

DISCIPLESHIP. SUPPLEMENT 17

[CHRISTIAN CHARACTER] ANGER AND SELF-CONTROL

This is a study about Christian character. How do you deal with anger? How do you gain self-control?

A. ANGER AND ITS CAUSES

1. What is anger?

Anger is an extreme displeasure with wrongdoing or injustice and is usually expressed in an inappropriate manner. While anger should be expressed, we do not have the liberty to express anger in any arbitrary way. Anger is often expressed in a sinful way (a way which misses God's purpose). Anger needs to be expressed in a righteous way (that is, a way that accomplishes God's purpose).

Read 1 Samuel 20:30-33; Ephesians 4:26; Luke 14:21; John 2:13-17; Romans 1:18.

Discuss. What is sinful anger and what is righteous anger?

Notes. Sinful anger is a strong emotion of displeasure in which you are annoyed and tend to hurt people or destroy property. Righteous anger is a correct attitude of righteous indignation against wrongdoing which you express in a controlled, rational and appropriate action.

2. Why do people get angry?

Discuss. What are different reasons why people get angry?

Notes.

Injustice. When you see or suffer injustice or oppression.

Opposition. When you are blocked from obtaining your desires, ambitions, goals, hopes, etc.

Provocation. When you are provoked by lack of communication, unreasonable demands, bad behaviour, etc.

Hurt. When you are hurt by what people say or do to you. When people treat you unfairly or reject you.

Fear. When you fear failure or rejection.

Loss. When you lose loved ones, possessions, a business transaction, a good relationship with someone, etc.

Helplessness. When you cannot cope with difficult people or situations like tiredness and sleeplessness, etc.

Loss of face. When other people expose you to shame. When you are rebuked, criticised, judged or corrected in the presence of others.

Disappointment. When God and other people fail to meet *your* expectations of them.

B. REACTIONS TO ANGER AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS

1. Illustration of the ladder of anger.

"The ladder of anger" is an illustration concerning how people react differently towards anger and how such anger is manifested.

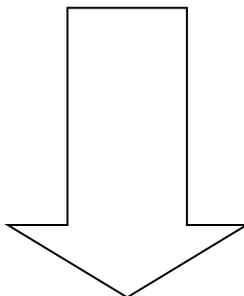


ILLUSTRATION OF THE LADDER OF ANGER

The illustration of the ladder of anger shows seven different expressions of anger. The lowest rung expresses the worst reaction and the highest rung expresses the most appropriate reaction.

7	<p><u>CONTROLLED ANGER</u> is the only right way to express anger. It is righteous anger and expressed in a controlled, rational and pleasant way. The angry person (1) recognizes and admits that he is angry: to himself, to God and to the provoking person. (2) But he does not involve anybody else. (3) He does not rake up the past. (4) He expresses his anger (indignation) in a controlled, rational, appropriate and pleasant manner, not in an emotional and unpleasant manner. (5) Controlled anger (indignation) is not sinful (Ephesians 4:26). (6) Controlled anger directs itself to reconciliation and upright peace.</p>
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6	<p><u>CONFINED ANGER</u> confines anger to the offender and the offence. Manifested (1) in unpleasant noise (raised voice and angry face), (2) but confined to the provoking person (not involving unsuspecting persons like family members, church members, neighbours and colleagues); (3) and confined to the provoking issue (not raking up the past, not digging up old or unrelated problems of the past).</p>
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5	<p><u>UNPLEASANT ANGER</u> is expressed in much noise. Manifested (1) in unpleasant noise (screaming, shouting, crying, provoking, needling, nagging, outburst of anger) (2) accompanied by unpleasant gesticulations (banging with the fist, banging doors, loud music, tantrums on the floor); (3) offensive facial expressions; (4) and affecting unsuspecting people (family members, church members, neighbours, colleagues).</p>
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4	<p><u>INSULTING ANGER</u> is expressed in verbal anger. Manifested (1) in an uncontrolled flood of words that hurt feelings, insult character, offend propriety and damage reputation; (2) in harsh words (cursing, scolding, insulting, name-calling, accusing, belittling sarcasm, loveless criticism); (3) accompanied by unpleasant noise (screaming, shouting, crying); offensive facial expressions and obnoxious gestures.</p>
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3	<p><u>VIOLENT ANGER</u> is expressed in destructive anger. Manifested (1) in uncontrolled violence (destroying things, throwing things, beating others, wounding others, causing accidents, cruelty, murder); (2) in uncontrolled flood of words (cursing, swearing, scolding, abuse); (3) in unpleasant facial expressions. (4) His anger affects himself as well as others.</p>
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2	<p><u>HIDDEN ANGER</u> is suppressed anger. The person is angry, but does not want to express it. His anger ultimately manifests itself in the following ways: (1) in psychological problems (self-pity, depression, suicidal thoughts)(Jonah 4:3). Angry people usually make irrational decisions and take their anger out on themselves (Job 18:4). (2) in emotional problems (hate God or a person or a culture, unforgiving, malicious, feelings of revenge, evil-tempered, inclined to violence); (3) in social problems (asocial behaviour, anti-authoritarian behaviour, habitually late, bad grades at school, wry humour, addiction to drugs, getting pregnant illegally, committing crimes, breaking up marriage or family or church); (4) in wrong orientation (blaming God or others for own mistakes, explode against a less threatening target or against an unsuspecting person (wife, child, employee, dog).</p>
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1	<p><u>EXCLUDED ANGER</u> is repressed, unrecognised or denied anger. The person thinks he is not angry, while he is. His anger is manifested in the following ways: (1) in psychological problems (depression, anxiety, mental breakdown); (2) in social problems (withdrawn or closed personality, rigid and cold in relationships, irritable, critical); (3) in physical problems (headache, ulcer, constipation, heart attack); (4) or in destructive behaviour (alcoholism, addiction, glutton). Excluded anger usually affects the person himself.</p>
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C. THE CONSEQUENCES OF ANGER

Discuss. Why is the expression of anger on the higher rung better than the expression of anger on the lower rung?

