

VICTORY OVER ANGER

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city. Proverbs 16:32

"But Pastor, my employees won't do anything until I get angry at them." So spoke a dear friend of mine who owned a business in southern California. He wanted to be a kind and gentle Christian boss, yet he found that his workers would only respond when he got angry.

Why do some parents yell at their kids? It must be because it works. It's called the decibel method of child rearing. Mom asks nicely the first time..."Please put your toys up and wash your hands for supper." About the third or fourth time around, with no one apparently paying any attention, the tone suddenly looms louder than the music level of the passing high rider! Everyone jumps up, scoops the recreation implements together, and makes a grand surge for the bathroom sink! Say what you will, anger works!

I read a humorous story witnessed by a New York psychiatrist. He was standing in a very slow-moving line, waiting to return some merchandise at a large department store. All the clerks seemed to have something better to do than to wait on these growing-in-agitation customers. Suddenly, the doctor reported, an irate man in front of him took his closed umbrella and made a wild swing at a display stack of empty shoe boxes; they went flying everywhere. Before you could snap your fingers, there were more than enough clerks and the line was progressing rapidly. Again, anger worked!

Why do we get angry? Probably for a hundred different secondary reasons. The truth is, we get angry because most times it seems the best way at the moment to handle our mounting internal pressure! The question we need to ask ourselves is, "Is this the best way to handle this situation?" Anger produces results, but are we always pleased with the end product?

Here's an interesting anger response one man had, as was reported in the International Herald Tribune, January 19, 1982.

A man in Bellevue, Washington, was driven to "autocide" by Washington's first major winter storm. That's what Bellevue Police Major Jack Kellem called the strange case of an irate motorist who beat, then shot his car after it got stuck in six inches of snow. Police said the man became so angry when his vehicle got stuck that he pulled a tire iron from the trunk and smashed all the windows. Then he hauled out a pistol and shot all four tires, reloaded, and emptied half of a second clip of bullets into the car. "He killed it," Kellem said. "It's a case of autocide." Kellem said the man was sober and rational but very perturbed.

Why would someone get so angry? There must have been some satisfaction for the man to "blow away" his car. But what a price tag just to vent one's anger! For a manage-by-anger boss, it may mean having employees with a "hop-to" attitude, but short-term in your employ. For the parent operating with the "Old Yeller" school of child raising, it can mean a hostile home atmosphere and deep bitterness that can last a lifetime. Anger is an emotional choice, but is it worth it?

DOES GOD GET MAD?

Anger is a very fascinating emotion. It is one of the capacities we have because we have been made in the image of God. In both the Old and New Testaments we see the Lord getting angry. The ultimate expression of this anger or wrath is the Lake of Fire. There are some things God actually hates. The Word says they are an abomination to Him.

There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him; haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked

plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.

Proverbs 6:16-19

Yes, the Lord gets angry with evil people. His, of course, is righteous anger. The reason God gets angry is different from why we usually get angry. God is love, yet love can get angry. The main differences are that He is slow to anger and His reasons for getting angry are not selfish. With this in mind, there may be occasions when anger is proper and perhaps the best response. There are times when decent citizens must rise up and squash demon-controlled monsters such as Hitler. This is usually not accomplished in a meek and mild frame of mind.

Anger gets scary when it's out of control. The angry dog, the furious motorist, the irate shopper are given maximum room. We give them space because we sense they are out of control and may do anything--including harming little ole us! We scare ourselves when we discover that something has risen up inside of us and taken over the control panel of our mind. We find it detestable to think that a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde could be walking around in our shoes! We say of the psychotic murderer, "Something snapped inside of him." He blew a fuse.

BENEFICIAL ANGER

To lose the ability to get angry is to diminish a very important aspect of God's image in us. As long as we live in this world, teeming with injustices and perpetrators of malice, we will be required to, on occasion, stand toe-to-toe with evil. At such a moment, the anger-ability can mean victory for the cause of righteousness. The hormones for fight or flight were created by God as power boosters for just such times. When it said that a roaring lion came toward Samson, "And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily..." (Judges 14:6), I believe that the Spirit of God together with Samson's adrenalin produced turbo-power. If we were to ask Mr. Lion if he thought Samson was angry, he'd probably answer in the affirmative.

