgetting those things which are behind**, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)*

- Plotting what you will say if you ever encounter such-and-such injury again (“If he does that one more time, this is what I’m going to say...”)

Let all bitterness... be put away from you, with all malice: (Ephesians 4:31)

- Vengeful thoughts are a reliable sign of an angry spirit, but some vengeful thoughts are pretty well disguised. For example, when your obnoxious neighbor (or brother-in-law) lost his job, we might have thoughts such as: “I’m not surprised. I can’t get along with him either.” Likewise, do your kids take delight in the troubles that come upon their siblings? This would point to their angry spirit, which they learned from you-know-who.

... he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished. (Proverbs 17:5)

If I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him... (Job 31:29)

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Evil Speaking

When our anger goes underground, we often find ways to retaliate against the people who hurt us. That retaliation sometimes takes the form of evil speaking. If you are prone to evil speak about other people, this is a sign of an angry spirit. God wants us to put away all bitterness and the evil speaking that it often leads to.³¹

Sometimes we find ways to cloak our gossip and evil speaking so it doesn't look so bad. For example, we might package it as "concern" for the person we are talking about ("We really need to pray for Joan because I heard she is having marital problems ...").

If you find yourself passing on disparaging things about anyone, I urge you to re-read Chapters 13-14. Identify how they may have hurt you in the past and then forgive them completely for every such injury. Forsake the bitterness that leads to evil speaking.

Bitterness toward your wife

Husbands and wives are in a position to hurt one another more than anyone else. Those hurts, if not resolved, fuel a spirit of anger. Sometimes this anger is out-in-the-open strife but many times it goes underground and becomes bitterness. This is a special problem with husbands toward their wives and for that reason the Bible singles out men with this commandment: "husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them."³² Here are ways that bitterness may manifest itself:

- Teasing ("My wife knows all the clerks at the mall by name")
- Sarcasm ("Oh, that was really bright!")
- Judgmental thoughts ("I can't believe how she can waste so much time!")
- Little digs that are designed to hurt ("Honey, do you have another dress you could wear...that one doesn't exactly flatter your figure." Or, "Are we having chicken AGAIN!?")
- Evil speaking ("You won't believe what she did now...")

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Bitterness in a marriage may also show up as withdrawal. Each spouse finds hobbies and interests that exclude their mate. Men take up time-consuming hobbies or work extra hours in their job. Life becomes so busy that they have little one-on-one time with their wife. Conversation becomes superficial. Even when there is little or no strife, husband and wife stop *caring* about one another. Divorce, of course, is the ultimate form of withdrawal.

Husbands, you know the thoughts you have toward your wife. If there is bitterness toward her, admit you've got a spirit of anger. Admit that all that anger and bitterness is sin. Repent. Go through the exercise suggested in Chapters 13-14 and forgive your wife for everything that you think she has done to hurt or disappoint you. Forgive all those irritating habits. Forgive her for how much she talks on the phone, or how she fails to clean the house, or never has dinner ready, or nags you about such-and-such. Forgive her for not taking much interest in the things that you like to do. Your marriage will never be anything close to what God intended while you harbor any bitterness toward her.

Poor listening skills

Are you a good listener? Do you interrupt people a lot when they are talking? Do you look at them when they are talking to you? Do you find people often having to repeat things to you? ("Jason, don't you remember we talked about that?") Ask your friends, spouse or children how they would rate your listening skills. If they give you a vague answer consider that a low rating. They may not want to be provoke strife by telling you the truth.

I had an experience recently where I was exhorting a friend about something he had done. It was a difficult discussion, but there was no open strife. In the middle of the conversation, he walked into the other room! By his choice, we talked to one another from one room to another! It seemed like his way of saying something like "I don't have to listen to you..."

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I have also noticed that this person often forgets the things I tell him.

The Bible says “let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” Has it been your experience that when people are good listeners (“swift to hear”), they are usually also “slow to wrath”? That has certainly been my experience. And conversely, when I am slow to hear and quick to speak, I am also prone to anger and wrath. Poor listening skills point to a spirit of anger.

Impatience

How is your patience with people who keep you waiting? I have always been a very schedule-oriented person. “Deadlines are deadlines....be on time....don’t be late.” Being this kind of person has generally served me well, and I do not regret this facet of my personality. The problem arises when other people or circumstances keep me from being on time or cause me to wait. That’s when my spirit of anger often reared its ugly head.

Impatience is a reliable sign pointing toward a spirit of anger. How patient are you? How do you feel, and what do you think, when people keep you waiting? Do you complain to others about how long so-and-so kept you waiting? For example, you make lunch plans with John and he is late again. In fact, John is consistently ten or fifteen minutes late. A lot of times he doesn’t even offer any excuse, though he might say a casual “sorry I’m late” as he takes his seat.

Are your thoughts like this: “John’s got a lot of stuff going on at the office...I know he’d like to be on time, but he never was very organized...Maybe if we pick some other location or time that will be easier for him...”

...or like this: “John says he’s sorry but I don’t believe it ...if he was, he would find some way to be on time...let’s admit it: he thinks his time is more valuable than mine.”

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The Bible says that charity (true love) “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”³³ Is that how you would describe yourself in those situations where people try your patience? Or would you say that your thoughts are better described as “judgmental,” “cynical,” and “bitter”? Impatience points to a spirit of anger.

Withdrawal

Anger that goes underground often becomes bitterness, which in turn may lead us to withdraw from the person who hurt us. Withdrawal is a way to reduce the pain or prevent it from happening again. When hurt by her husband’s lack of love, a wife might withdraw (emotionally) from the relationship to convince herself that she doesn’t care. Instead of dealing with the pain openly, we make ourselves less vulnerable to the pain. Withdrawal can also be a subtle form of retaliation (“I’ll show him (her) that I don’t need him (her)!”) Look for signs that you have withdrawn from your kids, your parents, and your spouse. Do you spend much time together? Is conversation always superficial chit-chat? Do you enjoy one another’s company, or prefer your separate friends? Withdrawal points to a spirit of anger. Identify and forgive the hurts that have caused you to withdraw from people (Chapter 13-14). Learn to communicate the pain without anger and you will reduce the urge to withdraw.

Complaining

Do you complain a lot? People who successfully resolve the injuries that come along seldom complain. They have no ax to grind and hold no grudges. They have forgiven the wrongs done to them and gotten on with their life. Since they are not carrying around past injuries, they are able to see the good things in life and not focus on the irritants. On the other hand, some people seem to find the cloud in every silver lining. They have been injured a lot and they want everyone to know it. All the pain they have endured has given them a chip on their shoulder which makes them sensitive to every injury.

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When you talk about your day to your husband or wife, how much of it is complaining? Do you share all the things that annoyed you, how long you had to stand in a line, how rude this person was, or what stupid thing the boss did at work? Do you complain about your kids to your spouse? Do you share all your health ailments with anyone who will listen?

Complaining about that rude clerk is not as ugly as yelling at her, but it suggests bitterness and a lack of forgiveness, symptoms of an angry spirit. Can you think of any of your “complaining” friends whom you would describe as joyful? I can’t. Likewise, if your children are complainers, this is a symptom of their spirit of anger, which they probably learned from you-know-who. Their complaints will often take the form of whining and boredom.

