

# Building Relationships: Resolving Anger

## Introduction

Anger is a topic that many of us tend to avoid. After all it has connotations of aggression, of being destructive and negative. The reality is that Anger can cause damage to our health – both to the health of those who are on the receiving end, and those who express anger. The following quotes highlight the concern in terms of the person feeling angry:

“A recent Gallup poll found that 49 percent of those surveyed generally experience anger at work, with one out of six becoming so angry that he or she felt like hitting another person.” Anderson, P8

“It has now been clearly established that anger can precipitate a heart attack and cause a fatal heart rhythm known as *ventricular fibrillation*.” Anderson, p28

“In one sobering study, a group of 225 doctors who had a high level of hostility were *seven times* more likely to have died from *any cause* after 25 years, as compared to those with a low level of hostility.” Anderson, p29

But is anger always a bad thing? What actually is anger and how does it work in us?

## Start with the Bible

“ The Hebrew word for *anger* appears approximately 455 times in the Old Testament, and of these, 375 times it refers to the anger of God.” (Carlson, p38).

If that statistic is correct that means that means that over 80% of the Old Testament references to anger are about God’s anger.

## God’s Anger

Let us start by looking at one time when God became angry, in Exodus 32. It started by the people doing something which provoked God, and He becomes angry.

EX 32:9 "I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. <sup>10</sup> Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

Yet God did not act on His anger straight away. In fact if you keep reading you will realise that His anger calms down. In verse 14 it says: “Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.”

Not only this, but the story continues, and by the end of the chapter Moses has interceded on behalf of the people and God does not destroy them.

What can we learn from this incident?

1. Anger is a response to a situation

2. Anger can be controlled
3. Anger does not have to determine actions

What else can we learn from the Bible about God's anger?

Exodus 34: 6-7 says, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."

This verse is significant in that it is echoed in Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 103:8, Number 14:18-19, Psalm 86:15 and Jonah 4:2.

Key Point 1: ***God is slow to get angry***

Numbers 25: 11 says, "Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them"

Here we see that God choose not to act on His anger. Instead He allows the actions of other people to calm His response.

Key Point 2: ***God can turn away from His anger***

Psalm 30: 5 says, "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."

God does not only respond in anger – this is just one of many emotions He feels towards people.

Key Point 3: ***God's anger does not last forever***

Psalm 78:38 says, "Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath."

God chooses to hold back on His anger and actually respond to us in kindness.

Key Point 4: ***God restrains His anger***

## **Anger and us!**

The Bible does give us some warnings about anger. In the Old Testament we are told in Proverbs 15:1, that "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." So we can stir up anger in another person.

Note 1: ***We can provoke anger in others***

Proverbs 29: 11 says, "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control." Our ability to control our anger is a sign of how wise we are.

Note 2: ***Anger should be controlled***

In chapter 30 of Proverbs we are warned that “stirring up anger produces strife” (verse 33). This warns us of the consequences that unrestrained anger can have.

Note 3: ***Anger can cause division***

There are two passages in the New Testament which it would be good to look at. First, Ephesians 4:26-27 which says:

“In your anger do not sin” : Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup> and do not give the devil a foothold.

These verses make it very clear that anger can lead to sin. Anger is not sinful in itself, but anger can take us on a journey that results in sin.

Note 4: ***Anger can lead us into sin***

This passage also tells us that if we do not master our anger, then this can give the Devil a way into our lives.

Note 5: ***Anger can let the Devil into our lives***

In James 1: 19-20 we are told:

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, <sup>20</sup> for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. <sup>21</sup> Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

Here we are told a few home truths –first of all, anger doesn’t always result in good! In fact it can have unrighteous results. There is also a link here between what we hear, what we say, and our anger.

Note 6: ***Anger can lead to unrighteousness***

Look at a summary of these points:

Anger is a response to a situation  
Anger can be controlled  
Anger does not have to determine actions  
God is slow to get angry  
God can turn away from His anger  
God’s anger does not last forever  
God restrains His anger

We can provoke anger in others  
Anger should be controlled  
Anger can cause division  
Anger can lead us into sin  
Anger can let the Devil into our lives  
Anger can lead to unrighteousness

The message is quite clear – it is what you do with your anger that is key.

## Is anger right or wrong?

Anger is an emotional response to a circumstance or situation. In itself it is neutral, neither right nor wrong.

Anger causes a physical reaction in our bodies to prepare us for “fight or flight”. This physical response is designed to be temporary and if experienced long term can cause physical damage. (Heart strain, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, etc.)

Anger can be suppressed as well as expressed. Both can cause long term emotional difficulties. It has been said that “90 percent of people stuff their anger inside while responding outwardly in a passive, submissive manner.” (Anderson, p37)

Tolerating, or ignoring anger, can leave us with unresolved issues piled up in stack of emotional “boxes”. The bigger this pile becomes the more likely we are to have problems relating to God and to other people.

Jesus expressed anger – with the religious leaders of his day (Mark 3: 5). We can also see clear examples of where Jesus confronted others - there was the incident at the temple (Mark 11), and his description of the Pharisees was quite blunt (Matthew 23).

Anger **can** be a right response, when directed and controlled by God. The key issue is really **unresolved anger and unrestrained anger**.

## Resolving anger

If you get angry is it with a person, circumstances, yourself or God?

a) **Circumstances**: Sometimes the circumstances of life can make us feel angry. God knows your circumstances, so committed yourself to Him and let Him guide you. If it is beyond your control, let it go.

b) **Another Person**: Most of us get angry because another person has done something. Go and talk to them! There are biblical guidelines for resolving disagreements, so why not follow them? (Matthew 18: 15-17 sets out a three stage process: 1. talk privately 2. try talking with a friend present 3. take the matter to the church leaders.)

NB Communication is a skill that we can learn – how to talk without insulting each other by using “I feel” statements, etc. (See Carlson, p141)

Forgive! Matthew 6: 14-15

c) **Yourself**: Sometimes we are angry with ourselves. Accept the limits of your own ability – there are some things that you need to leave with God. Forgive yourself!

d) **God**: When life seems unfair it can be quite easy to get angry with God. Accept that God is always right!

Confess your struggles. Forgive Him, and ask Him to forgive you!

## **Prevention is better than cure**

Let it go: you don't have to respond, you can choose to overlook this – Proverbs 19:11

Love: see 1 Corinthians 13:5. If you learn to love people, you will find it slows down the anger response!

Patience: Ecclesiastes 7:8-9. If you practise patience you slow down your response times and gain a few moments to reflect and think.

Walk in forgiveness

This can apply both to those who get angry and those on the receiving end of an angry outburst.

PLEASE NOTE: Aggression and hostility towards others is always unhelpful, will tend to make the situation worse. If you find yourself attacking another person either verbally or physically then you need to stop, reflect on your own behaviour, and apologise for causing offence.

### Bibliography:

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