


STUDY GUIDE FOR
THE ANGER TRAP

*FREE YOURSELF FROM THE FRUSTRATIONS
THAT SABOTAGE YOUR LIFE*

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 **JOSSEY-BASS**
A Wiley Imprint
www.josseybass.com

This study guide accompanies

The Anger Trap: Free Yourself from the Frustrations That Sabotage Your Life

ISBN 0-7879-6879-X

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Published by Jossey-Bass

A Wiley Imprint

989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741 www.josseybass.com

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FIRST EDITION

PART ONE UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF ANGER

CHAPTER 1

The Cry Behind the Anger

ANGER CAN BE UNDERSTOOD as a cry to feel significant. Happy, contented people tend not to experience the emotion to extremes; this means most angry people are struggling with a wounded spirit. To begin gaining mastery over anger, you need to determine the valid message associated with the emotion; then you must determine how to communicate that message beneficially. Being released from the trap of anger begins with deciding to take personal responsibility for emotional stability.

For Personal Reflection

Read Lamentations 1:20. This passage is a description of the spirit of the people of Jerusalem, who have lived a life of anger and rebellion. It underscores how a lifestyle of persistent anger indicates a deeper feeling of distress.

- Angry people can be understood as individuals in great pain. What type of pain might we expect to see in someone given to chronic anger?
- How does your own anger reflect experiences of pain and distress?

Read Exodus 34:6-7. As God revealed himself to Moses, he indicated that the poor decisions of parents can be visited upon their sons and daughters for successive generations.

- In what ways might anger be understood as an extension of the problems within a person's family of origin? Why do anger patterns tend to follow a predictable cycle within the family unit?
- What are your earliest memories of your own mismanagement of anger?
- What legitimate message do you wish to communicate when you feel angry, even if the form of communication is not appropriate?
- Your current anger may reflect pessimism and misassumption generated in the past. How might your anger reveal that you have not come to terms with pain originating in past conflict?

Read Psalm 51:10-13. This passage was written in the aftermath of David's rebellious behavior with Bathsheba. In his anguish, he hungered to be restored to a clean way of life.

- As you observe how your own misuse of anger can create perpetual problems, how might your observations serve as a springboard for growth and maturity?
- Your anger can serve a useful function if you learn to harness its energy and maintain dignity, even though you feel as you do. What adjustments can you make to begin the process of handling anger more constructively?

Personal Challenge

1. Write down the names of the people in your family of origin. Next to each name, write what you remember about his or her manner of handling anger. How did the anger affect you?
2. List three recent experiences of anger. Then next to each one, explain how the incident evoked feelings similar to those you experienced in your family of origin.
3. Now, go back through each recent experience of anger and ask, What valid message was beneath each experience? How could your behavior have been adjusted so others would more readily receive that valid message?

CHAPTER 2

Raw, Unrefined Anger

WHEN MOST PEOPLE FEEL ANGRY, they tend to fall back into tired old patterns of mismanaging it. Although we have choices to be either healthy or unhealthy in managing anger, it is easy to let the harmful forms of anger take over as we give hardly any thought to the repercussions. Only if we remain conscious of the privilege to choose can we expect to make positive adjustments in handling anger.

For Personal Reflection

Read Proverbs 29:22. Hot-tempered anger is certain to perpetuate ongoing strain and tension, yet many people repeatedly choose poor forms of anger expression because it has become habitual. It is surely undeniable that ongoing misuse of anger brings predictably disastrous results.

- Why do people continue to choose maladaptive forms of anger, knowing that it only stirs up more strife?
- What are some of your most common misuses of anger that keep you in its clutches?

Read Proverbs 22:24–25. Inevitably, angry individuals learn to handle anger at least in part from the modeling of significant people in their lives. Once we witness others mismanaging anger, we feel excused in being similarly inappropriate in our own emotional management style.

- Though you know there are better ways to proceed with your anger, what do you hope to accomplish when you handle anger disrespectfully?
- How do people respond to you when your anger is less than respectful?
- Knowing that others will probably not receive the legitimate message of your anger when it is rudely communicated, why do you nonetheless fall back into those forms of anger that repeatedly generate strain?