Judgmental Attitude

My spirit of anger gave rise to a very judgmental attitude, not just toward those who had hurt me, but also toward total strangers. For example, if I saw an overweight person, my thoughts would quickly run to something like: “I can’t believe they are drinking a soda. Don’t they know how much sugar is in that thing?!” If someone did not return my smile, I would immediately think something like “What a snob!” If someone messed up at a piano recital, my thoughts were often something like, “They should have practiced more.” Do you find yourself making judgments about lots of people and situations, whether you speak those judgments aloud or not? It strongly suggests an angry spirit.

Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment. (John 7:24)

Controlling Personality

Anger is excited by injuries and different people use different methods to try to prevent or reduce the pain from these injuries. Withdrawal is a common method: controlling is

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another. By controlling people and situations, we hope to prevent outcomes that hurt us. Control can also be a form of retaliation against those who have hurt us in the past.

For example, competitive people with an angry spirit will usually try to take charge of the game, picking the teams, making the rules and appointing themselves as the umpire. Why? Partly because it reduces the chance of losing, which they find very painful.

“Control” is a big struggle for me. In raising my kids, I often tried to micro-manage how they did things because it irritated (hurt) me so much when they did things differently than I. It hurt my pride when they did not consider my way to be the best way. If they did not follow my advice, I took it (wrongly) as a sign that they didn’t respect me. So I micro-managed many tasks to avoid that pain.

How much do you let your kids fail? When you give them a job to do, are you constantly checking up to make sure they do it “your way”? When they are building or drawing something, do you offer lots of advice? Another sign that you have a controlling personality is when your kids constantly ask you how to do simple things:

- “Dad, which rag should I use to clean out the ice chest?”
- “Mom, which part of the chair should I dust first?”
- “Dad, where should I empty this trash can?”
- “Is it okay if I don’t eat the brown part on this broccoli?”

Your children may ask these kinds of questions because they are afraid of doing it “wrong.” They’ve learned over the years that it is less painful to just do it Mom or Dad’s way. A controlling personality is a reliable sign of a spirit of anger. For some wives, this controlling personality is directed toward their husbands, which is the topic of the next chapter.

20. What About Her Anger?

There are many incidents in the Bible involving angry men and their violence, sharp words, hatred and revenge. It is harder, though not impossible, to find women starring in the angry role. Why is that? Do women have less anger, or do they tend to show it in different ways?

Here is a Bible verse that reminds us that women do get angry, and that also points to the manner in which her anger is often manifested.

It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman. (Proverbs 21:19)

According to the dictionary, “contentious” means quarrelsome, apt to dispute, given to angry debate. Today, we might use the term “nagging” to describe such a woman. Women, if you nag your husband or children, consider the possibility that it is a symptom of an angry spirit. The hurts that you have endured, and not resolved, have led you to the place where you are quarrelsome, apt to dispute and contentious.

In the previous chapter we noted that a controlling personality is a reliable symptom of a spirit of anger. Control is both a form of retaliation and a way to reduce painful outcomes. Women with a controlling personality often exert their control through nagging. She gets her husband (or child) to do what she wants by wearing him down with nagging, which can be like a continual dropping in a very rainy day.

“A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.” (Proverbs 27:15)

Since women usually have less physical strength than men, perhaps they learn to show their anger with more subtlety? In both men and women, anger often goes underground and takes other forms, such as withdrawal, cynicism, distrust,

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impatience, fault-finding, evil speaking, a sharp tongue, teasing, sarcasm, a judgmental attitude and a controlling personality.

- Mom, do you withdraw affection or emotional support from your husband as a way to retaliate for the hurts that you feel he has inflicted?
- Ladies, do you pass along disparaging information about people who have hurt and angered you? This could be a form of retaliation, a sign of bitterness in your heart, which in turn points to an angry spirit.
- Wives, do you tease your husband about his clothes or his other annoying habits? Is it purely out of affection, or is there an unspoken “bite” in your joking words? Do his garments or his hairstyle embarrass you? Is your husband the subject of your various reformation projects? Do you talk about your husband’s annoying habits with your friends or mother? If so, I urge you to identify the various ways your husband has hurt you, forgive him specifically for them all, and put away this compulsion to control him.

Some Bible examples

Job’s wife displayed an interesting form of anger. She and her husband had just lost their children and most of their possessions. Job had also lost his health and had his body covered with painful boils.

And he [Job] took him a potsherd [piece of pottery] to scrape himself with; and he sat down among the ashes. Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die. But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaks. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips. (Job 2:8-10)

We can certainly understand Mrs. Job’s pain and bitterness over her losses. But isn’t it interesting that her anger and bitterness manifested itself in the form of a sarcastic jab at

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her husband? Husbands, do you ever feel like the target of your wife's anger even when someone else provoked it? I have. Notice the soft answer that Job offers to his wife's angry suggestion.

Jezebel

Jezebel was the wicked wife of King Ahab and she was also a very controlling woman. A controlling personality is a reliable indicator of a spirit of anger (see Chapter 19). Here are a few instances where we see Jezebel's controlling personality.

For it was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water. (1 Kings 18:4)

- Even though her husband was the king, Jezebel took the initiative to kill the prophets of the Lord whom she opposed. Her husband made no effort to stop her.

Now therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal [a popular false god] four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves³⁴ four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's table. (1 Kings 18:19)

- Here we see that the nine hundred and fifty false prophets in Israel were being directly supported by Jezebel, quite a take-charge kind of lady!

And Ahab [the king] told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had slain all the prophets [i.e. Jezebel's false prophets] with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time. (1 Kings 19:1-2)

- In this instance, Jezebel's angry spirit come forth with vengeful words. Notice that she shows no concern that her husband might disapprove of her plan to kill this prophet of

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God (who had just done a mighty miracle in the king's sight to end the three year drought!)

And perhaps the best example of this woman's controlling personality is found in this story.

And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, The LORD forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee. And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.

Ahab is pouting, which often fits the profile of a man with a controlling wife. If Ahab reminds you of your husband, consider the possibility that you are his Jezebel.

But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread? And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard. And Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on

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high among the people: And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die...

And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead. (1 Kings 21:1-15)

Jezebel was the “provider” in her family. One of the ways she controlled her husband was by getting him the things that he wanted. He in turn was quite content to let her do the leading. If you wives feel your husband is not the leader he should be in your family, consider whether you are acting as his provider. Many men will let their wives lead them as long as they are willing to take that role.

Jezebel’s angry spirit continued until the day of her death. Here we see her mocking the new king Jehu who had slain all of Ahab’s sons after Ahab’s death:

And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head [put up her hair], and looked out at a window. And as Jehu entered in at the gate, she said, Had Zimri peace, who slew his master? (2 Kings 9:30-31)

She is reminding Jehu of Zimri, who had rebelled against another king of Israel and perished soon afterward. Mocking, teasing and sarcasm are some people’s favorite angry tools.

