

# How to Improve Conflict Management

## *Learning to Control My Anger*

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Wherever there is conflict you usually find anger and wherever you find anger you usually find conflict. Anger is a legitimate emotion, but the Bible clearly teaches us that we must learn to control our anger. As a matter of fact, the Bible says that misdirected anger can kill marriages. **Proverbs 11:29** says, "The fool who provokes his family to anger and resentment will finally have nothing left" (LB). If anger and resentment are allowed to build in a marriage eventually there will be nothing left of that marriage. If you want to minimize the conflict in your home, then you need to learn to control the anger.

Some of you don't have a problem with anger. You don't lose your temper. You don't flair up easily, but some of you do. Some of you don't flair up emotionally, but out of anger you calmly stab your spouse's heart with hurtful words. We are going to address anger today.

Let me begin by giving you four relationship styles regarding conflict management.

- There is **the retaliation style**: This is moving *against* each other. This is where a couple butt heads with each other. It's a point and counter point type of relationship. It's a verbal tennis match. They are opponents trying to win an argument.
- There is **the domination style**: This is moving one *over* another. One person in the relationship controls the other. One of you, in the marriage, gets their way most, if not all the time.

- There is **the isolation style**: This is moving *away* from each other. This is where you and your spouse do each your own thing while neglecting the other. This expresses itself with a cold shoulder, staying away from each other for long periods of time, silent treatment, avoiding your spouse by doing things that keep you away from home.
- There is **the cooperation style**: This is moving *with* each other, growing with each other, and moving through a difficult time together. This is the win-win situation in a disagreement. This is where you talk it out and come to a solution that you both are happy with. Both of you feel like winners.

The retaliation, domination, and isolation styles feed conflict by creating a sense of revenge, resentment, and rejection. Then the conflict turns into a combat resulting in mental, emotional, and sometimes physical casualties. We don't want that to happen. You want your marriage to be able to handle the conflict and anger in a God honoring way.

When you have an argument you will go through three phases.

- Phase one is **the recognition phase**: You recognize there is a problem. You disagree about something. You realize you don't see eye to eye.
- Phase two is **the reaction phase**: You since anger, frustration, disappointment or irritation. You feel mad. This is where most of the hurtful statements take place. This is where people say things they wish they could take back. This is where most of the damage is done during an argument.
- Phase three is **the resolution phase**: This is where you actually begin solving the problem and addressing the conflict. This is where you ask, "What are we going to do about it?" This is where the possible solution is discovered. Hopefully, this is where improvement takes place. Again, you want the resolution to be a win-win, not a win-lose. Both of you need to feel like it's a good decision.

Many marriages never get past stage two. They get stuck in the reaction phase. They get caught up in their emotions and their anger. Typically there are two reactions to anger: being aggressive and being passive. In most marriages there is a **skunk** and a **turtle**. You always know when the skunk is angry – they stink up the place. When they get angry everybody knows they are angry. When the turtle is angry, they withdraw into a shell. They bury their anger. While the skunk explodes, the turtle silently boils. Couples must learn how to deal with their anger toward their spouse. If you don't, you go around in circles and nothing gets resolved.

In order to get things resolved, you need to get passed the anger. How can you minimize the conflict in your home? Gain control of your anger. **Ephesians 4:26** says, "In your anger do not sin" (Eph. 4:26). How do you do that? Let me give you five Biblical thoughts on how to defuse the anger in your marriage. To help you with this I will use the acronym ANGER to walk through each truth.

## **Admit your anger**

**First of all, you need to admit your anger.** **Ephesians 4:25** says, "Stop lying to each other; tell the truth... when we lie to each other we are hurting ourselves. If you are angry, don't sin by nursing your grudge" (LB). If you are angry admit that you are angry. Tell yourself the truth and tell your spouse the truth. As a matter of fact, if you are angry and you deny it, then you are sinning. You are lying. Tell the truth. If your spouse senses there is something wrong and asks, "What's wrong?" Don't say nothing, calmly tell them what's wrong.

When Pam and I first were married, I couldn't admit that I was angry. I thought to be angry was a sign of weakness and un-Christian like. Instead of saying I was angry I would say I was frustrated or annoyed. No matter what you call it – being angered, annoyed, irritated, aggravated, upset, or bothered – those are all words that describe anger at some level. So, when your spouse ask you, "Are you angry?" And you are, just admit it. Say, "What you said really hurt me" or "It is irritating me that you are not helping with this." Admit it. Get it on the table so it can be dealt with.

Let me say, that anger is a God-given emotion. If you never get upset over anything you're not in touch with reality. Anger just means you care deeply about some things. Sometimes you or your spouse needs to get angry over things. Even God gets angry over things.

The first step in dealing with your anger is admitting to yourself and your spouse that you are angry. You must do this first step before you can move on to any of the others.

## **Now is the time to deal with your anger**

**Secondly, realize now is the time to deal with your anger.** Not next month, not next week, but right now. Deal with your anger as soon as possible. The Bible teaches us that when we get angry we should not procrastinate in dealing with it. Don't put it off, don't prolong it, don't hide your head in the sand, don't delay it. **Ephesians 4:26** says, "Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry – but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life" (Msg).

