

# Managing Anger

## Facing the Fire Within

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.

Do you struggle with anger? Some of you may say "yes" and others will say "no." But let's ask a few more questions. If you answer "yes" to any of the following questions it is an indication that you wrestle with anger to some degree.

- Do you become irritable over little things?
- Do you ever deny becoming impatient?
- Do you become easily frustrated?
- Do you say things in an argument that you later regret?
- Do you feel annoyed when you don't feel in control?
- Do you feel aggravated when others don't do what you expect?

If you said "yes" to any of those questions then this message is for you. Managing anger is a part of the discipleship development. It is part of becoming more and more like Christ. If you want to be like Christ then you need to learn to control your anger like Christ.

To help us understand what the Bible teaches about anger and how to manage our anger we are going to look at what the Bible says about the meaning of anger, the magnitude of anger, the sources of anger and finish up by examining some Biblical approaches to managing our anger.

### The Meaning of Anger

What is the meaning of anger? Anger is a strong emotion of irritation or agitation that occurs when a need or expectation is not met. Anger is not a sin, but what you do with anger can lead to many sins. **Proverbs 29:22** says, "An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins." The issue is not whether you are going to be

angry, irritated and agitated at people but how will you respond and act when you become angry. When you become angry what will you say? How will you say it? What will you do when you become angry?

Let's settle this now. You are going to get angry. Something or someone is going to cause you to get mad? However, God says in **Ephesians 4:26**, "In your anger do not sin." Then in **James 1:19** we are told we should be "slow to become angry."

Anger is not a sin. However, if you do not manage your anger correctly it will lead you to many sins. Anger is a strong emotion of irritation or agitation that occurs when a need or expectation is not met. So when that need is not met or that expectation is not met how do you react?

When your spouse does not meet your need or expectation how do you react toward them? When someone at work or school irritates you or agitates you how do you respond to them? What is your response when someone does something you do not like? All these questions deal with anger. It's okay to have a fire within, just don't let the fire spread.

## **The Magnitude of Anger**

We have briefly looked at the meaning of anger, but what is **the magnitude of anger**? Anger, like heat, can be measured in many degrees. It ranges from mild, medium, to hot. Anger can go from a controlled irritation to an uncontrolled explosion. The word *anger* is a wide umbrella word that covers many levels and types of anger. Let me show you what I mean. The Bible uses different words to express different kinds of anger. Let me show you some of them.

**One type of anger is indignation.** *Indignation* is anger provoked by something appearing unjust or unfair. Indignation is not a sin. Indignation can either lead to a righteous act or a selfish act. For example, Jesus became indignant when the disciples prevented parents from bringing their children to Him so He might bless them. **Mark 10:14** says, "When Jesus saw this, He was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'" Jesus became

angry because the disciples were keeping children from coming to Him. His indignation leads to a loving rebuke and correction.

But then in Luke 13:14 you see another result of indignation. Jesus had been healing people on the Sabbath. One of the synagogue rulers wanted to enforce the religious rule and policy that healing was considered working on the Sabbath and should be done on another day. So in **Luke 13:14** we read, “Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, ‘There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.’” The synagogue ruler's anger led him to be more concerned about the religious policy of the Sabbath and less caring about the people.

**A second type of anger is wrath.** *Wrath* is anger accompanied by a desire to avenge. Wrath often moves from the emotion of anger to the outward expression of anger. In Romans 1:18, God expresses His wrath as divine judgment on those who commit willful sin. **Romans 1:18** says, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.”

**A third type of anger is fury.** *Fury* is anger that destroys common sense. The word *fury* suggests a powerful force compelled to harm or destroy. Fury makes one irrational. For example, according to **Acts 5:33** some members of the Sanhedrin were so angry with Peter and the other apostles for proclaiming Jesus was God that “they were furious and wanted to put them to death.” When someone is furious they do things that don't make sense. This is why **Proverbs 6:34** says, “For jealousy arouses a husband's fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge.” When a person becomes furious they become overwhelmed with the anger and as a result they will become cruel. **Proverbs 27:4** says, “Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming.”

When a parent becomes furious with their child they will treat the child with cruelty. This is when the parent locks the child in the closet, slaps and beats the child, starves the child. The furious parent sees this as punishment and discipline, but in reality their actions are irrational and make no sense. Their fury is driving them.

**A fourth type of anger is rage.** *Rage* is the type of anger that loses control. Rage explodes quickly and dies down just as quickly. Rage is a form of temporary insanity. It is explosive, hurtful, and deadly. The person doesn't see the rage coming. A person who struggles with rage is like a moving land mine. You don't know when or what will set them off.

