

What's All the Anger About?

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

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 moments, and tend to adversely affect relationships. When angry, humans feel more powerful than when calm. This sense of power makes anger difficult to admit to, change or control. The only other emotion that people are less likely to want to change is joy.

Our anger is what professionals call a **secondary emotion** - it masks the primary underlying feelings of pain, shame or fear. When facing pain or fear we feel powerless. Our inner being would rather feel the anger than the fear, pain or shame. Angry feelings also prompt self-justifying thoughts that minimize or deny our contribution and blame-shift on to others. That's why we often foolishly go to war against others instead of going to God.

So what does this mean for our culture and lives? Pundits are saying that the current presidential race is being fueled by people's anger and frustration over governmental mismanagement. It's the main reason they offer for why so many people support one of our current presidential candidates. Recent shootings of black men by police officers has sparked outrage and demonstrations. In retaliation, angry assassins have killed police officers. Anger and the underlying fear are fueling so many of our actions and reactions. Instead of reacting to others in anger, we need to face our fears, pain and shame with God and be healed.

Scripture mentions how humans should handle their own anger (James 1:19, 20; Proverbs 22:24, 25; Proverbs 29; 22, etc.). We need to translate these principles into our own everyday lives. Anger is contagious and if we are not careful we become part of the problem instead of the solution. Here are some tips to appropriately managing our own anger.

Know when you are angry

Since anger has negative connotations, many Christians have difficulty admitting to themselves and others when they are angry. Instead, they mask their negative emotions with words like "bothered" or "upset". Anger can be intense and obvious, or cloaked and subtle. For instance irritability, impatience and heated passion are more often than not, outward signs of inner frustration and anger.

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 and often entrenches the anger deeper. Directing your anger at someone (your spouse) or something (the wall) or yourself, only helps to reinforce the feeling of

rage and the self-justifying thoughts that go with it. However, taking responsibility for your anger by honestly admitting you are angry and discussing it is constructive. Remember, nobody can make you angry except you. Unless you take the responsibility to resolve it, you will be left with angry feelings and thoughts.

Resolve feelings of anger quickly or you are likely to sin

Ephesians 4:26-27 commands, "Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger," addressing how quickly you resolve your anger. When anger is left to percolate, 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.

Resolving anger often makes you face your fears

Anger is often a defense mechanism used when we feel threatened or when things don't go our way. My cousin said it this way. "With all the news about shootings, terrorists and unsecured borders, I noticed I was becoming more and more fearful and then angry. Angry at the government, the world and even God for not stopping it." Her anger became the mask that covered up her fears and feelings of vulnerability. Like most people, it feels better to be angry than afraid. She needs to face down her fears in order to resolve her anger.

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 resentments are a direct result of their pride. Once again anger is the camouflage emotion that covers our less acceptable emotions. This time it's our own insecurities and pride. To erase these feelings, humility before God and people is needed. God is more interested in who is loving than who is right (1 Corinthians 13).

Anger can also be 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 necessary 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.

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