Our modern culture makes it very difficult for women to gracefully accept the family role that God has given them. Bible verses such as these are fighting words for many females:

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Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. (Ephesians 5:22-24)

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; (1 Peter 3:1)

Does this seem unfair? Yes, by today's cultural standards. Do many husbands take advantage of the leadership role that God has given them and use it to serve their own selfish desires? Yes. Do some women feel injured by the seeming unfairness of having to submit to their husbands? Yes. Do unresolved hurts excite anger? Yes. Could this anger manifest itself in some women as a desire to control their husbands? Yes.

Women, if you are plagued with a controlling personality toward your husband, consider the possibility that the underlying problem is a spirit of anger. Your compulsion to control suggests that you have not resolved the injuries and pains in your life, especially those caused by your own husband. When you resolve these hurts God's way (through forgiveness, see Chapters 13-14), the rug will be pulled out from this compulsion and you will find the peace and joy that God wants you to have in letting your husband be the head of your family.

Unto the woman he [the LORD] said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. (Genesis 3:16)

21. The Anger of the Father

Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: lest thou learn his ways... (Proverbs 22:24-25)

Have you noticed the power of peer pressure? When we (or our children) hang around the wrong people we often pick up their bad habits. The Bible says, "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners."³⁵ We learn to talk and act like the people we are with. If we make friendships with angry men, or go with them, it is highly likely that we will learn their angry ways.

We can choose our friends, and avoid those who have angry spirits, but we cannot choose our parents. If your parents had angry spirits, it is likely that you developed a similar condition. Looking back with the benefit of hindsight, both my father, my grandfather and my step-father were angry men. Once I discovered my own spirit of anger, I remembered countless angry incidents in my childhood home: harsh words, bitterness, withdrawal, cynicism, distrust, scorning, sarcasm, a judgmental attitude and a controlling personality. I spent my childhood with angry men and learned their ways.

I am not complaining. They were the parents that God choose for me, and I am thankful for each of them. I truly believe that their angry spirit has *already* worked together for my good, just as God promises to those who love Him.³⁶ But I also acknowledge that I learned their manner of dealing with injuries, their way of expressing anger and their manner of harboring bitterness.

The Bible contains a few stories to demonstrate the effect of parental anger on a child. We begin with Jacob, whom we first discussed in Chapter 9. You may recall that Jacob deceived his brother Esau and provoked him to anger and hatred. In that story we noticed a number of hurts that Jacob had endured which could easily lead to a spirit of anger, especially the fact that his father preferred Esau and wanted to

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give him the blessing. Unresolved hurts are the breeding ground for an angry spirit.

When Jacob fled from his brother he went to his uncle Laban, where he agreed to work seven years in return for the hand of Rachel (Laban's younger daughter) in marriage. Laban deceived him and Jacob ended up married to the wrong daughter, Leah. Leah, by the way, is described as "tender eyed" in contrast to Rachel who was "beautiful and well favored." Jacob had to work another seven years for the wife that he had already worked for. Later Jacob and Laban worked out an arrangement for Jacob to continue working for certain wages, and Laban repeatedly tried to cheat his son-in-law.

With all these injuries we should not be surprised to find Jacob with an angry spirit. In the following incident we see his spirit of anger directed at his favorite wife Rachel. At the time this occurred, Leah has had four sons while the more beautiful Rachel has none.

And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? (Genesis 30:1-2)

That seems like a harsh way to deal with one's beloved wife. No sympathy for what she is going through, no encouragement to "take it to the Lord in prayer." No offer to pray for her as his father Isaac had done when faced with a similar problem.³⁷ No exhortation to his wife to put away her envy. Just anger and angry words.

Later, Jacob fled secretly from his father-in-law with his wives and children, fearing that Laban might prevent him from leaving. Laban pursues after them and accuses Jacob of stealing some of his household idols. After a search fails to turn up the missing idols, we finally see Jacob's anger displayed

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toward the uncle and father-in-law who has repeatedly cheated him.

And Jacob was wroth, and chode [scolded, contended] with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me? Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? set it here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both. This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes [female sheep] and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. (Genesis 31:36-40)

Notice Jacob's complaining, another symptom of an angry spirit. Laban had deceived his son-in-law over a thirteen year period, but we just now see the first angry outburst toward him. Unresolved hurts breed anger, though that anger often goes underground. To overcome a spirit of anger we must admit that it is sin. We must admit that we are angry because we are hurt. And we must resolve those accumulated hurts by forgiving the people for the specific wrongs that we feel they committed (Chapters 13-14).

Jacob's anger got passed on to at least two of his sons: Simeon and Levi. These are the fellows who deceived and then slaughtered an entire village because one man in that village had defiled their sister Dinah. That incident is another good example of how anger overflows like a flood. And when Jacob reproves them for what they did, we see from their answer that they felt right in slaughtering an entire village.

And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the

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Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house. And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot? (Genesis 34:30-31)

Remember how King David's anger led him to pervert justice (Chapter 6) and want to execute a man for stealing another man's lamb? Well, killing an entire village for one man's wrong is another example of how anger blinds and overflows. Many years later Jacob mentions the anger of his two sons when telling them what would befall their descendents in the years to come.

Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel. (Genesis 49:5-7)

The anger of those two men cast a long shadow, affecting their descendents for many generations. Our anger has similar long effects though we often do not see them until it is too late. If you had an angry parent, or two, there is a strong likelihood that you developed a similar spirit of anger. And if you have an angry spirit, your children are learning it right now. Do not delay. Admit that your angry spirit is sinful, even if it only occasionally emerges as shouts, violence, or cruel words. Repent of the quiet bitterness you have harbored toward people. Acknowledge the hurts and the injuries that fueled your spirit of anger and forgive them one-by-one (Chapters 13-14).

Jacob had twelve sons by four wives and there was a lot of bitterness and rivalry between the wives. Jacob himself clearly preferred Rachel to Leah, and the son of Rachel

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(Joseph) over his other sons. That kind of rivalry can lead to a lot of hurt, which in turn can breed bitterness and anger.

Now Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. (Genesis 37:3-4)

We have already mentioned the anger of Simeon and Levi (sons of Leah) who slaughtered a village because of the wrong done by one man. The other brothers apparently shared that angry spirit, because we find them plotting revenge against Joseph, their father's favorite son. The desire for revenge is strong proof of a spirit of anger. They first plotted his murder but at the last minute they sold him into slavery instead. Afterwards they deceived their father Jacob into thinking that his favorite son had been killed by wild beasts, which certainly seems like retaliation for all the pain he had caused by his favoritism. Jacob's oldest son even committed adultery with one of his four wives, which certainly seems like another act of rebellion.

So we see Jacob's anger passed down to his sons, with many of them becoming rebels. Rebellion is strong evidence of a spirit of anger. Interestingly, there is no indication that Joseph acquired his father's spirit of anger. Perhaps, being the favorite son, he did not have to endure what his brothers experienced? For whatever reason, Joseph displays a wonderful spirit of forgiveness when he later faces his brothers who had hated him and sold him into slavery. This happened after he had become the governor of Egypt.

And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved,

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nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life...And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither [here], but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. (Genesis 45:4-8)

Notice Joseph's spirit of forgiveness, which is the opposite of a spirit of anger. If you do not have a forgiving spirit, you probably have an angry spirit. All the hurts and injuries of your life have stayed with you, building bitterness.