Read James 1:19–20. Without a commitment to godliness, the use of anger is bound to achieve unrighteous results. This explains why it is wise to be slow to anger, to contemplate where anger fits into the overall goal of a God-pleasing way of life.

- Why do angry people find it difficult to take a slow, measured approach to their use of anger?
- What adjustments would you make in choosing to be more patient and deliberate in how you handle anger?
- What is the difference between being cautious in the use of anger and suppressing anger (or being passive-aggressive, for example, giving the silent treatment or being evasive)?

Personal Challenge

1. For the next couple of days, keep a log of the circumstances that generate anger and frustration within yourself. Be honest!
2. Along with your written log of anger-producing episodes, write how you chose to handle the situation. Did you suppress? Act with open aggression? Become passive-aggressive?
3. Go back through each angry episode and record how you could have responded optimally to that circumstance.

CHAPTER 3 Healthy Anger Options

WHEN YOU FEEL ANGRY, you are not obliged to handle it with rudeness or insensitivity. You can choose to speak constructively about the matter that generates the anger. You can also develop the wisdom to discern when to release anger by way of forgiveness, tolerance, or a forgiving spirit. Regarding the use of improper anger, it can never be stated that “I can’t help it – that’s just the way I am.” For each harmful use of anger, there is a healthy alternative.

For Personal Reflection

Read Ephesians 4:26. Clearly there can be times when anger needs to be expressed, given the reality that conflict is inevitable in relationships. We can choose to manage that anger in a manner that is not sinful. This implies that our reason for feeling anger is just and our method of communicating it is respectful.

- How would you define “anger without sin”? What is legitimate about the feeling of anger that needs to be communicated openly?
- In what circumstances would you need to practice anger without sin?

Read Ephesians 4:15 and 4:25. The key to successful management of anger is its connection to a motive of love. Ideally, we can communicate anger for the purpose of removing a hurdle that is hindering loving exchange.

- In your conflict with others, what is it that seems to hinder the experience of love?
- Why is communication of truth an act of love? Is that communication still loving if the recipient receives it poorly?
- How should you respond if the recipient of your well-delivered anger is nonetheless defensive and thin-skinned?

Read Ephesians 4:31–32, and then James 1:19–20. We are cautioned that it is wisest to use anger judiciously because our anger might be less than righteous. Anger can become secondary to other traits such as a listening spirit, kindness, and forgiveness.

- In what circumstances would you need to defer your anger in order to show willingness to listen or to forgive?
- Why is it difficult for some people to be slow to anger? What internal adjustments are required for someone to be less inclined to give priority to anger?
- How can you determine that a person who is slow to anger is not merely suppressing it and thus setting the stage for poor use of anger sometime later?

Personal Challenge

1. Recall someone who has confronted you constructively about a matter of conflict. List three or four things about this person’s approach that seemed appropriate.
2. Write down three or four recurring incidents in your life that tend to trigger anger. Next to each incident, describe how you could choose assertiveness in the midst of that circumstance.
3. Think of a person you need to accept or forgive, knowing that change is unlikely. Write a letter (which is not meant to be mailed) expressing your feelings and expressing your willingness to accept or forgive.

CHAPTER 4

The Missing Ingredient

BREAKING FREE FROM ANGER'S TRAP requires that you use introspection. Anger does not simply disappear because you wish it would go away. Tapping into your God-given competence, you must accept the truth that you have the capacity to plan and implement healthy behavior. This means eliminating the word *can't* from your vocabulary as it relates to the capacity to be emotionally appropriate.

For Personal Reflection

Read Proverbs 22:6. Early training is one way to ensure that as a developing individual you can be competent in managing emotions. Repeated discussion and exploration of options can prompt even a budding youth to think carefully about the direction he or she will take when anger is experienced.

- Why is it so necessary to instill in children an early habit of looking inward for emotional direction?
- What training did you have as a youth to explore the meaning and direction of your anger? How did it influence your current manner of handling anger?