The Bible has a lot to say about a person's rage. **Galatians 5:19** says, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; (20) idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage..." When a person throws a "fit" they are operating in the sinful nature. There is no doubt about it. A "fit of rage" is obviously an act of the sinful nature. There is no guess work here. When you throw a fit you are not living by the Spirit of God, you are living by the sinful nature.

**Ephesians 4:31** says, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice (32) Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." This particular rage is also described as "wrath." But it is not a godly wrath, it is sinful wrath. It is a rage that is control by the passion of the moment. God says get rid of it and replace it with kindness, compassion, and forgiveness... why? Because God did the same for you in Christ. You are not showing them kindness, compassion, and forgiveness because they deserve it but because of what God has done for you in Christ.

**Colossians 3:8** says, "But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." This outburst of anger leads to various kinds of harmful behavior the Bible calls "malice, slander and filthy language." It is amazing what people will say and do when they are in a rage. God says rid yourself of all such things. Ridding yourself of these things is part of your spiritual growth as a Christian.

God says I don't want you to be the kind of person who is characterized by selfish indignation, human wrath, fury or rage. You are to be different. You act different. You react different. You are a child of God and the Spirit of God is in you empowering you and working in your life to be a person who shows compassion, kindness and forgiveness rather than wrongful anger.

## The Sources of Anger

This brings us to the question, “What causes the fire within to start?” What is it that creates an angry reaction within us? There are many sources or causes of anger. Let me show you four of them in the Bible.

**One source of anger is hurt.** This is where your heart is wounded. Everyone has a God-given inner need for unconditional love. When you experience rejection or emotional pain of any kind, anger can become a protective wall that keeps people, pain, and hurt away.

A Biblical example of this is the **12 sons of Jacob**. Joseph was the undisputed favorite of the 12 sons of Jacob. Feeling hurt and rejected by their father, the older sons became angry and vindictive toward their younger brother. **Genesis 37:3** says, “Israel [Jacob] loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.” The brothers became angry because their heart had been wounded. They decided to take their anger out on their little brother. Have you noticed how angry you become when you are hurt? When this happens don’t sin in your anger.

**A second source of anger is injustice.** This is where you believe your rights or someone else’s rights are violated. Everyone has an inner moral code that produces a sense of right and wrong, fair and unfair, just and unjust. When you perceive that an injustice has occurred against you or others (especially those whom you love), you may feel angry. If you hold on to the offense, the unresolved anger can begin to make a home in your heart.

A Biblical example of this is **King Saul**. King Saul’s unjust treatment of David evoked Jonathan’s anger. When Jonathan, Saul’s son, heard his father pronounce a death sentence on his dear friend David, he asked in **1 Samuel 20:32**, “‘Why should he be put to death? What has he done?’ Jonathan asked his father. But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him [Jonathan]. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David. Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger.” Jonathan saw an injustice and that injustice aroused a fierce anger within Jonathan. When you see an injustice how do you react? How do you feel? When this happens don’t sin in your anger.

**A third source of anger is fear.** Everyone is created with a God-given inner need for *security*. When you begin to worry, feel threatened, or get angry because of a change in circumstances, you may be responding to fear. A fearful heart reveals a lack of trust in God's perfect plan for your life.

A Biblical example of this is **King Saul**. Saul became angry because of David's many successes on the battlefield. He felt threatened by David's popularity and feared he would lose his kingdom (read 1 Sam. 18:5-15, 28-29). In **1 Samuel 18** we are told, "Saul was very angry... 'They have credited David with tens of thousands,'" he thought, "but with me only hundreds'... Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with David but had left Saul" (1 Sam. 18:8, 12). Sometimes our fear of change, fear of loss, fear of someone else taking over causes us to become angry. When this happens don't sin in your anger.

**A fourth source of anger is frustration.** This is where you feel your *performance is not accepted*. Everyone has a God-given inner need for significance. When your efforts are thwarted or do not meet your own personal expectations, your sense of significance can be threatened. Frustration over unmet expectations – your own or others' – is a major source of anger.

A Biblical example is **Cain**. Both Cain and Abel brought offerings to God, but Cain's offering was clearly unacceptable. Cain had chosen to offer what he himself wanted to give rather than what God said was right and acceptable. When Cain's self-effort was rejected, his frustration led to anger, and his anger led him to murder his own brother. **Genesis 4** says, "In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast... Now Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let's go out to the field.' And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him (Gen. 4:3-5, 8). When a person feels rejection they often lash out at those around them. You may not kill someone, but you may try to make their life miserable or express yourself to them so they feel rejected as well. When you feel frustrated or rejected be careful not to sin in your anger.