Please also notice how Joseph was not bitter about all the hardship he had endured *because he accepted it as God's will!* We talked about that in Chapter 11. When we Christians get angry at injuries and frustrations, is it not an indication that we need more faith in God's promise of Romans 8:28: "...all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose"? Why get angry at something that we know God is going to work for our good?

In summary, Jacob had a lot of anger in his life and this got passed on to most of his children. If you or your spouse has a spirit of anger, it is being passed on to your children as well. By the grace and power of God, you can overcome this angry spirit by following Joseph's example: you can forgive the hurts and injuries of your life and believe that God intends to work every one of them to your good.

22. The Anger of the Father, Part Two

King Saul was an angry man whose life can teach us much about anger and the effect of parental anger on our children. Saul tried repeatedly to murder David, his most successful soldier, because he feared him as a rival for the throne of Israel. One time he even ordered the execution of all the priests because he (wrongly) thought that one of them had helped David escape. Time and time again his efforts to kill David were thwarted, sometimes by his own son and daughter. Imagine the pain of knowing that your own children have sided with the man you are determined to kill! It helps explain the fury of Saul's angry spirit.

Interestingly, Saul does not seem to have had an angry spirit before he became king. In fact, he seems to have been a rather meek and humble man, as seen in this incident that occurred as Saul was being chosen out of the entire nation to become the king.

And when Samuel [the prophet who was showing the people whom God had chosen to be the king] had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken... and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they enquired of the LORD further, if the man should yet come thither. And the LORD answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff. (1 Samuel 10:20-22)

This next incident also reveals a man who had not yet developed an angry spirit. It occurred shortly after Saul was crowned the king.

And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched. But the children of Belial [the devil] said, How shall this man save us? And they

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despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace. (1 Samuel 10:26-27)

Later, after Saul's first military victory, the people wanted to kill those who had rejected him earlier, but we see again a willingness to forgive.

And the people said unto Samuel, Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death. And Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to day the LORD hath wrought salvation in Israel. (1 Samuel 11:12-13)

However, as Saul continued to reign we find a man who became increasingly angry, bitter and vengeful. This incident occurred after one of David's victories.

And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets [a musical instrument], with joy, and with instruments of music. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward. (1 Samuel 18:5-9)

Notice Saul's pain and the bitterness that it gave rise to. The songs of the women hurt his pride. David had done nothing wrong, but Saul's anger was already blinding him and making him "eye" this loyal servant. Later he tries to kill David while he is playing music for the king. His anger had blossomed into murderous hatred. Later still, Saul conceives a more subtle plan to kill David, by promising him one of his

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daughters to wife if he kills a certain number of Philistines. Imagine using your own daughter as “bait” to kill your enemy. That is the kind of thing that anger can lead people to do.

And Michal Saul's daughter loved David: and they told Saul, and the thing pleased him. And Saul said, I will give him her, that she may be a snare to him, and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.... (1 Samuel 18:20-21)

But his plan failed and God protected David again. Imagine how frustrating it must have been for Saul to see plan after plan thwarted! Frustration is like jet-rocket fuel for an angry spirit.

Another time Michal lied to her father in order to protect David. Not only did Saul’s plan fail again, but it was thwarted by his own daughter, whom he had given to David as a wife! He had become an angry man, and his anger had alienated his own daughter. Your anger is causing similar effects on your children, though you may not yet see those effects.

In this next story we see that Saul’s anger also alienated his son Jonathan. David and Jonathan had earlier concocted a story to deceive Saul about David’s whereabouts and test his intentions. Here we see their plan put into action.

And it came to pass on the morrow, which was the second day of the month, that David's place was empty: and Saul said unto Jonathan his son, Wherefore [for what reason] cometh not the son of Jesse [David] to meat, neither yesterday, nor to day? And Jonathan answered Saul, David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem: And he said, Let me go, I pray thee [please]; for our family hath a sacrifice in the city; and my brother, he hath commanded me to be there: and now, if I have found favor in thine eyes, let me get away, I pray thee, and see my brethren. Therefore he comes not unto the king's table. Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said unto him, Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast

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chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion, and unto the confusion of thy mother's nakedness?³⁸ For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom. Wherefore [for that reason] now send and fetch him unto me, for he shall surely die. And Jonathan answered Saul his father, and said unto him, Wherefore [for what reason] shall he be slain? what hath he done? And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him: whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David. So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month: for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame. (1 Samuel 20:27-34)

Notice the ferocity of Saul's anger. It led him to curse and publicly humiliate not only his son but also his wife ("son of the perverse rebellious woman") who had nothing wrong in this matter. It led Saul to attempt murder of his own son. Saul demonstrates the truth that "he that is soon angry deals [acts] foolishly..." and "wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous..." and "an angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression."³⁹

Notice also the "fierce anger" arising in Jonathan, the son of angry Saul. He continued to support David, his father's sworn enemy, until the end. His alienation from his father warns us of the effect that our anger may have upon our children.

The Bible also contains a story where Saul's daughter Michal displayed some of her father's angry spirit. In Second Samuel 6, David is bringing the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem. (This is the gold-covered box which represented God's presence among his people. It had been lost in battle many years earlier). David, a man after God's own heart, was excited and joyful. Let us see how his wife, the daughter of angry King Saul, reacted.

And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod [a type of apron]. So

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David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. And as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.... Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!

Here we see the bitter fruits of anger in the daughter of an angry man. In Chapter 19 we mentioned that one of the symptoms of an angry spirit is a judgmental/critical attitude, and we see that in Michal ("she despised him in her heart"). We also notice that Michal's angry spirit is expressed through mocking, which reminds us of Job's wife and the angry Queen Jezebel (Chapter 20). Anger separates people and inhibits intimacy, leading both husbands and wives to jeopardize their marriage for the littlest things!

Anger also destroys peace and joy. While David was dancing joyfully before the Lord, the joyless daughter of angry King Saul was standing by, critical and cynical. If joy is absent from your life, a good place to look for it is buried under a spirit of anger. Get rid of the angry spirit and *all* the fruits of the Spirit will have room to grow.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

23. Are Your Children Rebellious?

If your children have a spirit of anger, it will often show up as rebellion. Rebellion is anger directed against authority. How do children develop a spirit of anger? The Bible says “make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go. Lest thou learn his ways...”⁴⁰ Children, like everyone else, learn angry ways from the people they “go with.” Sometimes this is friends, but usually it is parents. Rebellion in your child is a reliable indicator of a spirit of anger in you and/or your spouse. Over the years, the anger they have observed and endured in the home has stirred up strife, and they have learned your angry ways.

What does rebellion look like? It depends on several factors, including the age of the child and his or her personality, but most parents would agree that the symptoms of rebellion include some or all of the following:

- A disrespect for authority.
- Openly defying the rules, either inside or outside the home.
- Arguing about the rules.
- “Forgetting” the rules and needing constant reminders (a passive form of rebellion).
- Animosity toward siblings.
- Taking pleasure in the misfortunes that befall siblings. Laughing at their faults or troubles. Hostility or violence shown toward other children.
- Withdrawal from the family – no desire to spend time with parents or siblings.
- Deception about their activities.
- A cynical, distrusting attitude.
- Adopting values that the child knows will offend the parents.