Read Psalm 119:97-98 and Matthew 5:6. Whether or not you were encouraged to contemplate your emotions as a child, you can now develop an appetite for challenging thinking. You can train yourself to slow down and think carefully about how your anger management fits into your overall scheme of life.

- How would you rate yourself on your willingness to delve deeply into the meaning of your emotions and the direction you can choose when experiencing those emotions?
- What does it mean to hunger and thirst for righteousness? How would this affect your use of anger?
- Why do some people shy away from thinking deeply about the meaning of anger?

Read I Corinthians 3:1-3. This passage clearly links traits such as jealousy and strife to an immature, infantile way of living. The strong implication is that we can expect to grow beyond childlike immaturity if we apply our minds correctly.

- What is it about mismanaged anger that is childlike? Why do adults remain stuck in obviously childish behavior?
- What mental adjustments must adults make to leave childlike patterns behind as they pursue adult forms of anger management?
- Specifically, how would your use of anger change if you were more consistently adult in your thinking?

Personal Challenge

1. Recall and write out at least five ways you commonly mismanaged frustration as a preteen or a teenager.
2. Looking back over the past several weeks, identify four or five times when you responded to frustrations in a way that was similar to those childhood responses. (If you have difficulty with this, enlist the help of a family member or someone who spends a lot of time with you.)
3. Alongside each recent incident of anger, make a note of how you could have responded were you more adult in your thinking.

PART TWO WHY PEOPLE REMAIN TRAPPED IN RAW ANGER

CHAPTER 5 The Illusion of Control

MOST PEOPLE WHO PERSISTENTLY STRUGGLE WITH ANGER have felt frustrated by others' efforts to control them. But despite their own discomfort about being controlled by others, they routinely attempt to turn the tables by becoming the one who acts controlling. Common sense indicates that others will resist their efforts to control, yet the competition for power can be ongoing. Only when we learn to opt out of the struggle for control can we expect to communicate anger appropriately, with dignity and respect.

For Personal Reflection

Read John 10:1–6. This interesting story is meant to contrast grace and legalism. It implies that those who compel others to be submissive ultimately have little influence, while those who focus on relationship building draw others in. Christ emphasizes that coercion does not have positive effects.

- Why do some people insist on being in control, attempting to hem others into their fixed agenda?
- What is it about a forced agenda that creates an atmosphere ripe for anger?
- Behind the scenes, what are controlling people really afraid of?

Read John 8:31–32. As we grow spiritually, we encounter truth from God that produces a mind of freedom. God does not want us to live in spiritual bondage. He places high priority upon choices and a nonburdensome way of life.

- Why is freedom given such a high value by God?
- What is the difference between a person who lives a free life and one who remains in bondage? How do their emotions differ?
- How can a formerly controlled person prepare his or her mind to accept the truth of being indeed free?

Read Joshua 24:14–15. As Joshua talks with his people about the new life unfolding before them, he issues a challenge to choose whom they will serve. He sees a life of godliness as an option rather than a compulsion.

- Doing right and living in a wholesome way are not mandates. We choose to do so or not. How can this notion positively guide us as we determine how to manage anger?
- How would your life be more fulfilling if you learned to let go of the need to control others, in favor of allowing the privilege of choice?
- How might you respond appropriately as you continue to encounter others who seem not to appreciate the truth that you have choices regarding your lifestyle?

Personal Challenge

1. Write down five or six recent incidents in which you desired to control the thoughts or actions of another person.
2. Alongside each incident, describe how your desire to control caused your anger to be misapplied.
3. Now go back through each citation and record how your anger could subside as you make room for the truth that the other person deserved to make choices in response to your emotion.

CHAPTER 6

Insecurity's Hold on Angry People

ULTIMATELY, EVERYTHING WE THINK, SAY, OR DO is a commentary about our deepest beliefs regarding personal worth. Those who are quite secure in their own worth tend to respond to anger-provoking circumstances with objectivity and balance. When anger is consistently misapplied, it indicates a struggle within the person's self-image. The surest way for you to maintain an appropriate self-image is to remain grounded in God's unyielding belief in your worth, not the fickle behavior of others.