Satan's strangleholds seem to loosen quicker when the white-hot anger of the saints of God is released at him by binding and loosing. We don't have to get angry to release faith with these commands, but it does impress

the enemy that we're serious. When we see what's going on behind the scenes and what the enemy is getting away with, then we will, along with Jesus, hate evil. Hatred of evil is not a placid emotion. As we stand at the edge of heaven, looking out over the wide stretches of boiling brimstone, we will say in total agreement with the Master, "This too is good." The smoke of hell will rise as a testimony to the holy justice of God, and a righteous concurrence will emit a sense of satisfaction. The Father's justice for evil will have been satisfied. With the other saints, we will lift our grateful praise.

I have seen through the years, times when anger has been used by a wife to awaken the good guy in her husband. He's really a nice guy, but he's slipped into a rut of doing as little as possible. He fails to respond to her gentle hints, so in frustration, she blows her stack! Not a pretty picture. If he wakes up and gets with the program, things will usually improve. But, because anger can get out of hand quickly, it should be our last resort. One thing I've seen, when a person can't get angry anymore, it usually means the relationship is dead!

DEALING WITH BULLIES

Another case for anger is in dealing with bullies. Most troublemakers are pain-haters. If they fear reprisal, they will usually back down with no contest. Regardless, the bullies of life will move in on the weak, nonviolent and steer a wide path around the potentially dangerous. Our job as believers is to stick up for the weak. Jesus stood between the abusers and the terrified. We should too. This is not just Americanism, it's the spirit of Abraham when he chased after his nephew's captors. It's the spirit of David as he brought Goliath down to ground level. It's the same courage and valor of Joshua. This may be hard to square with the "turn the other cheek" of Matthew chapter five, but Romans 13:4 reminds us that those who bear the sword, do so for a reason, as ministers of God!

When there are selfish, devil-driven people walking the streets, it offers a measure of comfort to know that there are some trained and equipped professionals watching out for the law-abiders. I find it hard to believe that a policeman could go through a shootout with a mobster without his hormones patterning those of an angry person. But, this too is good.

Another thing to consider is that anger does not necessarily quench the Holy Spirit. Jesus was angry with the blind Jewish leaders who considered their traditions more important than a healing for a crippled man. But even in the middle of this emotion, Jesus released the power of God to heal the paralytic borne of four (Mark 2:5). In 1 Samuel 11:6 we read of Saul, the first King of Israel:

Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily when he heard these words, and he became very angry.

There is a time to get angry and to release that anger in a God approved response. We had better be busy about the Lord's business when we do so, or there could be serious consequences. The flesh can trick us so easily into believing that our's is "righteous indignation." A way to analyze our anger is by examining the fruit it produces. Is the fruit of the Spirit nearby? Was my "mad" for selfish reasons, or was someone else helped. Was love, joy, peace, etc., a byproduct from this blow up?

ANGER THAT'S BAD

It may be an oversimplification to say that anger generated by selfishness is wrong, and anger on behalf of the victimized is righteous; but, it's a starting place. We know that pure love is not selfish (1 Corinthians 13), and that God is love. Therefore, we could say that God never gets angry because He's selfish. Humans may have an occasional streak of godliness that causes holy anger to emerge. Rare, no doubt, but all things are possible!

I find that I get angry most frequently when things mess with my plans. What gets to you? After sifting through several books on anger, I have found many "reasons" people get angry, but I think I see the same self-centered pattern behind most of these causes. Here are a few of the reasons we get angry:

Un-met expectations, dashed hopes, disappointments, deprivation, supposed reactions of others, exhaustion, hunger, frustration, losing control, inability to communicate, inability

to change situations, inability to meet needs, awareness of inadequacy, impatience, jealousy, being ripped off, being manipulated, being lied to, being inconvenienced, being treated unfairly, seeing others being ripped off, witnessing violence, chronic pain, chemical imbalances, results of accidents or strokes, demonic activity, being harassed or annoyed, our pride being assaulted, doing dumb things, others doing dumb things, fear anticipations, insecurity, abandonment, loss of love, rejection, betrayal, criticism, threats, intimidation, rivalry, losing, anger as a means to control others, sudden interruption of sleep or meditation, being scared suddenly, isolation, overcrowding, prejudice, grievance collecting, red tape, blocked by a perceived enemy, being stood up, tardiness, being ignored, lack of proper responses of others (not returning your phone calls, etc.), people who promise and don't follow through, gossip, betraying a confidence, pokey drivers, rude drivers, line cutters. And ad infinitum...