It is a fearful thing for children to observe anger in their parents, especially if that anger is accompanied by any form of violence. Children see how anger hurts Mom and Dad, and they

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can feel that hurt themselves, even when the anger is not directed toward them. Put yourself in the place of a five-year-old watching Dad yell at Mom, or vice versa. “What does it mean?” “How can Dad be so nice one moment, and yelling the next?” “Do they really mean those words that they say to one another?” Parental strife hurts children, and unresolved hurts are a breeding ground for an angry spirit.

A parent’s angry spirit can get passed on their children even if the children are not usually the target of the anger. Does your spirit of anger lead you to judge and criticize people outside your family? If so, your children observe this and learn your ways. Does your anger come forth as complaining? Your children are learning your ways. Does your anger manifest itself through evil speaking or sarcasm? Your children are learning your ways. Are you cynical or mistrusting? If so, your children are developing a similar attitude. Do you withdraw from people who anger you? Your children are observing and learning your ways. When we “go” with an angry person, we learn his ways, just as the Bible says.

To make matters worse, many parents refuse to follow the Bible’s method of child discipline. We discussed that method in Chapter 17 and it is summarized in these verses.

He that spares [holds back] his rod hates his son: but he that loves him chastens him betimes [promptly, early]. (Proverbs 13:24)

Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare [hold back] for his crying. (Proverbs 19:18)

Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him. (Proverbs 22:15)

Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beat him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him

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*with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.
(Proverbs 23:13-14)*

*The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to
himself brings his mother to shame. (Proverbs 29:15)*

*Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall
give delight unto thy soul. (Proverbs 29:17)*

Instead of the rod and reproof, many parents use guilt, withdrawal and sharp cutting words. These methods seem to get the desired results for awhile, but they cause more long-lasting pain than a firm, calm spanking. More pain means more anger is building up in your children, since anger is excited by real or imagined injuries. We need to trust God that He knows the best way to discipline our children, and that way does not include guilt, withdrawal, sharp, cutting words or any other form of anger.

Have you made your children feel stupid or incompetent? Do you withdraw affection from them when they do something wrong, or do not meet your expectations? Are you critical and judgmental toward them and the things they do? Are you impatient when they do not understand something you are trying to explain? Those are the kinds of things that we angry-spirited parents do regularly, and they all hurt our children more than we realize. These hurts breed anger which may go underground for many years, but eventually becomes rebellion. A child's rebellion points to the angry spirit in Mom and/or Dad.

Since children cannot retaliate directly against the parents who hurt them, their anger tends to go underground. During early childhood, they may be sullen, moody, clingy, complaining, fearful or withdrawn. They may show hostility toward other children (a MOST reliable sign of anger in the house). Many parents do not recognize these as symptoms of an-angry-spirit-under-construction, because our anger blinds us to the effect it is having on our children. Alarm bells do not go

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off because the problem is manageable while our kids are young – we can put up with the occasional clinging, moodiness, and fearfulness. We think it is just a phase that the child is going through.

But then the child becomes a rebellious teenager and the parents are often shocked. “What happened?” they wonder. “We gave them every good thing. We spent lots of time with them. We were always there when they needed us.” Yes, we may do many nice things for our children, and that is commendable, but it does not erase the ill-effects of our anger. In fact, sometimes the “nice things” we do for our children can blind us to the effect of our anger, by making us think that all is well when it is not. We yell at our children, or spank them in anger, or make them feel stupid, and when we feel guilty enough we take them out for an ice cream cone or spend extra time with them playing games. Is everything okay? It may seem that way because the child is smiling and talking to us again. But doing nice things is not the Biblical way of getting rid of sins. In fact, it is the kind of “covering” that can deceive us and blind us to God’s solution.

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. (Proverbs 28:13)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

People have a natural tendency to believe that they can “make up” for their sins by some act of penance. By our natural reasoning, good deeds should erase our bad deeds. “If you do something bad, do something good to make up for it.” No wonder so many well-intentioned but angry-spirited parents are shocked when their children become rebels. The parents

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remember all the good things they did for their child – the child remembers the anger and all the pain that came with it.

In Chapter 21 we saw that Jacob's angry spirit got passed on to many of his sons, and they committed various acts of rebellion. In Chapter 22 we saw how angry King Saul alienated both his son and his daughter, both of whom showed signs of an angry spirit. If you or your spouse have an angry spirit, it is breeding anger and rebellion in your children right now.

We do not want to raise rebels. We want children who are sweet-tempered and joyful. And we will accomplish that by overcoming our own angry spirits and then helping them to overcome theirs. Repent of your spirit of anger, not just the occasional outbursts of temper. Recognize that it is sin even if it never looks like anger. Acknowledge the hurts that have fueled your angry spirit and forgive them one-by-one (see Chapters 13-14). Teach your children to do the same thing. From this day forth, let them observe in you a forgiving spirit toward those who hurt you.

*For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive;
and plenteous in mercy unto all them
that call upon thee. (Psalms 86:5)*

24. Let Us Avoid Withdrawal

The dictionary says that anger is a violent passion of the mind excited by real or imagined injuries. This violent passion of the mind often leads to some form of retaliation, such as sharp words, shouting, broken dishes, hitting, mocking or evil speaking. That form of anger is easy to recognize. As we overcome our angry spirit, and learn new ways to respond to the injuries of life, these acts of retaliation will decrease more and more, and for that we can be very thankful.

But our goal is not to withdraw into passivity. We do not want to replace a spirit of anger toward our children with a spirit of tolerance. We do not want to go from control freak to “It’s not my problem, let him find his own way.” We do not want to replace marital malice with “He can live his life, and I’ll live mine.” Overcoming a spirit of anger does not mean passivity toward the people that God has put in our life, or toward the hurts that come our way. Passivity and withdrawal may look and feel more peaceful than our former angry retaliation, but they are still not God’s way. He wants us to make a positive difference in the lives of other people.

Retaliation is one way we respond to injuries in order to deny the pain, reduce it, or prevent it from happening again. Withdrawal is another way. I have withdrawn from people (either physically or emotionally) both as a means of retaliation and to prevent them from hurting me again. I stopped making an effort with friends who angered me. I withheld affection from family members. I adopted an “I don’t care” attitude. Although it feels more peaceful than retaliation, withdrawal is not our goal.

Withdrawal in a marriage can be formal (divorce) or informal (lack of intimacy, lack of time together, separate lives under the same roof, superficial communication). Withdrawal in a friendship can also be formal (you stop getting together) or informal (you still see one another but you stop caring about their problems, you entertain cynical thoughts toward them, you stop showing the same interest etc.).

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Our goal is to avoid both retaliation and withdrawal. Is this possible? Yes. Here is an example. Imagine that a store clerk treats you rudely and you are angered by her attitude. Retaliation might be a harsh tone of voice, a sarcastic remark, or a threat to talk to the manager. Withdrawal might be a decision to stop shopping there and passing on your bad experience to as many friends as possible, hoping that they will also avoid that store. The responses look totally different but both are born of anger, which in turn is born of the hurt that you experienced.