For Personal Reflection

Read Psalm 8:3-5. One of the most poetic descriptions of God's esteem of humanity, this psalm indicates how God values us highly. Like the psalmist, we may experience moments when we question our value to God, but this questioning can lead us to truth.

- What causes you to question your value to God? In what way might external influences cause you to lose sight of your value to God?
- There is no indication in this passage that God requires us to behave correctly in order to gain his favor. Why is it difficult for some to accept that God loves simply because he chooses to love?
- What does it mean that we each were crowned with glory and majesty?

Read Philippians 4:11-13. The apostle Paul lived a broad spectrum of both positive and negative experiences. Through it all, he determined that he could not afford to let his contentment rest in fickle circumstances. Instead, he drew his strength from the empowerment of Christ.

- What does a life of contentment look like? Where does contentment come from?
- What is it in your life that robs you of your contentment? In what way is anger an indicator that you have given power over to unreliable sources?
- Christ is our strength even when we feel weak. How do we position our mind to draw strength from this truth?

Read I Timothy 6:3-6. Some people attempt to show themselves as godly when in fact it is only a means of manipulation. Godly people have no desire to play psychological games with others. They want to be simple and straightforward in how they interact.

- How do insecure people engage in manipulation that yields the traits listed in verse 4 (disputes, envy, strife, abusive language, and so on)?
- Verse 6 indicates that godliness and contentment go hand in hand. How does this work?
- How would the use of clean assertiveness affirm that you are a contented person?

Personal Challenge

1. List four or five common scenarios that trigger feelings of annoyance or frustration. Are you able to recognize in each situation how your emotion reflects a desire to be treated more worthily?
2. Next to each scenario, write out how your use of anger is affected if you are fully attuned to your God-given worth.
3. Now consider each scenario again, only this time write out your best response, assuming the other person stubbornly refuses to respond appropriately to your message of worth.

CHAPTER 7

Held Captive by Self-Absorption

ALTHOUGH MANY OF OUR EXPRESSIONS OF ANGER can be associated with a valid message of self-preservation, it is easy for self-preservation to cross the line into selfishness. Our anger can become destructive as we fail to put our feelings into the context of others' needs and perspectives. If we prioritize humility over pridefulness, however, we are positioned to be fair-minded in the use of anger. We can still stand up for what is right, yet it will be accomplished in a manner that considers the good of all involved.

For Personal Reflection

Read James 3:13–16. This passage is an unflattering depiction of how people are affected by allowing a spirit of selfishness to dominate their lives. Selfish ambition can lead to rationalization, arrogance, jealousy, and disorder. Our task is to be aware of this possibility for the purpose of pursuing better alternatives.

- How do prideful people think of themselves as wise, when in fact they are self-deluded?
- How does pride-motivated anger cause a person to lie against the truth? What are some obvious ways in which a prideful person twists truth? What are some subtle ways in which this happens?
- How do others tend to respond to you when they sense that you are too self-focused in your communication of anger?

Read James 4:6–10. In this passage, James reveals that a better alternative to pride is humility. This is accomplished as we draw near to God with a spirit of submission.

- What does a submissive spirit before God look like? How might you be more emotionally balanced by being submissive?
- How might you draw near to God? How would this affect your choices in managing anger?

Read Philippians 2:3–8. This passage speaks to the heart of the Christian way of life. Humility is held up as the core ingredient in the life of Christ; it certainly can become central to each person who seeks his empowerment.

- How would you define humility? How does the Christian understanding of this trait differ from the view others might hold?
- When is it most difficult to live with humility as the centerpiece of your personality? Why does this trait often feel unnatural?
- How can you regard another person as more important than yourself even as you remain true to the legitimate message associated with your anger?
- What would your anger look like if you fused it with a humble spirit?

Personal Challenge

1. List at least eight or nine of the most common ways you allow selfishness to gain a foothold in your life. (The more you list, the more honest you are likely to be with yourself.)
2. Go back through the list and make notes about how each trait can cause your anger to go awry.
3. Now write out the humble alternative to each trait. How would your behavior change for the better with each one?