Let's look beneath these emotion provokers. How many are basically selfish? No doubt most are, but there could also be some acceptable reasons for anger within this list. I say it's pokey drivers! Ah yes, that's my Achilles heel, last bastion for conquering! Find any of your common anger-buttons listed above? Our main question needs to be, "How can we walk in victory over anger?" We want to use anger as a proper tool when called for, and maintain a strict mastery over it at all other times. How do we go about this?

ANGER STRATEGY

If anger (the bad kind) slithers from the swamp of selfishness, then I need to drain the swamp! Is this possible? Sure, we do it all the time. We do it for people we love deeply. We do it when certain people are watching. We do it when we're not even aware of it. If we monitored the average person's feelings as they watched TV, we would likely observe every emotion possible. We'd see them getting angry as the criminals tore through the

innocent town and left ruin in their wake; then, as the cameras took them to the beauty and splendor of the seven wonders of the world, they'd experience a sense of awe. We can laugh one minute and cry the next. We can get so angry that we shout at the TV (well, some have). What causes the rapid swing of emotional responses? What we focus on!

If I focus on my personal agenda being violated by some inconsiderate individual, anger starts breeding. If I see my time and order of business as overseen by the Lord, this happens less frequently. God is bigger than the interruptions and delays, and His will for my life takes all of these into account--unlike my daily schedule. Oh, if only I could always see life this way! What we focus on will start the anger generators or the compassion pump, or whichever emotion is appropriate! This is how I believe Jesus controlled His anger. His eyes were on the Father. When His Father got angry, Jesus got angry. If our eyes are on the Father, then that which makes Him angry will make us angry.

Maybe you have a difficult time accepting the biblical doctrine of hell because you do not understand this aspect of God's holiness. It's more enjoyable to meditate on His grace, but it is dangerous to ignore the truth that our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). When Jesus saw the enemy behind the scenes, exploiting ignorant people, He got angry with the source of the exploitation. As we see the activity of the demonic element in the lives of those we love, it will be much easier to release our anger against the enemy in a productive, useful way, and remain semi-intelligent when dealing with the person! When the person has sold out to the enemy (a true wolf in sheep's clothing), we will be able to deal quickly and decisively with them, without a personal vendetta.

WHO ARE WE KIDDING?

If a person says they can't control their anger toward their kids, yet somehow puts on composure when an unexpected guest arrives at the door, they are overlooking something. The abrupt change of focus from the irritations of the brats to the presence of someone who must be impressed, is all it usually takes. What is the consequence for the poor children if no one knocks at the door in the nick of time?

The key to controlling anger is to control what we focus on. It has been said that no one makes us mad, but that we choose to be mad. Anger is an emotional response that we choose to have, according to Dr. William Glasser in his book *Control Theory*. Willard Gaylin, M.D., in his book *The Rage Within*, says essentially the same thing. We choose it by choosing what we focus on.

If you are sitting in a roomful of people, and they are all talking at once, you will gravitate toward one conversation. You choose which noise emitter you tune in on. Your emotional responses will be in accordance to what the people are talking about. If you eavesdrop on two people discussing the evils of government waste, and this happens to be a bugaboo with you, guess what will happen to your anger level. If you're tuned in on someone telling a funny joke, you may laugh out loud with them when it comes to the punch line. Why? Because of what you're focusing on. In a large roomful of talkers, you could probably experience every imaginable emotional response just by sitting in the middle and listening to the various dialogues.

"Anger control can't be that easy. Surely it requires pills or therapy, or restraints or threats." Maybe so. If we have gone too far and have made too deep of ruts in the lanes of our minds, maybe so. If you happen to be one of the fortunate people that think on occasion, there may be a more convenient cure for runaway anger. Honestly, though, most people resort to anger because it works for them. It may do a crummy job, but it still produces results. Maybe they can't handle success, so what, they are comfortable with failure, and anger sure does provide some great failures!