There is a third path we can choose that is neither retaliation nor withdrawal: we can address the problem openly in a spirit of meekness. For example, with a kind tone of voice we could ask the rude clerk; “Miss, have I done something to bother you?” You may be shocked with her reaction. One of two things will probably happen:

- The store clerk may completely deny that anything is wrong, and prove it by treating you respectfully for the rest of the transaction. If that happens, you’ll be able to leave the store without any lingering bitterness, and prove to yourself once again that one really can handle the injuries of life without anger.
- Or she may “confess” all sorts of things to excuse her rude behavior: how she was called in to work on her day off, how she isn’t feeling well, how bad her boss is, how she hates the job, how her child is sick at home, and so on. These excuses are sort of like an apology for her earlier rude behavior, and like most apologies, they help dissolve our anger.⁴¹ You now have an opportunity to make a difference in her life. For example, you can offer sympathy for her trouble, give her a gospel tract, or invite her to church. Perhaps nothing will come of it, but at least you tried, and God rewards His people for faithful efforts, not just results.⁴²

What you did is communicate your hurt in a non-threatening way. It helped the person rise above the anger that

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had temporarily blinded her. Although your effort may not prevent this sales clerk from treating the next customer rudely, it has a far better chance of success than either retaliation or withdrawal.

So, as we overcome our spirit of anger, let us not retreat into the position of passivity. Let us look for meek and gentle ways to communicate to people that hurt us. I think you will find what I have found: when I communicate my hurt in a non-threatening manner, I do not feel the need to retaliate, and the other person is much more likely to accept the exhortation.

- “John, can I tell you something that I’ve been struggling with for awhile? <he says okay> “Well, I really have this problem with you being late all the time, and I know it’s a little thing that shouldn’t hurt me, but it really does, and I was wondering if there is anything we can do...”
- “Honey, it really hurts me when you use that tone of voice.”
- “Dear, it hurts me when you keep reminding me to do these things. It seems like you don’t trust me...”
- “Hey, kids, I’m sorry to have to burden you with this, but it really hurts me when no one greets me when I get home.”
- “Dad, I get really scared when you use that tone of voice.”
- “Mom, that tone of voice really makes me feel stupid.”
- “George, I was wondering if you could stop that teasing? I’ve never really admitted how much it hurts me.”
- “Sally, you know how much I value our friendship, and for that reason I have to share with you how much it hurt me when you told Mary about”
- “Darling, I sense that you’re very withdrawn today. Have I done something to hurt you?”
- “Son, what can we do to help you remember to put away your tools? It really hurts me that you don’t follow my instructions...”
- “Daughter, can I share with you a problem I’m having? You know how you like to blow bubbles through that straw? Now, this is just a personal quirk of mine, but that noise really gets

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on my nerves. Is it possible that you could stop doing that for a while?"

Instead of withdrawing into a "who cares" attitude, let us believe that God has put people into our lives for a good purpose. He has allowed "painful" situations to arise in our lives so that both we, and the other person, can grow. In Chapters 13-14 we noted that every injury is an opportunity to recognize our frailty, see our need for God, and draw closer to Him in prayer. We saw that every injury is an opportunity to practice real forgiveness. Every injury is also an opportunity to meekly help other people – the people who hurt us – see what they are doing and grow thereby. Everyone can "win" when we avoid both retaliation and withdrawal.

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [trials, tests]; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting [lacking] nothing. (James 1:2-4)

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:1-2)

- Do you have a wife or husband who is overtaken in a fault? Do not retaliate or withdraw. Do not pout or dish out the silent treatment. Seek to restore him or her in a spirit of meekness.

And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. (Jude 1:22-23)

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- Do you have friends or family who are still in bondage to a spirit of anger? Do not tune them out or withdraw. Have compassion on them and be God's helper to make a difference in their lives, pulling them out of the fire. Meekly communicate how their anger hurts you, and demonstrate through your life a better way to deal with the injuries that come our way. Gently tell them when they seem angry.

The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself brings his mother to shame. (Proverbs 29:15)

- Do not leave your children to themselves, no matter how much they irritate or disappoint you. Resist the temptation to let your aggravating adolescents go their own way, while you go yours. Use the rod and reproof as God has commanded so they develop the wisdom that will keep them from bringing you to shame. God does not give parents the option to withdraw from their children, which happens even in Christian homes more than we care to admit. Do chasten them, do reprove their faults, do discipline promptly, and do it all without anger or bitterness.

But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (Hebrews 3:13)

- Seek to make a difference in the lives of one another. Exhort your friends and family members who fall into anger or some other sin. Remember how anger deceived you, and is deceiving this person as well, so be patient and meek.

Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. (2 Timothy 4:2)

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- Pastors and elders, you do not have the option of being passive when it comes to people's spiritual needs. Contend for the one true faith that has been delivered to the saints.⁴³ God commands you to reprove, rebuke and exhort, whether it is in season (convenient and easy) or not. Do not withdraw from the spiritual battles that rage all around you. Do not choose the path of passivity for fear of offending people. Reprove, rebuke and exhort and do it with lots of longsuffering. Do it without anger, as a workman of Almighty God, remembering that it is He who gives repentance, not our angry reproof. Remember that an angry spirit disqualifies someone from leadership roles in God's church.

*For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, **not soon angry**, not given to wine, **no striker**, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, **temperate**; (Titus 1:7-8)*

*And the servant of the Lord **must not strive**; but be **gentle unto all men**, apt to teach, **patient**, In **meeekness** instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; (2 Timothy 2:24-25)*

*For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; **not selfwilled, not soon angry**, not given to wine, **no striker**, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, **temperate**; (Titus 1:7-8)*

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. (1 Thessalonians 5:14)

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- Let us be especially patient toward those people who are still in bondage to an angry spirit, even as we warn them of its dangers. Support the weak and remember that anger blinds. His (or her) spirit of anger developed over many years, and it will not disappear overnight. Let us be patient toward them as God has been toward us.

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. (Romans 15:1)

- Remember that someone in bondage to an angry spirit is really *weak*, though he or she may appear strong and self-reliant. Resist the temptation to withdraw from his (or her) life with the attitude “it’s not my problem.” Bear his (or her) infirmities and be ready always to talk about how to overcome a spirit of anger. Pray for that opportunity and watch God open a door for such a discussion.

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:9-10)

25. Ten Ways to Handle His (or Her) Anger

All of us have to deal with angry people. Even if you yourself do not have a spirit of anger, you probably have friends or family members who are struggling with this problem. Sometimes their anger will be directed at you, and other times the victim will be someone else, such as your child. Fortunately, the Bible gives us a lot of practical information on how to handle other people's anger. Once you recognize that your husband, wife, mother, father, child, neighbor or friend has a spirit of anger, you can be an instrument for healing in their life. And like Ezra, you can do things right now to prepare for that success.

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments. (Ezra 7:10)

Here are ten ways to help someone else overcome his or her spirit of anger:

1. Pray daily for the people in your life who have an angry spirit. Be like the woman in the Bible who went to the unjust judge over and over again until she got the answer she wanted.⁴⁴ Remember that anger has probably blinded your friend or relative, just like it blinded me. They are probably in denial, just like I was. Pray every single day that God will open their eyes to the problem and give them a desire to change. Once they recognize they have a problem, they have taken a big step toward healing. Pray specifically that God will grant them repentance and open their understanding to the problem.⁴⁵ Put a "sticky note" on your bathroom mirror as a reminder.