CHAPTER 8 The Chains of Fear

BEHIND EACH MISAPPLICATION OF ANGER IS FEAR. Though angry people may not always appear fearful, their behavior indicates that they feel threatened. They are operating on the misassumption that they cannot be emotionally stable until those threatening circumstances are eliminated. To improve their management of anger, they will need to apply a mind of inner trust. Having faith that God can guide them to respond appropriately, the intensity of their anger can decrease greatly.

For Personal Reflection

Read II Timothy 1:7. Fear is not a natural byproduct of the Christian faith. In fact, believers in Christ can be expected to exude inner strength (power), which allows them to maintain such priorities as love and discipline.

- If fear is not from God, where does it come from? How do we learn to respond to unwanted circumstances with fearfulness?
- Once you allow fearfulness to become a part of your response to others, you lack power, love, and discipline. How is this displayed?
- As you continue in fearful responses, how is your anger affected? How can misapplied anger be understood as an indication of inner weakness and timidity?

Read Psalm 56:3–4. Those who trust in God do not succumb to fearful responses because they realize that others' responses are not the final word. Rather than looking to humans to validate them, they know it is God who has the final say regarding their worth.

- We can expect secure believers in the Lord to be nondefensive because they are not rattled by the possibility of people being against them. Specifically, how does this transform a person's communication of anger?
- In what circumstances is it difficult to let go of fear in order to trust powerfully in God's guidance?
- Why do we sometimes allow others' pronouncements to carry more weight than the pronouncements of God? How does our anger indicate in whom we trust?

Read Proverbs 3:3–6. This beloved passage indicates that our trust in God's guidance can allow us to respond to circumstances with balance. If we are certain that our decisions are being properly filtered through God's will, we can proceed with inner calmness.

- Exactly what does it mean to trust in the Lord in such a way that we are not leaning on our own understanding? How would this quality be best exhibited in anger-provoking circumstances?
- How can you maintain your emotional composure even though others do not believe a decision of yours is sound or godly?
- Once you place your trust in God, kindness and truth are likely to remain in you (verse 3). How does this work?

Personal Challenge

- In what ways do you respond to unwanted circumstances with a defensive spirit? List five or six of your defensive behaviors.
- Next to each of the behaviors listed, write out the ways that your defensiveness increases your problems with anger.
- Now go back through the list and determine how an attitude of trust in your own God-given coping skills would diminish your struggle with unruly anger.

CHAPTER 9

Myths That Perpetuate Anger

WE EACH HAVE IDEAS that help determine our preferences and priorities, and this is good. However, we can experience too much of a good thing when our ideals become so strong that we are unable to respond maturely to adversities. Excessive anger indicates that wishful thinking has taken hold of the mind to such an extent that it crowds out the ability to be realistic. To keep anger in balance, we will need to exchange idealistic thoughts for hard truth, even when that truth is unpleasant.

For Personal Reflection

Read Jeremiah 17:9. In this most unflattering verse, we are reminded that human nature produces imbalance in how we live. Even good people can sometimes baffle others. Knowing this, we are wise to drop any reaction of shock when a relationship experiences difficulty.

- Why is it necessary to acknowledge that the human heart can be deceptive and sick? What good can come from such an admission?
- When people cling to anger, how does this indicate they are unwilling to accept the truth that they can and will disappoint?
- How might anger diminish as we make room for the truth that human nature generates struggle?

Read II Corinthians 12:9–10. Even amid difficulty, God can sustain us with his grace. Even when we are insulted, persecuted, or afflicted, we can maintain confidence as we trust that God will guide us through.

- What mental shift is needed for a person to truly incorporate the truth that God's grace is sufficient to carry him or her through trials and persecutions?
- If you are highly conscious of God's sustaining grace as others treat you with contempt, how does this affect your response of anger?
- Pain cannot be completely averted on this side of heaven, and assertive anger can be a way of constructively addressing those who generate pain. How can the knowledge of God's sustaining grace help us maintain composure as we speak and act assertively?

Read Philippians 2:12–16. Living in the life produced by salvation is work. If we resolve to follow God's guidance, we can confidently rise above the crookedness and perversion produced by others.

