



A Quick Reference and Lesson Guide

Dealing with Anger

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1 Scenarios and Assessment

Scenarios/Case Studies

A. Scenario #1

1. John had worked a sixteen-hour shift and was on his way home. Right before his shift ended, John's boss had scolded him for a mistake he had unknowingly made earlier in the week, leaving him feeling frustrated. While he was driving home, another driver cut him off nearly causing him to run off the road. When he arrived home, his wife began reminding him about the honey-do list. John became agitated with his wife and began yelling at her for "nagging" him.

B. Scenario #2

1. Jane was in the grocery store when she saw an old "friend" that she had not seen in a while. Jane approached the friend and began a conversation. The friend was short and did not seem like she wanted to talk. After the conversation Jane instantly became offended because she felt the old friend had treated her unfairly.

C. Scenario #3

1. George was at his locker collecting his books when they were pushed out of his arms by some bullies. This was not the first time this had happened to George, and he was furious. The next day George decided that he had finally had enough. George brought his pocket knife to school and slashed the tires of one of the bullies' trucks during lunch.

Definitions and Key Thoughts

A. Facts and Statistics

1. According to the AAA division of traffic safety, nearly 80 percent of drivers display "road rage" behind the wheel. (<http://newsroom.aaa.com/2016/07/nearly-80-percent-of-drivers-express-significant-anger-aggression-or-road-rage>)
2. Additionally, in a study done by the European Society of Cardiology an anger episode increases the likelihood of cardiovascular problems by three times in the two hours after the anger episode. (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24591550>)
3. According to a study by Harvard Medical School in 2012, two-thirds of US adolescents have experienced an attack motivated by anger. (<http://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/1206777>)
4. According to a 2008 study performed by CPP Inc., workplace conflict motivated by anger consumes roughly 2.8 hours of an average workday. (http://img.en25.com/Web/ CPP/Conflict_report.pdf)

B. Anger and Aggression

1. Anger is an emotion that is neither bad nor good and has the potential to accomplish both good and evil.

- a) Anger, like other emotions, is a God-given emotion that He intended for all people to have and experience. Anger brings the potential for evil due to the corruptive nature of sin; however, like all things God created, the purpose of anger is for good. Anger is a feeling associated with power, strength, and drive.
 - b) Sometimes individuals will point to their family background or other problems as an excuse for their anger. This is not the cause; rather, anger is often connected to past trauma from emotionally painful or stressful situations, particularly those involving fear. Anger is a learned response to fearful or threatening events which is reinforced by past trauma, habitual practice, and a refusal to properly deal with angry feelings.
 2. Aggression is anger in action. Aggression is a volitional choice made by an individual to respond to anger. Aggression often results in negative outcomes.
- C. Styles of Anger Expression
1. Vocalization – Unhealthy vocalization style occurs when an individual is not in control of their anger, and it can result in verbal abuse which results in hurt feelings, resentment, and bitterness. Those who vocalize their anger in an unhealthy way are often aggressive communicators. Healthy vocalization is controlled and expressed with consideration of the time, place, and person. Healthy vocalization is directed at the problem not at the person, and its goal is to solve the problem in a way that is mutually beneficial to all parties involved. Those who vocalize their anger in a healthy way are often assertive communicators.
 2. Internalization – The internalization style involves the individual ignoring or putting off their angry feelings. This results in a person internalizing his or her anger and directing it at themselves. Internalization is used to defend against painful experiences at first, but eventually causes its own unique painful experiences.
 3. Slow expression – This style is characterized by non-verbal or behavioral expression that emerges after a time of experiencing angry feelings and emotions. The style of slow expression is a way of dealing with the anger indirectly over time. This is often manifested in the form of passive-aggressive communication.