A change of focus will not do too much when the source of anger is due to a chemical imbalance or chronic pain. If the button-pusher is actual injustice, then we do not necessarily want to avoid anger. This calls for some of that nasty stuff called thinking. If we can press beyond the laziness-barrier, and make some decisions about good mads and bad mads, then we can construct some advanced warning devices.

In one of the books I read on anger, the author said that the further away we are from danger, the easier it is to remain calm. If we spot from a distance a situation that is a possible anger-generator, then we can, with great self-control, plan our strategy.

When we're caught unaware and swept away with the currents of a flash flood of emotion, the best thing to do is to have an emergency plan. We

won't look as pretty when we are caught off guard, but we can still come out on top if we have a backup plan. As soon as we regain our composure, we can whisper a prayer of confession, yield up every piece of the problem, and begin to praise the Lord as best we can.

This takes our focus off the provoker and puts it on the Provider. We may have some mud on our face by the time we cool down enough to do this, but better late than never! Remember that praise turns even our blunders and bad responses into something good through the promise of Romans 8:28.

SELF-PROTECTION VS LOVE

Have you ever noticed how much a loving parent puts up with from their newborn? If we didn't like someone very much, we'd probably want to poke them if they pulled even a small percentage of the shenanigans our infants do. When we love someone, we give them the benefit of the doubt, we overlook so much, we excuse their failings. We do this because we love them and we want their love in return. We have learned that for the most part you have to deal carefully with the feelings of others. If we really care about having someone for a friend, then we will bite harder on our tongue than we would for someone we don't like.

We put up with so much from our newborns for several reasons: love, protection, and we know they can't help it. When we start to get suspicious that their little minds are plotting our overthrow, then we start putting up with less. We can excuse so much more as long as we think that the person is not trying to put something over on us or rip us off.

To be truly filled with the Spirit, I should be asking the Lord, "What's causing the pain inside this person? How can I minister to their needs?" Did you ever get upset with your baby for fussing, only to discover that they were being attacked by a diaper pin? People sometimes fuss at us because something is sticking them! Real love says, "You're hurting, that's why you're trying to hurt me. So, how can I help you to stop hurting?" This attitude could change our focus from self-protection to ministering in love. Not only will

our anger potential be less, but we will be pleasing to the Father, and will find His limitless power at our disposal!

THE CLOCK

How important is our schedule? I believe it was Ted Engstrom who said, "God gives us sufficient time each day to do His perfect will." Is your view of the Father this big? Does He know in advance about the traffic jam that will make you late for an appointment? Does His schedule include the necessary time that "drop-in" took away from the little time you had to complete your project? Is His stamp of approval on this page of your diary all that really matters, or are you driven by something else? We can put such unrealistic demands on our time that not even Superman could measure up. What makes matters worse is that we get to believing that our schedules are sacred! Anything that keeps me from accomplishing all my goals becomes the enemy to shoot at!

The Lord doesn't play these games with us. He will set back and let us stew in our juices. He watches as Jonah gets angry with a bug (Jonah chapter 4). The Lord said to him, "Do you have a good reason to be angry about the plant?" Jonah's shade was whittled away by a nasty worm. When the sun beat down on him, he got hot two ways. As the story closes, we do not see God trying to humor Jonah, but to get him to see life from a far more important perspective. Jonah was so self-centered that he cared more about a little shade than he did about the eternal souls of the whole city of Nineveh.

DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

A businessman friend of mine had a sign on his desk that is good to remember when we start to get ticked by interruptions. It said, "It won't matter a hundred years from now anyway!" Don't take this to the point of lethargy; however, we can benefit our mental, emotional, spiritual and physical health by thinking of our goals in terms of eternity. A phrase used as a derision is, "They see life through rose-colored glasses." We would be able to control more anger if we could but see life and time-demands through the Father's glasses. He can show us legitimate time-wasters and give us the

wisdom as to how to change them. We lose when we fail to consult Him. To walk in the Spirit is to ask Him if we should bring the interruption to a close or if there is a genuine need that He has brought into our life for ministry.

BET I CAN MAKE YOU MAD

Have you ever felt as though some people had as their calling in life to make others mad? A roommate of mine in college went to apply for a job with the Highway Patrol. A friend tipped him off to a special part of the interview that was designed to see how much it would take to get him angry. After a series of tests, he was ushered into a room where a man began asking him questions, with the sole purpose of making him mad. Such a test is very important in light of what an officer of the law will have to put up with. You can't have a bunch of guys walking around with a .357 magnum on their hip, and a chip on their shoulder. T'would be mighty dangerous!

