

ANGER MANAGEMENT

By Al Ells

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."—James 1:19



"Our culture is full of angry people," said one pastor. "We have angry spouses, drive-by shootings and gang vendettas. But the anger isn't just out there, there is also anger in the pulpit and the pew."

Perhaps the major cause of conflict in the church is not theological differences, but rather unresolved anger, an agent of discord and division. Research indicates that frustration, irritation, insult, annoyance, offense and rage are humans' most frequently experienced emotions. These negative emotions tend to last longer than positive or neutral emotions. They lead to inappropriate behaviors and comments, and tend to adversely affect relationships. When angry, humans feel more powerful than when calm. This sense of power makes anger difficult to change or control. The only other emotion that people are less likely to want to change is joy.

Scripture mentions anger a lot: God's wrath as a result of man's pride, sin and rebellion (Psalm 7:11), and how humans should handle their own anger (James 1:19, 20; Proverbs 22:24, 25; Proverbs 29:22, etc.). How do these principles translate into everyday life? What should we do with our anger, especially since it is so powerful and destructive?

Here are some tips that many have found helpful:

Resolve your feelings of anger quickly or you are likely to sin

Ephesians 4:26-27 commands, "Be angry but sin not", addressing how quickly you resolve your anger. When anger is left to stew, it becomes more intense and less appeasable, causing bitterness, resentment, jadedness, and sin. Scripture warns against this in Ephesians 4:31- 32, Hebrews 12:15, and Colossians 3:8.

Know when you are angry

Since anger has negative connotations, many Christians have difficulty admitting when they are angry. Instead, they euphemize their emotions with words like "bothered" or "upset". Anger can be intense and obvious, or cloaked and subtle. For instance, a pastor who preaches a hard-hitting, convicting sermon may be motivated by anger rather than the Holy Spirit. Take a risk by asking others how you come across. Get familiar with your anger and how it works.

Openly admit your anger rather than deflecting it

“Get it all out; express it.” That was the anger therapy mantra of the 80s. We know now that this is counterproductive. Directing your anger at someone (your spouse) or something (the wall) or yourself, only helps to reinforce the feeling of anger and the self-justifying thoughts that go with it. However, taking responsibility for your anger by honestly discussing it is constructive. Remember, nobody can make you angry except you. Unless you take responsibility for your anger, you will not be able to resolve it.

Resolving anger may make you face your fears

Anger can be a defense mechanism when we feel threatened or when things don't go our way. Relationships in life require trust. Cynical, mistrustful thoughts must be recognized, monitored and controlled. When we assume the worst in God and others, we fuel distrust and negative feelings of anger, resentment and depression. Our desire to be in control, and the anger when we're not, must be surrendered to God.

Resolving anger may make you face your pride

Research indicates that frequently angry people think they are smarter than the general public. Their frustration and resentment are a direct result of their pride. To erase these feelings, humility before God and people is needed. God is more interested in who is loving than who is right (I Corinthians 13).

Anger can also be all about hurt feelings

Hurt feelings of rejection, humiliation and inconsideration often emerge as anger rather than pain. When I'm hurt by another I often respond by getting angry. The powerful feeling of anger makes me feel in control, covers over my pain and prevents the feeling of vulnerability that hurt creates. But unless one goes beyond the anger to the pain, healing and release do not come.

Resolving anger requires forgiveness

Anger is usually manifested in interpersonal relationships. People hurt us or let us down. Whether the offense is real or imagined, forgiveness is the answer. Forgiveness is the ability to release the perceived wrong and not hold a grudge. Forgiveness is a process that starts with a decision and ends with an emotional release of the anger. It is a rare gift that does not require the other person to change before it is given.

Resolving anger requires "putting on" new behaviors and attitudes

Scripture emphasizes that not only must we "put off" anger, but we must replace it with new behaviors. According to Colossians 3:12-13, we should put on "a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another". By controlling our thoughts we can control our anger. Prayer, taking the other person's point of view, and identifying our triggers are just a few ways we may change our thoughts, thereby changing behaviors and attitudes. "Bringing every thought captive to Christ" empowers us to extend ourselves to others through acts of kindness and caring (2 Corinthians 10:5). Doing so often releases the feelings of anger and replaces them with compassion and joy.

Note:

When anger becomes chronic or overwhelming, referral to a trained professional can be necessary in order to uncover and resolve the empowering roots or conditions causing the anger. If you live with or know a person who rages violently, or have such tendencies yourself, seek immediate help. Rarely will you or the person who rages be able to resolve this condition without help. For more information or a referral, call 480.325.9350 or email info@leadersthatlast.org.