- Too many in our generation want to have a life of calm, but they do not want to work hard to get it. Why is this?
- As you choose every day to work out your salvation, what benefits can you expect from your efforts to maintain balance in your use of anger?
- Verse 14 indicates that we can work out our salvation without also grumbling and disputing. What implications does this teaching have for your handling of anger?

Personal Challenge

- What are some of your most treasured principles or ideas that you cling to as you determine how your relationships should unfold? List five or six.
- Next to each of these ideals, make notes of the ways your world does not comply with them. How does this feed your anger?
- Now go back and write out the ways your anger could be managed more appropriately if you came to terms with the truth that those ideals will not always be met.

PART THREE CHOOSING THE BETTER PATH

CHAPTER 10 Agony's Upside

No one enjoys living with the recognition of personal failure, yet if emotional and spiritual growth is to occur, this agonizing process can be quite fruitful. People who have consistently mismanaged anger need to feel guilty, not for the purpose of generating ongoing shame, but to take time out to ask hard questions of themselves about the direction of their lives. By seriously grappling with questions like "Who am I?" and "Why do I do what I do?," individuals can become more seriously committed to the better path.

For Personal Reflection

Read Matthew 26:69–75, and then Matthew 27:3–5. These two passages reveal a stark contrast in how individuals can respond to agonizing circumstances. One held in his agony a deeply repentant spirit, while the other was completely engulfed by a feeling of doom.

- It could be stated that Peter's denial of Christ was the turning point in Peter's life, causing him to become an extremely effective proponent for Christianity. How did his agony work in his favor?
- Judas too, after denying Christ, was overcome by agony, but he responded with self-destruction. What causes people to assume that they cannot overcome their self-inflicted misery?
- Although it is never pleasant to let agony run its course, this can be a necessary springboard toward personal growth. In what way is agony good for us?
- As you admit your capability for great wrong, how can this help bring perspective to your response to anger-provoking circumstances?

Read Psalm 119:162–163. God's word produces joy because it is designed to lead us into being the best we can be. In contrast, falsehoods are to be despised. It can actually be good for the soul to develop a holy disgust for the things that produce ongoing strife.

- Why is it good for us to despise the things in ourselves that run contrary to the goodness of God?
- What causes us to become numb to falsehood, such that we make room only for insensitivity in our way of living?
- How can we understand misapplied anger to be the result of a lax attitude regarding our own inclination to live falsely?

Read Romans 12:1–2. Personal transformation is a byproduct of the realization that the ways of the world are undesirable. As we observe how easily we become ensnared by demeaning habits, we develop a hunger for the goodness of God.

- As you are able to clearly see the pain that is produced by ungodly living, how does this generate a yearning to be transformed with a renewed mind?
- How might you expect spiritual transformation to affect your use of anger?

Personal Challenge

- List three or four of your experiences with anger that produced the most damage. What caused you to go out of bounds in those situations?
- Next to each of these experiences, write out the lessons you learned as you witnessed your own capacity to take the wrong path.
- Based on these experiences of misapplied anger, how have you determined to respond differently when similar situations present themselves in the future?

CHAPTER 11

Forgiveness and Acceptance

TO BE RELEASED FROM THE TRAP OF ANGER, you have to be committed to a mind of forgiveness. Although forgiveness does not cancel out the need to be assertive, it involves recognizing that some loose ends remain anytime you experience conflict. You may never be able to find closure interpersonally with some individuals, yet you can choose to yield your anger to God, giving him final authority over your pain.

For Personal Reflection

Read Ephesians 4:31–32. This passage indicates that forgiveness is preceded by the willingness to let go of unhealthy forms of anger. Only when this decision is freely made can you give higher priority to forgiveness.

- Why do some individuals struggle to put away traits such as bitterness or malice?
- How can this struggle be understood as normal?
- How does a person arrive at the conclusion that it is better to put away raw anger in favor of forgiveness?
- Forgiveness is linked to the willingness to be kind and tenderhearted. What is the connection among these traits?

Read Colossians 3:12–14. Forgiveness is not an isolated trait that can be chosen as a separate priority. It is linked to other qualities such as compassion, humility, and patience. If we see forgiveness as one piece of a larger mosaic, it can be more readily given.