Think about this example for a minute. How hard would it be for someone to get you angry if you knew their purpose in advance? If you kept in mind what they were trying to do, and were committed to not playing their game, then it should be rather easy to win. For some of us with pet peeves, we would be straining when they got close to our sore spot, even though we knew their game. On the other hand, how soon would we blow up if we were unaware of their strategy? The enemy of our soul is playing this deadly game with us. He dangles things before us to irritate us; throws up roadblocks to delay us; uses inconsiderate people to infuriate us. When we see through his game, we will up our batting average greatly!

Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Ephesians 4:26,27,31

What a sneaky trickster the devil is. If he can get us to sit on our anger past sundown, he knows we'll hatch some sin! He makes his opportunities many times by provoking us to anger. Look at what the 31st verse says. Notice the kinds of things that hang out with anger: bitterness,

wrath, clamor and slander. Not very good company! These are the flesh ways of dealing with what makes us mad. The enemy says, "Hurt somebody, it'll make you feel good."

REPRESS OR EXPRESS?

Some counselors have encouraged the display of anger with the thinking that repressed anger will destroy your body. Everyone knows that hiding anger is dangerous. Ulcers and arthritis, right? We know that expressing anger around people you love or want to impress is dangerous. Anger alienates us from others. So, the only sensible thing to do is to take out my frustrations on a punching bag or beat on a pillow, or some such thing, right? Wrong! Look at this quote from *The Rage Within* by Willard Gaylin, M.D.

This damaging effect of repressed anger has been the basis for much of the rationalization for the therapeutic outpouring of rage. Well, the sad news is now at hand. Recent studies (R. Shekelle and R.B. Williams) indicate that expressed anger is hazardous to your health. Men with high hostility ratings have six times as much probability of having a heart attack. In addition, high hostility is associated with risk of death from all causes. Expression or repression is not the issue. The problem is with the emotion. (page 92)

It's dangerous to vent your anger, even in "acceptable" ways. Why? Because, (1) it trains your anger responses; (2) it rewards the anger emotion; (3) it taps into the power of sowing and reaping; and, (4) it can open the door for Satanic invasion. Beating a pillow instead of somebody's noggin is by far a better response, but not the best. The Holy Spirit method for handling anger is to drain the swamp! When the pressure-causing element is gone, there's nothing left to injure us. All the dangers of repression and expression are avoided!

JESUS ON ANGER

Jesus gave us some real good reasons to work on our anger control in the Sermon on the Mount:

You have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not commit murder" and "Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court." But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, "Raca," shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, "You fool," shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. If, therefore, you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

Matthew 5:21-24

The Lord gets real serious about anger toward our brother. Why? Because it was the emotion behind the first murder. Cain got so jealous and angry with his brother that he rose up and killed him in cold blood. The next murderer, Lamech, did so out of anger. Esau wanted to kill his brother he was so angry. Jacob's sons killed all the males in Hamor out of anger. Joseph's brothers wanted to kill him because of anger. Moses murdered out of anger. Saul, first king of Israel, tried to kill David out of jealous anger. Absalom, son of David, had his half-brother cut down because of two years of simmering rage. Saul of Tarsus chased believers all over the country in a fit of anger--thought to be righteous anger, but in reality it was only jealous anger!

Jesus is obviously not talking about the righteous indignation that is according to godliness. He's concerned with the progression of anger that starts with name calling and ends up in character assassination or even actual death. Countless churches and ministries have been destroyed because irritations led to anger, and anger led to name calling and name calling led to destruction.

Jesus is literally saying He doesn't want our sacrifices and offerings if we have bitterness in our hearts, or if someone has a cause for anger with us. "Leave your offering there" gives us a motivation for returning to the altar when we've made up with our brother. What is the key focus that Jesus wants us to have? Isn't it harmony with our brethren? If we could put it in one word, He is saying, "reconciliation" is where it's at!