Assessment (Interview)

A. Symptoms of Anger

1. Increased heart rate
2. Sweaty palms and feeling “hot”
3. Tense muscles (clenched fists or jaw)
4. Glaring looks or refusal to make eye contact
5. Strong urge for a “flight or fight” type response
6. Perceived physical or mental heaviness or weightiness
7. History of using drug or alcohol to cope with angry feelings
8. Refusal to accept responsibility for aggression
9. Passively withholds angry feelings and finally explodes into a violent rage
10. Consistently overreacts in anger to perceived disapproval, rejection, and criticism
11. Often blames others for problems rather than accepting responsibility
12. Persistent pattern of challenging authority figures
13. Becomes defensive when confronted about problem behaviors

14. Uses verbally abusive language when angry episode is triggered
- B. General Assessment Interview Questions
1. Do you believe you have problems with anger?
 2. In your own opinion where does your problem with anger originate?
 3. Do you believe your anger's origin is connected in some way with unresolved events or feelings?
 4. How severe do you feel your problems with anger are? Why?
 5. How often during any given day do you find yourself becoming angry for any reason at all?
 6. Have you experienced angry feelings that would not subside over time? If so, how often do you experience them?
 7. Have you experienced anger and said something you wish you could unsay or done something you wish you could undo? Could you give me an example?
 8. Have your angry feelings ever led you to ruin a relationship, damage property, physically harm someone, verbally or emotionally abuse someone, experience physical harm yourself, or experience short- or long-term incarceration?
 9. Do you know what triggers your anger? Could you give some examples?
 10. What do you think the goal of your anger is?
- C. Interpreting the Assessment to Set Goals for Overcoming Anger
1. Think back over the meeting after it is concluded.
 2. If there is a viable threat of harm to someone or threat of damage to property, it may be necessary to refer for professional counseling or even notify the proper authorities.
 3. The purpose for any further meetings regarding anger will be to determine how to achieve in a healthy way that which expressions of anger have been used to accomplish in the past, and possibly to explore other coping mechanisms that can help reduce the expression of anger.
 4. The ultimate goal is to lead the angry individual towards healing and restoration within themselves and reconciliation between the individual, God, and others effected by the anger. This is done through the individual taking responsibility for their life, admitting their faults and mistakes, seeking forgiveness from God and the individual's victims, and providing restitution if applicable or possible.

2

Crítique and Counsel

Biblical Insight

- A. ***“Be angry, and do not sin:’ do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:26-27 NKJV).***

Anger is a God-given, human emotion that can have both positive and negative effects. It is important to deal with anger sooner rather than later (“before the sun goes down”) in order to not “give place to the devil”. Do not act out your anger in ways that will be regretful. Work

to resolve differences with others as respectfully as possible. Unrestrained anger can cause division.

B. *“If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (Genesis 4:7 NKJV).*

1. Cain was legitimately angry about his sacrifice being rejected, but he allowed his anger to become jealousy toward his brother Abel. This anger continued uncontrolled until Cain ultimately killed Abel.
2. Anger is an emotion meant to serve us by alarming us that something is wrong. When expressed in a destructive manner, it becomes our master. In Nehemiah 5:6, Nehemiah became angry when he observed the money-lenders taking advantage of the poor, and his anger directed his attention to a problem that needed to be corrected. In this sense, anger had a positive result. However, in Jonah 4:9, Jonah was angry because God would not destroy Nineveh. We observe that Jonah’s uncontrolled anger at God had only negative effects on his life.

C. *“Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul” (Proverbs 22:24-25).*

Be careful of the friends you choose and how much time you spend around others outside your home who do not control their anger. Guard your heart when interacting with family members who do not control their anger. You do not want to begin handling your anger in the same unhealthy way.

D. Special Note

Ask for feedback on what the Bible says about their situation.