You will sense anger when you feel hurt, injustice, fear, and frustration or rejection. Remember God says, In your anger do not sin (Eph. 4:26) and be slow to become angry (James 1:19) because an angry person can commit many sins (Prov. 29:22).

## **The Management of Anger**

What is anger? It is a strong emotion of irritation or agitation that occurs when a need or expectation is not met. It shows up as indignation, wrath, fury, and rage. Anger is not a sin, but it can lead to many sins. Learning to manage your anger is a part of your spiritual growth. God wants us to replace that unhealthy anger with compassion, kindness, and forgiveness. God wants you to manage your anger in such a way as to honor others and to glorify Him.

What does God tell us about managing our anger? We don't have time to look at everything God says about managing our anger but let's look at some things God says that will get us started in the right direction.

**For one, you need to acknowledge your anger. Proverb 28:13** says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." If you want to grow and move beyond your anger controlling and damaging your life then you are going to have to say, "I have a problem with anger." Admit it to yourself, to God, and others. Don't conceal and pretend like you have not committed a sin that came from your anger. Acknowledge it.

A second action you can take is to **ask for forgiveness for your anger**. If your anger controls you and you have said or done things that were wrong, uncalled for, and hurtful then ask for forgiveness. **1 John 1:9** says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Go to God and admit your anger to Him, agree with Him about it and receive His healing forgiveness.

But don't stop there. If you have wrongfully offended someone with your anger go and ask for their forgiveness. In **Matthew 5:23** Jesus is talking about what to do with how you have treated someone out of anger and He says, "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you [because of your

anger], (24) leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” If you have hurt someone physically or verbally because of your anger toward them, go to them and ask for their forgiveness. Try to make things right.

If someone comes to you who has hurt you out of their anger and they ask you to forgive them you need to forgive them. **Colossians 3:13** says, “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

Another step to managing your anger is to **appraise your thinking regarding anger**. **Proverbs 21:29** says, “A wicked man puts up a bold front, but an upright man gives thought to his ways.” If you have a problem with anger don’t act like you don’t have one. An honorable and respectable person is going to think about his ways. He is going to think about his anger, how he controls it, how he does not control it, how it affects those in his life, and how it affects his testimony toward the lost. Think about why you get angry so easily. Think about how you should have reacted when you became upset. Give thought to your ways.

A fourth action you can take in managing your anger is to **admit your needs are revealed by your anger**. When a person exhibits unhealthy anger it is often used as a tactic to get an inner need met in their life they feel is not being met in some way.

- Do you use anger to manipulate people to perform a certain way for you so that you feel loved by them?
- Do you use your anger to force people to behave in a certain way that communicates love to you? For example, you want someone’s attention but they don’t give it to you so you do or say something mean in order to get their attention.
- Do you try to control people with your anger in order to feel significant and important? When a person feels like they are losing control of something they will get angry and their sense of significance is threatened with the lack of control. As a

result to gain control and significance they will say or do something mean out of their frustration in the attempt to regain control.

If people don't feel loved, feel significant, or feel secure they will lash out at those around them in anger in order to change the situation. But the real issue isn't those around you, it's your relationship with Christ. **Philippians 4:19** says, "My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus." Your needs are not met through manipulating others with your anger, but in Christ Jesus.

**Let me give you one final action step you can take. Acquaint yourself with anger.** Study God's Word on anger. Look at Biblical examples of people getting angry correctly and wrongly. Look at what Jesus says about anger. Answer questions like, "When is it right to become angry and show anger? How do I know when my anger is out of control? What role does the Holy Spirit play regarding my anger? How does the sinful nature affect my anger? How does my new nature in Christ affect my anger? How does my anger affect me? How does it affect others?" **Proverbs 14:29** says, "A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly." The reason you get impatient so quickly with people and situations and lose your temper with them is because of a lack of understanding. The reason a patient person is patient is because they understand some things. The more "understanding" you have about anger the better you will be able to fight unhealthy anger. You want to renew your mind and thinking about anger on God's Word, when that happens your anger becomes healthier, you glorify God more, and people feel safer around you which increases your influence as representative of Christ in their life.

## **Conclusion**

When it comes to our eternity anger does two things.

**One, it reveals people have a sinful nature.** God tells us that we have all sinned and missed the mark of God's perfection. If you have ever lost your temper, said selfish and mean things because you were mad you have sinned. Our unhealthy anger reveals we are sinners. Jesus is the only one who has been perfectly angry and not sinned.

Our anger reveals we have a sinful nature, **but it also reveals we need a Savior.** The Bible says in **1 Timothy 1:10**, "It has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior,

Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” Jesus destroyed death so death would not destroy you. It is through Jesus that you can experience life and immortality. Let me tell you the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ [explain salvation].