When I focus on how to improve my relationship with an estranged brother it makes me less sensitive to the devil's barbs. Reconciliation calls for give and take. It requires humbling of ourselves. It requires making ourselves vulnerable. In short, it can be used of the Lord to produce in us the traits He deems most valuable. Our pride takes a real beating when we go to someone and apologize or admit we goofed. Whenever pride is smashed, Jesus is glad.

Another revelation is given to us in this passage; the message is sobering. God does not take to divisions between brothers! If we fear God, we will watch what we say about a brother. Name calling is damnable. It stirs up contention and spreads strife. He who stirs up dissension among the brethren has God as an adversary! Remember Proverbs 6:19?

Matthew 5:25 and 26 outlines the Lord's plan for reconciliation with our opponents at law.

Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, in order that your opponent may not deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Truly I say to you, you shall not come out of there, until you have paid up the last cent.

Matthew 5:25,26

Jesus is more concerned with reconciling people than He is that we get our own way. Paul said that God gave to us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18). God wants His kids to get along, to flow in love, not to be at each other's throats. Paul strongly denounces believers suing other believers (1 Corinthians chapter 6).

Litigation can be dangerous. Opponents at law can quickly get into anger. Many times accusations are made and names are called. An inner seething begins to produce the poison of anger. We grow blind behind the

"cause" of our rights. The formula for murder (or character assignation) includes large amounts of this kind of anger. Jesus is asking us to think beyond the emotion of the moment; even beyond our personal pride!

Humbling ourselves before an opponent can take much of their heat away. Proverbs 15:1 puts it this way:

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

If somebody is angry enough with us to take us to court, then there's serious trouble ahead. Even if we win the legal opinion, we may lose a friend or a chance to witness. What is the spirit of the law? The letter of the law warns against murder; the spirit of the law is concerned with relationships. When we humble ourselves before our opponent, as unto Christ, we are following in the same footsteps that provided salvation to the lost human race. We are walking out Calvary love. Laying my life down for others becomes my focus; anger is destroyed by the power of love.

Jesus is implying that if we go to court with our fellow man and we have some blame ourselves, that we can not count on God to bail us out. When we humble ourselves before our opponent and go for the law of love, the Lord is smack dab in the middle of the situation and will release His influence for things to turn out for our best. To insist on vindication of myself for pride's sake will cost dearly!

HOW'S THAT AGAIN?

What are the ways of eliminating anger buildup? Let's list them again and add a couple more.

1. THINK!

The Word stresses the value of being slow to anger (see Proverbs 14:29 and James 1:19, 20 for starters). If counting to 10 helps, then by all means, improve your arithmetic. Christian counselor, Norm Wright, encourages the use of a key word when we start to get angry. If you feel yourself getting mad, say out loud, "stop" or maybe, "Praise the Lord." A cry

for help– "Jesus! Jesus!"– might be appropriate. He suggests standing up or saying to the person you're talking to, "I'm getting angry."

Try to isolate the cause for your anger. Analytical thinking can sooth the more animal reactions. Ask yourself why you are allowing this person or event to make you mad, and if this is really what you want (maybe that's a bad question). Try to unmask the devil's ploys of setting brother against brother to divide the house. Proverbs 19:11 says, "A man's discretion makes him slow to anger." Think!

2. CHANGE THE FOCUS

Reread the part where we mentioned the ease with which our emotions can be altered. Jesus focused on the joy set before Him as He endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2). Paul encourages us to think on the things that will produce life-giving emotions (Philippians 4:8). If we don't change our focus when we know better, then we are really saying that we want to get mad!

3. LOVE

Isn't it true that we put up with more from the person we love the most. We may hurt them in many subtle ways, or they us, but we will hang in there because we love them. "Love covers a multitude of sins," (I Peter 4:8); that's why the Apostle tells us to "keep fervent in our love for one another." Solomon tells us that it will be for our "glory to overlook a transgression." The swamp of irritation and frustration can be evaporated by a fresh baptism of God's love. Even love will get angry on occasion, but more slowly and with great discretion.

The beauty of the power of love is that it works even when we don't "feel" loving. If we merely do the loving thing, the Lion of Love comes forth and gobbles up the gremlins of anger!