Wise Counsel

- A. *Work to educate the individual or family you’re meeting with about anger.* Be sure to stress that being angry is not sinful, but what matters is how it is expressed. Explain that repressing anger can cause depression, anxiety, hostility, etc. Anger expressed in destructive ways can damage relationships and lead to further psychological and physical problems. Anger not properly dealt with can lead to resentment and bitterness.
- B. *Explore the history of anger within the family or life of the individual.* It could be caused by certain triggers or rooted deeper in past problems that need to be dealt with.
- C. *Be encouraging and give hope.* Remember, this family or individual is coming to you because this is no longer a problem to be handled “in-house.”
- D. Special Note
 1. *Ministers are encouraged to counsel in a non-forceful way.*
 2. *The goals should be to reinforce God’s Word, promote hope, and normalize feelings, yet guide towards a healthy mindset.*

3

Application and Prayer

Application

- A. ABCDE Method (Adapted from Albert Ellis' Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy or REBT therapy)
1. Activating Event – The activating event can be an external or internal event that triggers a response from the individual.
 2. Beliefs – Once the event is experienced through the senses, beliefs about the event begin to form. Sometimes these beliefs may be correct, and other times they may be wrong.
 3. Consequences – Before we act, all the consequences should be noted so we can make an informed decision and choose the consequences we desire.
 4. Dispute – The individual begins to dispute potential beliefs to decide which choice and set of consequences he/she wishes to bring to his/her life.
 5. Evaluation – The individual will determine whether he/she obtained the outcome being sought. If so, the individual can replicate choices and actions to use in different scenarios. If not, the individual has discovered an approach that does not help him/her achieve their goals.
- B. Retraumatization occurs when a person is triggered by an event or situation that causes the individual to lapse back to an extremely painful and traumatic event. The anger a person displays could be a defense mechanism devised by the individual to keep them safe, help them feel powerful, keep others away due to lack of trust, etc. Remember every behavior has a goal; therefore, individuals must be led to discover new behaviors that achieve goals in a healthier way.

Prayer

“Lord, in Your wisdom you gave us the powerful emotion of anger, and we have all experienced the effects of anger. Help us to learn to control our anger by the power and direction of Your Word and Spirit. Give us wisdom and discernment to know how to correctly express our anger and not hurt others with it.”

4 Recommended Resources

- Bankart, C. P. (2006). *Freeing the Angry Mind: How Men Can Use Mindfulness and Reason to Save Their Lives & Relationships*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Carter, L. (2003). *The Anger Trap: Free Yourself from the Frustrations that Sabotage Your Life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cloud, H. (2010). *Necessary Endings*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Cloud, H. & Townsend, H. (1992). *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Gentry, W. D. (2006). *Anger Management for Dummies*. Indianapolis, IN: Wiley Publishing, Inc.
- Harbin, T. J. (2000). *Beyond Anger: A Guide for Men: How to Free Yourself from the Grip of Anger and Get More Out of Life*. New York, NY: Marlowe & Company.
- Lynch, J. (2004). *When Anger Scares You: How to Overcome Your Fear of Conflict and Express Your Anger in Healthy Ways*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- McKay, M. & Paleg K. (2001). *When Anger Hurts Your Relationships: 10 Simple Solutions for Couples Who Fight*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Petracek, L. J. (2004). *The Anger Workbook for Women: How to Keep Your Anger from Undermining Your Self-Esteem, Your Emotional Balance, and Your Relationships*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Potter-Efron, P. & Potter-Efron R. (2006). *Letting Go of Anger: The Eleven Most Common Anger Styles and What to Do About Them*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

5 Taking it to the Church

“Dealing with Anger”

Lesson Text

“Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still” (Psalm 4:4 NKJV).

“‘Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil . . . And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from

you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:26-27, 30-32 NKJV).

When considering Psalm 4:4, it may prove useful to assume that Paul was thinking of Psalm 4:4 when writing Ephesians 4:26. Psalm 4:4 exposes the dangers of anger and a solution to dealing with anger in a positive and constructive way. Ephesians 4:26-27, 30-32 expound on the biblical teaching regarding anger by giving the believer more solutions to approach the emotion of anger.

Both biblical texts open with a version of the phrase, “Don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Anger, though a God-given emotion, becomes problematic when we allow it to control us. It is natural for us to feel the emotion of anger when we observe an unjust situation, are hurt, or mistreated. However, it is also unnatural for us to allow anger to usurp control over our lives. Both Paul and the psalmist inform readers that we sin when we allow anger to control us. In fact, anger even gives a foothold to the devil. A foothold describes a place during a battle where an enemy gains control of a certain area. When we allow anger to control us, the devil gains a foothold in our soul and spirit. Therefore, we must not even give Satan the opportunity to direct us towards sin and unrighteousness.