- What is the link between humility and forgiveness?
- Since we have each received God’s forgiveness, we are to give it away in turn to others. When might this feel like an unfair equation?
- All the traits listed in this passage of Colossians are preceded by the words “put on.” What does it mean to put on such godly traits?

Read Luke 23:32–34. Christ’s words of forgiveness on the cross offer the ultimate illustration of a heart of compassion. In this scene, he reveals that God places such a high priority on forgiveness that it may even be offered in unlikely circumstances.

- How was Jesus able to speak these words at a time when forgiveness seemed to be so undeserved?
- Jesus indicated that his tormenters knew not what they were doing. What prompted him to draw such a conclusion? Today, how might you conclude similarly?
- Ultimately, what are the advantages of forgiveness over anger?

Personal Challenge

1. Whom in your life do you need to forgive? Write out your thoughts about how your emotional disposition will improve if you choose to maintain a consistent spirit of forgiveness toward this person (or persons).
2. Undoubtedly, you have struggled at times to maintain an attitude of forgiveness. Make a list of the reasons that might cause you to shun forgiveness and instead cling to anger.
3. Next to each item on the list, make notes explaining why forgiveness is the better alternative.

CHAPTER 12

A Mind of Equality

HEALTHY PEOPLE WANT TO COMMUNICATE THEIR LEGITIMATE ANGER in ways that do not demean but instead uphold dignity. This means they refrain from communicating with an attitude that might be construed as condescending. Aware that conflict can quickly become a battle for superiority, they opt to stay out of the one-up, one-down form of communication. Rather, they choose to speak as one equal to another.

For Personal Reflection

Read James 3:8–9. This passage suggests we are capable of declaring our love for God and then turning around and belittling those who bear God’s image. It highlights the reality that we need to maintain strong vigilance over the tendency to lose sight of the decency with which others deserve to be treated.

- How might people illustrate in their anger that they have forgotten that the person before them is created in the image of God?
- How do we compartmentalize our knowledge of God’s goodness to the extent that we can forget to treat God’s beloved with dignity?
- What is poisonous about our words when we communicate with others in a manner inconsistent with godly value?

Read I Peter 1:2–9. The call to salvation means that we can partake with God in His divine nature. As we each remember how God has chosen to redeem us, we find it more natural to treat others with self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness, and love.

- What does it mean to partake with God in His divine nature?
- This passage suggests that as we bask in the gift of God’s grace we cannot help but extend the same to others. What implications does this teaching have for those who are caught up in angry feelings?
- Look carefully at the personal traits listed in verses 5–7. What do these qualities have in common with an attitude of equality among all humans?

Read Acts 10:34–35. This declaration by the apostle Peter was the culmination of a great struggle over the question of equality. Having been previously trained to think that his kind were most loved by God, Peter learned not to think of those who differed as being his equals. His story is one of true transformation of thought.

- Peter recognized that God is not one to show partiality. What does this mean?
- If we choose not to show partiality to those in our midst, how is our communication of anger changed for the better?
- Why is it so easy for some people to forget that God holds us each in love? In doing so, how do they forget that they can manage anger in unloving ways?

Personal Challenge

1. List four or five moments when your weariness of being put into lowered status has led to an experience of anger. What is valid about your emotion at such times?
2. Thinking about each experience you have just listed, how might you respond to those put-downs in an attempt to establish superiority? (This may be done through open aggression or passive aggressiveness.)
3. List at least five occurrences of an attitude of equality as it relates to managing your own angry feelings.

CHAPTER 13

The Way of the Overcomer

WHEN PEOPLE PERSIST IN PATTERNS OF INAPPROPRIATE ANGER, it can indicate that they have developed an attitude of defeat and pessimism. Rather than assuming they can handle their circumstances with some degree of proficiency, they reveal through their irritability that they have little hope for a good outcome. They might develop the mind of an overcomer, refusing to sink in despair, believing instead in the possibility that they can meet life's challenges with logic and fairness.

