

Anger is a common emotion that we all struggle with. In our marriages anger can have a devastating effect on those we love and keep us from the intimacy we truly desire with our spouse. Despite anger's costs we are prone to justify our anger, excuse it and then let it control us. But God wants something better for us and our marriage.

James 1:19-20 says *"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."*

We are told to be "slow to become angry" because our anger damages intimacy and trust in our marriage. That is why we must take time to understand the roots of our anger and submit ourselves to God so we can truly love our spouse.

A good definition for anger is: a reaction to a perceived threat to us, our loved ones, our property, our self-image, or some part of our identity. Notice that our anger depends on our "perceptions". Your past experiences, beliefs and expectations all affect how anger works in your life. That is why you may become angry over a comment from someone and yet another person does not even react to the same comment.

One key to understanding anger is to recognize it is a secondary emotion. Before we express anger, other thoughts and emotions occur inside us. We may feel disrespected and then feel angry. Or we may feel threatened and then feel anger. If you examine your anger you will usually find it was preceded by negative emotions like guilt, fear, pain and doubt.

So why did God give us this emotion of anger if it causes so many problems? Some of God's purpose for anger is to help us preserve the truth, resist evil and protect those people and things He designed us to care for. That is why we feel anger when our beliefs are threatened, or when others are untruthful about us (or those we love). While this is good, the problem is that our sinful hearts and pride take this good gift and use it in ways God never intended. Only by submitting our anger to God's control will we gain freedom from anger and the intimacy we desire in our marriage.

EXPRESSIONS OF ANGER

Our anger comes in many forms. Here are some common ways we express anger:

Outward, Expressed and Visible Anger

- Rage – outward, out-of-control, irrationality
- Reckless Behavior – driving, slamming doors, throwing, squealing tires
- Withdrawal – physically or emotionally leaving, often with threats
- Aggression – physical intimidation, hitting, pushing, slapping, yelling, threatening

Hidden, Suppressed or Inward Anger

- Depression – despondency, lethargy
- Irritability – short with others, blaming, easily defensive, judgmental, frustrated, impatient, agitated, over-reactive
- Self-hatred – loathing, self-criticism
- Passive-Aggression – subtle anger expressed by:
 - Sarcasm
 - Private revenge – plotting steps to get even
 - Gossiping about others, bitter criticism, sniping, personal attacks
 - Procrastination in completing tasks, making excuses and stonewalling

ROOTS OF ANGER

In your marriage you will find your anger occurs repetitively over the same issues. Why is that? Fears, guilt and pain from past experiences can make us sensitive to certain comments or situations. Expectations and false beliefs also lead to anger. Instead of taking these to God and allowing Him to heal and restore, we tend to hide behind our anger and justify it.

For example, many of us are fearful of being disrespected and when we sense any type of disrespect our anger arises. God wants us to find the root of this fear, take it to Him and replace it with the truth of His word and the comfort of His love.

Often we try to excuse our anger or blame it on others. The truth is that to find freedom from anger we must accept and own our anger then be willing to let God change us. Freedom from anger's control starts with being honest with others when we are feeling anger and accepting the truth about ourselves.

False beliefs, not based on God's word, can contribute to our anger. Here are some common ones. As you read them note those that resonate with you.

- I don't have any issues; others have the real problem, not me
- I have to prove myself to be accepted
- I don't need others I can handle it on my own
- No one really understands me or cares
- If I achieve this I then will feel good about myself
- I have everything under control
- I deserve to be angry

Our false beliefs also affect our expectations. We believe something, expect it to happen but when it doesn't we become angry. Over time, it is common for our expectations to become personal rights. Anyone daring to interfere with these rights will soon see our anger. You will find that laying down rights and expectations can free you from the power of anger and allow God to reward you and sustain you in powerful ways you never knew.

ANGER AND CHOICE

We each have a choice with our anger. We choose when to become angry and the truth is that no one can truly "make" us angry unless we allow it. This thought about choice is uncomfortable for each of us. We want to blame others or the situation when angry, but having a choice puts the responsibility back on us and removes our excuses. The ability to choose is a gift from God. When we accept responsibility for our anger and stop blaming others (and situations) we are then free to choose God's way.

Anger management or focusing on tips and techniques may help some, but usually they only provide a temporary solution and lead us to depend on our self-will. When we yield to God and focus on dealing with the root issues that fuel our anger we experience God's grace.

In the Bible we can study God's anger and human anger. A good place to start is in Genesis, Chapter 4, where anger is mentioned for the first time. As you study, acknowledge your anger, how it works in your relationships, what its roots are and how God wants to free you from it. Share with your spouse and others so they can support you with insight and prayer as you go through the process. Yielding your anger to God and living one day at a time will allow God to create His nature in you.

With God's power, God's word and the support of God's people each of us is called to make the choice to yield our anger to God so that we might be a blessing to others, especially our spouses.

"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." Ephesians 4:26.

For additional resources on this lesson see MarriageHelp.org/Anger.

QUESTIONS/PROJECTS:

Answer questions 1-4 by yourself first, then share them with your spouse before group time. Some of these questions will be discussed during your group time.

1. What is your most common type of anger expression, from the list above?
2. How is your anger affecting your marriage and relationships with others today?
3. What are some beliefs, expectations, or past experiences that might be contributing to your emotions and which lead up to anger?
4. Relating to the scripture from James 1, why does your anger not lead to the righteousness that God desires?
5. **Action Item:** Share with your spouse or a trusted friend your desire to yield your anger to God and ask them to pray for you as you begin this process.