Additionally, anger gives way to evil behaviors. In the Old Testament, there are three key words used to describe sin. All three of these words for sin may be found in Psalm 51 in David’s psalm of repentance over his sins involving Bathsheba. The three words are *sin*, *transgression*, and *iniquity*. *Sinning* and *transgressing* are both verbs which involve doing something, manifesting a behavior, or performing a task. To sin is to commit an unrighteous act without premeditation. A modern example of this may be road rage. When people commit road rage, it is not because they got behind the wheel of the car with the intent of displaying their anger. They are simply responding to something that triggers their anger in the moment.

Transgression refers to committing an unrighteousness deed with premeditation. A synonym for *transgression* is *trespassing*. It may be helpful to envision a “no trespassing” sign. A transgression or trespass occurs when we see the sign; an example of this may be a scriptural command that we willingly disobey. A modern example of this may be the legal distinction between the charges of manslaughter and murder. Both of these are homicidal charges; however, murder includes volition and premeditation, whereas manslaughter does not.

In both cases anger has controlled the individual and resulted in unrighteousness; however, the question really is, how long has the anger controlled the individual? Was it a passing emotion that manifested as an impulsive behavior? Or was it a disposition of bitterness or rage the individual refused to quench resulting in the subsequent negative behaviors? The Bible uses the word *iniquity* to describe our disposition that influences our transgression. *Iniquity* literally means “to twist or distort out of shape.” When iniquity penetrates a believer’s heart, soul, and spirit, their emotions, thoughts, and attitudes become sinful as well as their behavior.

Paul does not use the word “iniquity” in Ephesians 4:26-27, 30-32; however, he refers to some of the symptoms of iniquity. In verse 31, Paul admonishes believers to rid themselves of bitterness and rage. Rage and bitterness are attitudes that give a foothold to the devil, allowing

anger to consume and control a person. In verse 32, Paul admonishes believers to replace bitterness and rage with kindness and tenderheartedness. In Psalm 4:4, the psalmist advises believers to be silent and think about the anger rather than letting anger control them. It is during this thinking process that these problematic attitudes, such as bitterness, are challenged and replaced. God has saved us by calling us His own. Let us not grieve the Lord through our attitudes, emotions, and behavior, which would make us appear not to be His own.

“Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret—it only causes harm” (Psalm 37:8 NKJV).

The psalmist advised his audience to refrain from anger, turn away from fits of rage, and keep tempers under control; taking these measures will prevent harm. Temper is an interesting way to think of anger. Tempered steel has the word “tempered” attached to the front of it because it is not supposed to be able to be bent. Aluminum, like tempered steel, is a metal; however, it is easily bent, meaning it loses its temper very easily. The author of Psalm 37:8 advises readers not to lose their tempers, or not to get bent out of shape. As believers we should strive to be tempered Christians because we know getting bent out of shape only leads to harm.

Closing

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1: 19-20 NKJV).

James offers wisdom in agreement with Psalm 37:8. James indicates that we must be slow to lose our tempers or get angry. He also advises that we must be quick to listen, meaning that a great deal of anger comes from misunderstandings. We must be quick to hear what is going on rather than what we want to hear interpreted through our rage. We should be slow to speak as well. We must think about what we are saying to ensure that anger has not manipulated our words.

The key contribution of James is found in verse 20 in which James informs his readers that human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. What is interesting is that James does not say that anger is unrighteous. Believers often become angry for righteous reasons. Often this is referred to as righteous indignation. Interestingly, this is not the righteousness God desires for believers. We are not righteous judges but instruments of mercy. God does not desire us to be consumed and intoxicated by anger. Perhaps the reason for this is the effects of iniquity in our lives. We cannot effectively use anger in a wholly righteous way that is pleasing to God because of the iniquity that has distorted our hearts, souls, and spirits. Therefore, we should learn to control or manage our anger rather than allow it to intoxicate and control us.