Try to resolve the anger before you end the day. This is a great rule for marriages: "Neither of you get to go to bed until the anger and the conflict is into the resolution phase." Begin looking at solutions, rather than putting it on a shelf.

Why should you deal with anger immediately? Because **Job 18:4** tells you, "You tear yourself to pieces in your anger" (NCV). You are only hurting yourself in your anger. When you are angry and you don't deal with it immediately, it keeps building and building. You think about it, worry about it, meditate on it. It gets bigger and bigger until it expands all out of proportion. The more you hold it in the more it builds up. Now is the time to deal with your anger. The sooner you can deal with it, the better.

## **Gain understanding of your anger**

**Number three, gain understanding of your anger.** **Proverbs 19:11** says, "A man's wisdom gives him patience" (NIV). When a person is wise and they have a practical

understanding of things they are more patient. This is true regarding anger as well. If you have wisdom and understanding about anger you will reflect a higher level of patience when you are angry or when someone is angry at you. Your wisdom about anger gives you patience.

When we are angry we need to ask ourselves, “Why am I angry? Why is this upsetting me so much?” Anger is a warning light that you are dealing with a different issue than what is on the surface. Have you noticed that most arguments don’t start with the real problem? They start with surface irritations.

Let me give you an example. John comes home from work and kicks his shoes and socks off in the living room and leaves them there. He has done this for the past several weeks. Suzy, his wife, has picked up his socks in the living room, bedroom, and even off the kitchen floor. She has been asking him to put away his dirty socks. Finally, the day came when she walks up to him and says, “Why do you leave your dirty socks all over the house. Why can’t you pick them up and put them away. I am tired of having to clean up after you.” John replies, “You don’t have to yell at me. I’m three feet from you. I’ll pick them up when I get ready. If they don’t bother me, then why should they bother you?” Now the arguments on, it gets heated and mean and they are having this verbal war over dirty socks. She talks about his laziness. He comes back with her pickiness. She says he is a pig. He says she is too uptight and a perfectionist and needs to relax. They are in a full blown retaliation mode. They are playing angry verbal tennis.

But this argument is not really over socks, John’s laziness or Suzy’s cleaning perfections. The socks are the surface issue that irritated the outer layer of a deeper issue for Suzy. The real issue is Suzy feels underappreciated and disrespected by John. Suzy felt angry by John’s dirty socks, but didn’t know why. If Suzy would have had a greater understanding of anger she might have asked herself, “Why do these socks bring out anger toward my husband? What is my real issue? What do these socks represent?” Once Suzy had these answers she could have approached her husband with patience and wisdom and had a conversation about how she feels disrespected by John which is illustrated by the dirty socks. So the conversation would have been about respect, not dirty socks.

While we are talking about causes of anger, let me give you four root causes of most anger in people.

- **You get angry when you feel unaccepted.** When your spouse rejects who or what you are, when they compare you to other people, nag you, or make fun of you, you are going to feel angry.
- **You get angry when you feel unappreciated.** When your spouse is taking you for granted, doesn't value your work, or when other things seem more important to your spouse than you... you will feel anger.
- **You get angry when you feel unsupported.** When your spouse seems to be working against you rather than for you, you will sense anger. This often happens over the kids, when one parent undermines the other parent's decision about something dealing with the kids.
- **You get angry when you feel uncertain.** If you think your spouse is not telling the whole truth about something or keeping a secret from you, you will sense anger. This often happens over financial matters or when one spouse is not being completely honest about where they have been.

When you find out why you are angry don't start off by saying, "You did this... you said that." Start off by saying, "I feel unsupported when you do this or say that. Can we talk about it?" Find out why you are feeling angry and then get it on the table for discussion.

## **End the flood of anger**

**Number four, learn to end the flood of anger.** Learn to control it. Learn to manage it in healthy ways. **Proverbs 29:11** says, "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control" (NIV). Have you ever been to the dam when they have everything wide open and the water is just rushing out as fast as it can? It is loud and it

even shakes the ground. But sometimes they just let a little of the water flow through. At the dam, there is always water pressure on the other side. The dam controls the water flow regardless of the pressure. That's how you and I need to be. When we get angry, there is pressure on the inside to let it out. However, it is up to you with how much you let through. Unwise people loosely let their anger out, but smart people quietly hold it back letting it out in healthy doses.

How do you learn to control your anger? **James 1:19** gives us direction, "Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" (NIV). Listening more and speaking less in an argument will help control or manage the anger. It will help your anger to leak out, rather than flood out.

## **Rely on God's Help**

**Number five, rely on God's help.** If you struggle with anger, anxieties, worries, and frustrations then listen to **Philippians 4:4**, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (NIV, Philippians 4:4-6).

You cannot control your anger on your own. You need God's help. Go to God and ask Him to help you control it. God wants to help you. He does not want you to be controlled by anxious, upset, and angry feelings. He wants you to be controlled by His peace.

## **Conclusion**

Philippians 4 begins with rejoicing in the Lord. Before you can *rejoice* in the Lord you need to be *redeemed* by the Lord. You need to receive His salvation, His Spirit inside of you. You need to commit yourself to Him. Before you can control the anger, God has to control you. That's starts with Jesus being the Lord of your life.