4. GIVE THANKS

The practical expression of our trust in God's sovereign control of the events touching our lives is the giving of thanks. Praising Him when

frustrations first start triggers faith--the kind that moves mountains! As with love, we do not have to "feel" thankful; however, we are commanded to give thanks for all things (Ephesians 5:20) and in all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

5. HUMBLE YOURSELF

Personal rights yielded to the Lord make it much harder for others to take advantage of us. Humbling myself under God's mighty hand (1 Peter 5:6) acknowledges to the world that He runs my business! My schedule should always be subject to His final approval! There are no "accidents" or "delays" for the yielded believer, only opportunities!

The Lord promises to exalt us when we humble ourselves before Him. He also uses our brokenness to drain the anger from others. If we return hostility to one who is mad at us, things go from bad to worse. As we demonstrate a gentle, flexible attitude, the softness of our response will "turn away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1).

6. PLAN AHEAD

Some of my anger comes when I'm caught off guard and embarrassed. To plan ahead prevents this kind of frustration. If there are people who always make you mad, then ask God for wisdom to be able to avoid them or to insulate your feelings from their static! He may give you the "calm" words of rebuke for the irritator, so that you may lovingly confront them.

Look for trends. When are you most easily angered? Develop a strategy well in advance. The bottom line is that there may be some people that you just cannot be around, or some activities that you cannot get involved with. Ask someone that you know loves you, to make suggestions to help you avoid the anger trap.

7. WORK ON COMMUNICATION SKILLS

If some of our interpersonal anger comes from misunderstandings, then it would behoove us to listen to our self. Our tone of voice can easily contain pride, judgment, derision, and sarcasm. Watch the face of the one

you're talking to. How they're receiving what you're saying can often be detected by reading their body language.

When giving important instructions, it can be a lifesaver to provide a written follow-up. Asking the person, "What did you hear me say?" can eliminate problems. "I know what I'm thinking, why can't you read between the lines of what I'm saying?" Ever feel that way? It's a good anger-breeder! Turn this around. We can also avoid pitfalls if, when in doubt, we ask the other person questions to verify what we think we heard. And always, the soft answer turns away wrath.

8. ADJUST YOUR SELF-IMAGE

Looking around, I see many folks taking themselves too seriously, and God's law of love as optional. Nowhere in the Word are we told to love our self or to think highly of our self. The Bible says no man hates his own flesh (Ephesians 5:29); and, Jesus told us to love others just like we love our self! Of course we love our self; it's God's protection device He put in us. In fact, the devil has to work hard to pull this down in order to "get" someone to kill their self.

Many times when I'm listening to people, I wonder if they can hear how their story sounds to others. We take ourselves so seriously. We really believe that things are as urgent or earth-shaking as the devil whispers to us. Sometimes I think we're trying to con even our self! We need a new proverb:

Blessed is the man who can laugh at himself; and yet takes the law of love seriously.

When I feel like it, I can turn almost any put down into a joke on myself. Most considerate people laugh. The atmosphere is light and life goes on. Sometimes, (now, these are rare indeed) I'm a grump and I return slam for slam. Ever get into that game? You can usually feel the heat rise, and in short order you can barbecue. More than one relationship between close friends has been ruined by "smart-mouthitis."

Why can I cleverly turn a jibe into humor one moment and the next time take offense? Probably because I'm taking myself too seriously. Some-

body no doubt ignored my importance or rejected my advice or said something disparaging about little ole me. The bottom line is that I've got me on the mind. Problems are on the way! Majoring on others and flowing in the law of love can quench the smouldering fires of irritation. Laughing at our blunders can set everyone around us at ease. Haven't you been on needles and pins before when someone goes into a tirade over some little dumb thing they did? Relax, we're never going to get out of life alive! Memorize and say often, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 1:21 and 2:3.

9. PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR.

Seek to be as invulnerable to the enemy as possible. His big deal is to divide the House of Faith. Much of our anger needs to be directed at him, not with name calling (Jude 9), but with binding and resisting. Are there certain buttons that he knows of, that when pushed, you explode? Then, by all means either disconnect them or hide them! Look for any of his helpers. Sudden flashes of anger may point to the presence of one of his big boys!

10. FARM BETTER.

Plant large fields of the love of God and the Word of God. Major on farming better. Eliminate the weeds from your life. The fruit of the Spirit comes from wise planting. Our actions produce fruit; therefore, plant for the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23). This is one way we can get off the defensive concerning anger management (that's a yucky place to live, anyway). Take the initiative--plant all the good seed you can!