For Personal Reflection

Read Psalm 23:1–6. Through the years, this has become one of the most beloved readings in all of literature. It speaks of the Lord's goodness and faithfulness even amid trying circumstances. It promises us an ever-present guide who can bring peace to those who follow his lead.

- The Lord is depicted here as our shepherd. What teaching does the psalmist have in mind as he refers to God in this manner?
- God is described as one who leads us through the valley of the shadow of death and prepares us a table in the midst of our enemies. What do these metaphors refer to?
- As we look to God to shepherd us through our daily frustrations, how can this make a difference in our response to the tensions that generate feelings of anger?

Read Romans 8:18–25. The bible candidly tells us that we cannot expect life to give us one lovely experience after another. We will suffer pain and sorrow. Yet we need not give up in despair because we also have the hope of God's salvation.

- What evidence do we see today that life entails suffering and groaning?
- How does this suffering generate anger? What is it about anger that can be normal, and what might be misapplied?
- We are told to hold onto hope even in our struggles. How is this hopefulness displayed as we determine how to respond to anger-provoking circumstances?

Read Romans 8:37–39. As we cling to the strength of our salvation, we can expect to conquer the pain that might otherwise make us feel defeated. Becoming fully immersed in the love of God, we then find the strength to face daily trials.

- What common circumstances keep us from feeling like conquerors?
- When we conquer our trying circumstances, we do not necessarily win over others, but we do defeat our own negative tendencies. How might we expect to see this work?
- As you accept the promise that nothing can separate you from the love of God, how can this make a difference in your handling of anger?

Personal Challenge

1. List three or four common experiences that generate a feeling of defeat in your life. Explain how this feeling can eventually become anger.
2. Go back through these experiences and write out how you increase your inclination toward anger by assuming the worst about the situation.
3. How can your anger be handled more appropriately in these situations if adopt an overcomer's mind-set?

CHAPTER 14

Higher Priorities

TO MINIMIZE YOUR MISUSE OF ANGER, you must have better priorities to turn to. It is not enough to say you want to avoid anger; you also have to know what traits to use when faced with frustrating circumstances. Will you choose to be more patient? Is kindness a better way to respond? Should you forgive? Can you draw upon calmness? By asking yourself such questions, you may conclude that there are better options than anger in many of your disappointments.

For Personal Reflection

Read Galatians 5:19–24. The phrase *deeds of the flesh* refers to some of the natural impulses that can take over a personality in difficulty. The fruit of the Spirit offers a better path of life; if you yield yourself to the Spirit's qualities, you can expect to respond to life's challenges more appropriately.

- What is it about the deeds of the flesh that can captivate personality so easily and thoroughly?
- How can the fruit of the Spirit make a difference in people's response to anger-producing situations? When is it unnatural to apply these traits?
- What does it mean to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires? How can you tell this has happened in a person's life?

Read Ephesians 4:1–3. The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes how Christians can give high priority to the preservation of unity. This does not negate the need to be open or straightforward at times, but it does imply that we are primarily known for our traits of forbearance and goodness.

- As preservation of peace and unity becomes primary in your personal relationships, what difference does it make in how you respond to frustration and hurt?
- We are taught to be diligent in our efforts to produce peace and unity. Why is diligence so necessary? What does diligence look like?
- As you commit to the traits listed in verse 2, how is your use of anger changed?

Read II Timothy 2:23–26. As Paul instructs his protégé, he emphasizes the need to stay out of fruitless quarrels and to maintain a reputation of kindness even when he uses words of correction or rebuke. Directness is a good quality in any dispute, but it is always best first of all to have a reputation of being a patient, good person.

- Why is it so easy for some people to get caught in foolish and ignorant speculation that leads to a quarrel?
- If a person is prone to easy arguing, how does he or she go about prioritizing traits such as gentleness or kindness?
- How is a person's influence transformed as he or she chooses to be consistently committed to a peaceful or calming manner of life?

Personal Challenge

1. List three or four common situations that merit a less angry or frustrated response from you, and more patience or acceptance instead.
2. Next to each recorded situation, write how you would change your words or actions to reflect more gentle priorities.
3. Write out a mission statement for your life, detailing how you want anger to fit into your overall relationship goals.