2. Second, have hope. Your friend or loved one may have so much accumulated anger and bitterness that the situation seems hopeless. They may not be a Christian, or even a professing Christian. They may resist your efforts to talk

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about anger. That's okay. God will be all the more glorified when He heals such a person. Have confidence that this person's angry spirit is part of the plan whereby God is going to work some good thing. I am living proof that God is able to do what seems impossible: help someone overcome a strong and life-long spirit of anger.

But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. (Matthew 19:26)

3. Memorize Bible verses about how to handle an angry person so that they come to your mind when the need arises. Here are three of my favorites.

A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. (Proverbs 15:1)

By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaks the bone. (Proverbs 25:15)

Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work. (Proverbs 24:29)

4. Show by your personal example that one can solve problems and deal with injuries without anger. If your husband has a spirit of anger toward your children, skip the soapbox and perform your discipline without anger. Let your non-angry example, and good results, speak for themselves. Your husband will eventually notice, especially if you are praying for him. God will open a door for you to talk about anger when your husband is willing to listen.

Wives, I recommend that you do not make it your job to reform your husband of his angry spirit. Most men resist being made a project. Rather, let him see you respond to injuries

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without anger. You will be able to win him to the truth through prayer and your own behavior.

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation [behavior] of the wives; (1 Peter 3:1)

5. Talk about what you have learned about anger in your life. Forget the finger pointing, the lecture and the soap-box. Share good-old “let me tell you what I’ve learned about myself lately” kind of stuff. Communicate the successes (and failures) you have experienced toward your child or your mother-in-law. Almost everyone likes to listen to personal testimony, so make it as personal as possible. In the months after I discovered my own angry spirit, I had countless opportunities to tell people what I was learning. Every salutation (“What’s new with you, Larry?”) opens the door to talk about anger. What I found is that most of my listeners confessed a similar problem with anger, which gave me many opportunities to point them in the right direction. Purchase the S.M. Davis audio tape mentioned earlier and be ready to lend it out. If this book has helped you, share it with anyone who shows an interest. Put together a list of Bible verses about anger, including the “anger stories” we have discussed, and send it to people who admit a problem with anger. Start a Bible study on anger.

6. Respond slowly and meekly when confronted with his (or her) temper. Strive to pray for help as soon as you are confronted with anger. Lower your voice and pause before talking. Remember that “grievous words stir up strife.” Believe God when He says, “a soft answer turns away wrath.”

7. When God saw Jonah’s anger (Chapter 15) He asked him a question (“Doest thou well to be angry?”). Questions can diffuse anger by helping the angry person see what is going on.

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The right question is a very “soft answer.” Be sure to watch the tone of your voice because even the best question can sound like an attack. Whenever possible, use a question that pacifies whatever angry accusation has been raised and focuses on solving the problem.

Angry wife: “You’ll never believe what that kid has done now...!”

Wise husband: “Yes, I see what you mean. What do you think is making him act that way?”

* * *

Angry husband: “He thinks he knows everything. I’ve never known a more pig-headed person and I don’t have to put up with this...!”

Wise wife: “What do you think you should do?”

* * *

Angry wife: “Why can’t you remember to do the simple things I ask!”

Wise husband: “I do have a pretty selective memory, don’t I? Will you forgive me?”

* * *

Angry husband: “I can’t believe he hasn’t returned that lawn mower he borrowed. That’s the last time I’ll lend him anything!!!”

Wise wife: “I can see why you feel that way, dear. Are you angry?”

* * *

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Angry wife: <cold, silent treatment>
Wise husband: "Honey, I can tell that I've done something to hurt you. Can we talk about it?"

* * *

Angry husband: "All those politicians are a bunch of crooks. They ought to take them out and shoot them!"
Wise wife: "Who do you think should shoot them, dear?"

* * *

Nagging wife: "When are you going to move that shelf like you promised...?"
Wise husband: "I've really hurt you again, haven't I?"

* * *

Angry husband: "I can't believe you did something that stupid!"
Wise wife: "It was pretty stupid, wasn't it? Will you forgive me?"

* * *

Angry parent: "That was SO careless! Do you realize what you've done?!"
Wise child: "You're right, Mom. That was really careless. I'm sorry. What can I do to help fix the problem?"

If the angry person ignores your question, or responds angrily to it, try silence. That's what God did with Jonah when

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he ignored His first question. My wife has used silence on many occasions to help me recognize my anger.

8. Show by your personal example that it is okay to acknowledge the hurts that come into our life. Help your angry-spirited loved one realize that they are angry *because* they are hurt. Demonstrate that when we are hurt, it is the time to *be* hurt, not the time to be angry. Your angry-spirited loved one has been blinded by anger and thinks it is the appropriate response to injuries. You know better. Demonstrate in your own life how it is okay to be hurt and communicate that hurt, instead of getting angry.

9. Think of a “gift” that you can give to pacify people whom you have angered. The Bible says “a *gift in secret pacifies anger: and a reward in the bosom strong wrath.*”⁴⁶ When we hurt someone and provoke him to anger, let us be quick to give the “gift” that is always appropriate: an apology. Offer this gift even if the person you wronged shows no visible signs of anger. If you suspect that you hurt them, or if you would have been hurt if you were in their situation, then apologize.⁴⁷ Do not wait to see the anger, bitterness or withdrawal.

Watch the tone of voice you use with an apology: “I’m sorry” can sound like an attack. Show you are sorry with a sincere apology. Humble yourself in that way and you will forestall many angry arguments and demonstrate to your angry-spirited loved one how well it reduces strife. My worst outbursts occurred when the person who wronged me refused to admit any wrongdoing. That angered me more than whatever he (she) did wrong in the first place. Once you overcome your own spirit of anger, you will find it easier and easier to apologize immediately to the people you have hurt and set an example for them to follow. Once your angry loved one sees *you* sincerely admitting your mistakes, this will make them more willing to do likewise.

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The gift of a sincere apology takes a lot of the wind out of any angry sails. Saying “I’m sorry. Will you forgive me?” is a “gift” we can offer anytime we do wrong, even before we see any signs of anger. Apologize even if you feel the angry person was wrong to react harshly to your error. Many times we resist an apology because we are immediately angered by the anger of the person we hurt. Apologize even if the angry person shows no willingness to apologize for his anger. It will be like heaping hot coals of fire upon his head.⁴⁸

Depending on the wrong that you committed, another gift may be appropriate in addition to an apology. If you break your neighbor’s hedge cutters, forestall any anger or bitterness by buying him a new one. If you step on your daughter’s foot, show some real compassion for her pain and forget the lecture about how she should have gotten out of the way. If you forget to pick up some groceries for your wife, go right back out to the store and get them, and if that is not possible, do something else that makes up for the inconvenience.

It is a matter of utmost urgency to reconcile with those whom we have wronged. In fact, Jesus taught that “if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matthew 5:23-24). God would rather you not offer your gifts to Him until you have reconciled with the people you have hurt.

10. Here is one final suggestion to help deal with angry people: remember that it is your glory to overlook this fault and not respond in kind.