MAD AT GOD?

There's another area concerning anger that needs to be looked at--- anger with the Lord. A few thoughts may help us through the times when we're strongly upset with our Maker. Many great saints had times when they misunderstood God and therefore responded toward Him out of anger. David, the man after God's heart, got so upset with the Lord when He struck down Uzzah (II Samuel 6:7-11), that he pulled back and left the ark at Obededom's

house. The Scripture says "David was unwilling to move the ark." The article given by God for the priests to direct worship, was abandoned, after a fashion. Why? Because David was angry with the Lord. It took three months of cooling down plus testimony of God's blessings on Obededom's household before David would consider resuming his plans concerning worship of Yahweh.

Why do I mention this? To make David look bad? No. To remind us that anyone can get angry with the Lord. We may try to hide it because we're wise enough to have a fear of God. Some Christians would pounce on us so fast if they thought we were audacious enough to get angry with the Lord. The truth of the matter is that we know that God is able to stop or prevent anything. He has all power. When He does not choose to intervene on our behalf (or for one we care about), we can simmer. If God allows us to be put in the middle between warring factions, we can forget about the blessings of being a peacemaker and go to "frustrating!"

Does it help to get angry with God? No, He is not moved by our fits or our tears! God is moved only by faith! Romans chapter nine was written in response to man's fuming about the Lord's sovereign leadership. Can you hear the frustration that Paul is describing in verse 19?

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"

As a minister of Christ, the Apostle Paul had come across many who were working through their feelings concerning God's sovereignty. If God is love and He is also all-powerful, why doesn't He do things differently. We can easily get our finite noses bent out of joint and answer back in sarcasm. What does Paul call for in this theoretical conversation with the angry?

What shall we say then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.

Romans 9:30-32

Paul calls for faith! We must respond to God with trust! God is God and getting angry, though not punishable by damnation, profits nothing. In fact, when we pull away from faith and in dependence upon our five senses make judgment calls of God, we cut ourselves off from the Source of all blessings! This passage above says the Jews were isolated from the blessings of God by their refusal to flow with Him by faith. When David got angry with God, all he did was isolate himself from God's blessings. Obededdom was having a grand time in the presence of the Lord!

When we find ourselves angry because of the "unfair" death of an infant, the suffering of the third world nations, or because God didn't come through (according to what I feel He should do), it would be real smart to stop and reflect. Jesus said anything is possible for the one operating in faith. What do I want? Do I want a miracle or do I want to soak and simmer in anger? "But I trusted God for a miracle, and He let me down. Why should I put myself in that situation again?"

Can you see the frustration in this common reply of someone who's angry? It's built on the lie that God could fail. Only truth will set us free. The fact is that God's Kingdom works by faith (I Timothy 1:4 NASB); we can only please Him when we operate in faith (Hebrews 11:6); and, "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). When blind Bartimaeus received his miracle, Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well" (Mark 10:46-52). Maybe we're getting angry with the wrong one.

Yielding our viewpoint of fairness and equity to the Almighty Sovereign is a good place to start. Allow the One who is perfect to make the calls! Then, let's commit ourselves to learning all we can about how faith works. Reread the New Testament looking for how much responsibility is placed on us humans for miracles. I think we will all be surprised when we see how much the Bible is dumping the burden for "doing the impossible" back into our lap (check out Galatians 3:5 for a starter!).

I'm sure we'll all have times when we're upset with our Heavenly Father. Let's paste these words over the doorpost of our mind so that when we find our irritation level rising, we can switch over into faith and make miracles happen!

ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE
TO THE ONE WHO BELIEVES!

YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL!

HIDDEN ROOTS

Serious anger responses need to be considered prayerfully and carefully. If you have a problem with frequent anger and hostility, and if the level of rage nears the danger point, you would be wise to consult a Christian counselor. There probably are some hidden roots of bitterness that are seeping poison into your system. Things from the past do not always go away with time. Ask the Lord to reveal the cause. If you can't get a breakthrough by yourself, please reach out to someone experienced in these matters. Anger is serious business:

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 1 John 3:15

He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Proverbs 17:27

He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly. Proverbs 14:29

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