

Managing Anger

‘Don’t sin by letting anger control you.’

Ephesians 4:26 NLT

Here’s a Bible plan for growth that includes anger management: ‘Let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God – truly righteous and holy. So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbours the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.”

Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil...Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them...Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behaviour. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you’ (vv. 23-32 NLT).

God gave you every emotion you have, including anger. But He wants you to handle it the right way. Note the words ‘let us...tell the truth’. When you’re angry, instead of denying it, use it to bring about positive change. Saying, ‘I’ve been feeling angry because I value our relationship and I’d like to talk about it,’ brings healing and solutions.

Pretending you’re not angry when you are is basically dishonest. So is exaggeration. ‘You never listen to me...You always ignore my wishes...Nobody does anything around here except me.’ Such generalisations are untrue and serve only to aggravate and polarise, guaranteeing the problem gets obscured and goes unsolved. God’s will is for you to control your anger rather than letting your anger control you.

‘My inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak right things.’

Proverbs 23:16 NKJV

When it comes to practising anger management, here are two important Bible principles:

- 1) Don’t blame people and things. Blaming is a way of evading responsibility while pointing your finger elsewhere. ‘If only you’d arrive on time, I wouldn’t have to nag you,’ or ‘If you’d stop nagging me, maybe I’d start being on time.’ Words like that don’t help, they just antagonise the other person, perpetuate your anger, and fail to get the results you want.
- 2) Don’t use words as weapons or a form of control. Instead keep your emotions in check and express them in a healthy way. Remember, your goal is to solve the problem and strengthen the relationship, not leave wounds that fester.

Is this easy to do? No – that’s why you need God’s help. The Bible says that your words can crush the other person’s spirit (see Proverbs 18:14), break their heart (see Proverbs 15:4), and destroy the relationship (see Proverbs 18:21). Solomon said that angry words ‘go down to a man’s inmost parts’ (Proverbs 26:22 NIV 1984 Edition).

What you say can live in the memory of another person their whole life – all the way to the grave. Is that what you want? Surely not! On the other hand, anger properly managed never needs to be regretted or repented of. Learn to discern the difference between the anger you feel and the words you speak. Anger can reveal what needs to be changed in the relationship. So ask God to show you what needs changing – first in yourself, then in the other person.

Managing Anger

‘Out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.’

Luke 6:45 NIV (1984 Edition)

What you store on your computer’s hard drive can be recalled by touching a key. Jesus said: ‘The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart...the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.’ And when you download old resentments you grow bitter.

When you’re angry, deal with it quickly. Don’t walk around on a ‘slow boil’. And don’t sit around hoping the other person will see the light and apologise to you. What if they never do? Jesus said, ‘If your brother sins against you, go to him and try to make things right’ (see Matthew 18:15). What do you value most – your point of view, or the relationship?

When you ‘stuff’ your anger and refuse to deal with the issue in a healthy way, you add another skeleton to your emotional closet. Imagine what that does to you. Some doctors say resentment eats at your stomach lining, attacks your immune system, and predisposes you to heart problems, cancers, and other physical, social, and emotional disorders. And that’s not all! It preoccupies your mind, drains your energy, and cripples your creativity. It strains your fellowship with God, your family, and friends, as well as denying your offender an opportunity to clear their conscience and make things right with God and with you.

Until you deal with the issue, you’ll drag it around like a ball and chain. Refuse to live that way! Ask God for the humility and courage to deal with the issue – today.

‘Don’t use...abusive language.’

Ephesians 4:29 NLT

The Bible says: ‘Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live’ (vv. 29-30 NLT).

Notice, when you lash out in anger you not only hurt the other person, you grieve the Holy Spirit. Have you considered that? As followers of Christ we’re called to try to understand what the other person needs. That means not bringing up previously confessed offences, dragging in other people, or using wisecracks about someone’s weight, colour, IQ, or physical, mental, and emotional limitations. Don’t bring up things that cloud the issue and keep you from finding a solution.

And don’t raise the decibel level in order to intimidate or manipulate. God made you with a capacity for anger because when handled right it can be the fuel needed to bring positive change and the medicine that heals. So:

- 1) Seek a solution, not a ‘victory.’ Name-calling and ‘diagnosing’ others just makes things worse. Your focus shouldn’t be on what they did, but what you can do together to resolve it.
- 2) Acknowledge your flaws and ask for forgiveness. Admitting your imperfections makes it easier for the other person to admit theirs.
- 3) For every difficulty you address, give a sincere compliment. Instead of criticising, try saying, ‘I’m sure this wasn’t easy for you to hear. Thanks for listening to me so graciously.’ Being solution-focused instead of blame-focused gives people something to live up to, not down to.

Managing Anger

‘Those who are trustworthy can keep a confidence.’

Proverbs 11:13 NLT

If you’re serious about managing your anger, here are two things to keep in mind:

- 1) Don’t hang out your dirty laundry in public. Keep it in the laundry room. When you’re hurt and angry, spreading gossip about your offender comes naturally. Don’t do it. The Bible says, ‘A gossip goes around telling secrets, but those who are trustworthy can keep a confidence.’ Dirty laundry generally gets aired in two ways:
 - a. Embarrassment: you say things when you know others will hear them.
 - b. Subtlety: you make jokes about their appearance, their friends and family, their personal hang-ups and habits in order to belittle them. This results in embarrassment for the other person, widens the gap between you, and makes reconciliation virtually impossible. The Bible says, ‘Love covers all sins’ (Proverbs 10:12 NKJV).
- 2) Don’t act in an un-Christlike way. For example, don’t say, ‘He brought it on himself, so let him get over it.’ That may be true, but as a follower of Christ, don’t walk away and leave wounds to fester and become infected. ‘Forgive, even as Christ...has forgiven you’ (see Ephesians 4:32).

How did Christ forgive you? Was it after you’d acknowledged, confessed, repented, and earned grace? No. Paul says, ‘When we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son’ (Romans 5:10 NKJV).

Just as God took the initiative, you are called to extend grace to other people before they ask for forgiveness. And even if they choose to remain your enemy, you must forgive them anyhow. Only then will you have peace, your wounds will be healed, and you will be able to put it behind you.

With permission from the Word for Today UCB PO Box 255, Stoke on Trent ST4 8YY. Free issues are available in the UK.

www.ucb.co.uk

June 2017