The discretion of a man defers his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression. (Proverbs 19:11)

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Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work. (Proverbs 24:29)

It may seem stronger and more effective to retaliate or withdraw from the angry person, but God looks at these things differently. He says, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit [is better] than he that takes a city."⁴⁹ We say, "A pound for a pound and a tooth for a tooth" but He says, "It is our glory to pass over a transgression." Do it God's way and you now have the Creator of the Universe working on your behalf to change this person's heart.

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

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26. Make a Difference

*And of some have compassion, making a difference
(Jude 1:22)*

Perhaps by this time you have discovered that you have a spirit of anger. Perhaps you now see how much damage it has done to your relationships and how much peace and joy it has diminished. You may have also discovered that you acquired your angry spirit from your parents. Regardless of where we learned our angry ways, let us refrain from the blame game. Pointing fingers is part of our old angry self, which we have put off. Does it hurt to realize that your parents led you down the path of anger? Sure, it hurts. Let it hurt, instead of letting it cause anger. Cast this pain upon Jesus. Use this injury, and every other hurt, as an opportunity to draw closer to God in prayer. Forgive your angry parents from the bottom of your heart. Remember that they probably learned anger from their parents.

Strive to deal with this issue the way the Apostle Paul dealt with the things in his past, “forgetting those things which are behind.”

*Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, **forgetting those things which are behind**, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)*

The world encourages us to find someone to blame for our troubles, but that just provides more fuel for an angry spirit. Forget the blame and forgive people the way God has forgiven you for your faults. The world will also tell you that since someone else caused your problem, you are not responsible. Do not fall for that lie either. Regardless of how you developed your angry spirit, you are responsible to overcome it. It is *your*

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spirit of anger and the Bible says “every man shall bear his own burden.”⁵⁰ Thankfully, you are not alone in this effort.

If you are a Christian, remember that God is greater than all your prior bad habits and training: “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”⁵¹ Believe that “with God, nothing shall be impossible.”⁵² He is willing and able to grant you the repentance you need to turn away from your angry ways. He is also able to provide more than enough help to overcome your angry habits. He can and will give you a heart to forgive all the hurts that have fueled your angry spirit.

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not. (Jeremiah 33:3)

For this is the will of God, even your sanctification... (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

Trust that “all things work together for good to those who love God”, even that spirit of anger that now burdens you. You will be extremely helpful to other angry people if you are someone who has “been there, done that” and escaped. When you overcome your spirit of anger, find a way to turn this former infirmity into a ministry serving other people. Share what you have learned. Talk about your experience to friends, family and neighbors. Write a book. Organize a Bible study on anger. Share this book or other resources. Strive to make a difference.

And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, (Jude 1:22-24)

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I call your attention to the “exceeding joy” mentioned at the end of that last verse. If joy is AWOL from your Christian life, consider the possibility that anger chased it away. How can joy thrive while we give anger and bitterness a place in our life? As you overcome your spirit of anger, see if you experience anew that “exceeding joy” that God wants His people to have.

When you turn from your spirit of anger, when you crucify it by the simple power of repentance and forgiveness, see if ALL the fruits of the spirit emerge with fresh vigor. Remember these are fruits OF THE SPIRIT, not our own works. If they are not abounding in your life, then one of two things is true: either you do not have the Spirit (very bad situation!) or something is killing these fruits as quickly as the Spirit brings them forth!

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance... (Galatians 5:22-23)

Consider carefully these nine fruits of the Spirit, and how many of them are thwarted by anger and its bitter bedfellows:

- How can LOVE abound when we are angry and bitter and withdrawn?
- Who can experience JOY when he is controlling, critical and complaining?
- Is PEACE possible where there are sharp words, sarcasm, strife and cynicism?
- Do not shouting, scorning, fault finding and evil speaking contradict LONGSUFFERING, GENTLENESS, GOODNESS AND MEEKNESS?
- Is not TEMPERANCE the opposite of anger?

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An angry spirit quenches the fruits of the Spirit and keeps your Christian life from being what God desires for you. If you have an angry spirit, forsake it right now. You know you would rather live without it. You know how much damage it has already done. You know God is able and willing to help you overcome it. Cast this burden upon Him without further delay. Repent of the anger and bitterness you have harbored toward other people. In the presence of God forgive all the specific people who have hurt you and the specific wrongs you can remember. Experience anew the fruits of the Spirit and become more loving, joyful, peaceful, gentle, good, meek, longsuffering, and temperate. Use these fruits to make a difference in other people's lives.

*If we live in the Spirit, let us also
walk in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:25)*

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Endnotes

- ¹ American Dictionary of the English Language, Noah Webster, 1828
- ² Philippians 4:13
- ³ 1 Corinthians 10:13
- ⁴ Proverbs 19:11
- ⁵ Proverbs 19:11
- ⁶ Proverbs 19:18
- ⁷ Proverbs 22:8
- ⁸ James 1:20
- ⁹ In the Old Testament, a prophet named Elijah had called fire down to destroy some of his enemies. First Kings 1.
- ¹⁰ Proverbs 15:3
- ¹¹ Proverbs 14:17
- ¹² Proverbs 27:4
- ¹³ Proverbs 22:8
- ¹⁴ Genesis 3:5
- ¹⁵ Hebrews 11:1
- ¹⁶ Romans 10:17
- ¹⁷ Proverbs 13:12
- ¹⁸ Ecclesiastes 3:4
- ¹⁹ 1 Peter 5:7
- ²⁰ Psalm 50:5
- ²¹ John 20:23; Matthew 6:12; Ephesians 4:32
- ²² The so-called Lord's Prayer, for example, contains the plain words "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors..."
- ²³ 1 Thessalonians 5:17
- ²⁴ 1 Peter 5:7
- ²⁵ Matthew 11:28
- ²⁶ Isaiah 53:4
- ²⁷ There are other places where Jesus seems to be angry, judging from his words or actions, but the Bible does not say he was angry.
- ²⁸ Proverbs 29:22
- ²⁹ Proverbs 22:24-25
- ³⁰ Proverbs 29:22
- ³¹ "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil

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- speaking, be put away from you, with all malice” (Ephesians 4:31)
- ³² Colossians 3:19
- ³³ 1 Corinthians 13:7
- ³⁴ People often liked to worship false gods among trees, and there were “prophets of the groves” who would lead such idolatry.
- ³⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:33
- ³⁶ “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)
- ³⁷ “And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.” (Genesis 25:21)
- ³⁸ The sense of Saul’s words seems to be something like “As long as David is alive, the children that your mother bare (“her nakedness”) will never be established on the throne.
- ³⁹ Proverbs 14:17; 27:4; 29:22
- ⁴⁰ Proverbs 22:24-25
- ⁴¹ A soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger. (Proverbs 15:1)
- ⁴² Now he that plants and he that waters are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. (1 Corinthians 3:8) And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. (Revelation 22:12)
- ⁴³ ... it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. (Jude 1:3)
- ⁴⁴ Luke 18
- ⁴⁵ Acts 11:18; Luke 24:45
- ⁴⁶ Proverbs 21:14
- ⁴⁷ Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them...(Matthew 7:12)
- ⁴⁸ Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. (Romans 12:20)
- ⁴⁹ Proverbs 16:32
- ⁵⁰ Galatians 6:5
- ⁵¹ 1 John 4:4
- ⁵² Luke 1:37