Notes. The expression of anger on the higher rung is better than the expression of anger on the lower rung, because it is less destructive. For example:

1. **Excluded anger.**

Excluded anger is the most damaging kind of anger, because the angry person refuses to recognise or admit that he is angry. Instead he will adamantly maintain that he is not angry! He denies that there is a problem and therefore the problem cannot be dealt with. It gradually does more and more damage to the angry person himself without him realising that it is caused by his anger.

(2) **Hidden anger.**

Hidden anger is also a very damaging kind of anger, because the angry person continues to brood internally over his problem and hides his problem from everyone else. Because he hides his problem out of fear or shame, he cannot be healed from its consequences.

(3) **Violent anger.**

Violent anger is very damaging to everyone, because the angry person attacks people violently and destroys possessions. Violent anger is a step better than excluded and hidden anger, because the anger is expressed and the problem can be dealt with. It also prevents the internal damages of excluded and hidden anger. The angry person continues to take steps up the ladder of anger and in this way learn self-control.

(4) **Insulting anger.**

Insulting anger is damaging for everyone, because it hurts people. However, insulting anger is a step better than violent anger, because the angry person has gained self-control over his violent and destructive actions!

(5) **Unpleasant anger.**

Unpleasant anger is certainly a wrong expression of anger. However, unpleasant anger is again a step better than insulting anger, because the angry person has also gained self-control over his offensive language and trampling on other's feelings!

(6) **Confined anger.**

Confined anger is much better than all the foregoing forms of expressing anger. It is another step higher on the anger ladder, because the angry person has gained self-control over the issue that caused anger and limits the expression of his anger to the current issue and the person that caused the anger.

(7) **Controlled anger.**

Controlled anger is the only kind of anger that can be expressed without sin. The person has gained self-control over how he vents his anger. It is the way God desires that Christians express their anger. He discusses his anger only with the person concerned and in a controlled, rational, appropriate and pleasant way.

D. DEALING WITH ANGER

Teach. How should or could you deal with anger.

1. **Consider the consequences of sinful anger.**

Discover and discuss. What are the consequences if you do not deal with sinful anger?

Notes.

- Sinful anger makes you a fool. “Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger reside in the lap of fools” (Ecclesiastes 7:9).
- Sinful anger leads only to evil. “Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret – it only leads to evil” (Psalm 37:8).
- Sinful anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. “A man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:19-20).
- Sinful anger may affect your prayers. “I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing” (1 Timothy 2:8).
- Sinful anger disqualifies you for leadership. “An overseer must not be overbearing, not quick-tempered...” (Titus 1:7).
- Sinful anger grieves the Holy Spirit. “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit ... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger ...” (Ephesians 4:30-31).

- Such an angry person must face God’s judgement. “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca’ (good for nothing) is answerable to the Sanhedrin (human court). But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell’ (divine judgement)” (Matthew 5:22). “If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father (God) will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:15).

2. Practise to climb up the ladder of anger.

Discuss. How do you climb up the ladder of anger?

Notes. Don’t be afraid to show your anger, but *learn to express your anger in biblical and socially acceptable ways.* Get rid of rage and sinful anger (Ephesians 4:31). Practise to express your anger next time in the form of one step higher on *the ladder of anger* than you are presently doing. Be encouraged by every improvement in the way you express your anger.

3. Express your anger in a self-controlled way.

Discover and discuss. How do you express your anger in a self-controlled way?

(1) Express self-control by taking responsibility for your actions.

No matter how hurt you feel, God holds you responsible for how you express your anger to others (Matthew 5:22). If you feel that your emotions still want to explode, then you must *suppress them for a while.* For example, take a long walk, meditate on a Bible verse, pray and write down what you think and feel. Wait to express your anger until you have brought your emotions under control.

(2) Express self-control by being patient with the other person.

“A patient man has great understanding” (Proverbs 14:29). Try to understand the other person. “A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel” (Proverbs 15:18). Thus, stay calm. “Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city” (Proverbs 16:32). Instead of winning the argument, conquer your own temper! “A man’s wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offence” (Proverbs 19:11). Thus, never take revenge. “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control” (Proverbs 29:11). Thus, learn to control your feelings of anger.

(3) Express self-control by speaking slowly and positively.

Learn to get angry slowly, that is, not to get upset about everything or take everything as a personal attack, which are expressions of self-centredness (James 1:19). Do not stay angry for longer than the same day (Ephesians 4:26). Stay away from people who are easily angered and might influence you (Proverbs 22:24-25). Without suppressing, denying or ignoring your own anger, concentrate on the positive qualities of the person with whom you are angry (Romans 12:10). Do not keep a record of wrongs, which the other person has committed against you. “Love does not keep a record of wrongs” (1 Corinthians 13:5).

4. Express your anger in a rational way.

Discover and discuss. How do you express your anger in a rational way?

(1) Take the Initiative.

Read Matthew 5:23-24; Matthew 18:15.

Regardless of who is at fault, *you* must take the initiative and express your desire to resolve the problem.

(2) Admit that you are angry.

Read James 5:16a

Admit that you are angry to yourself, to God and to the provoking person. Ask God for wisdom how to speak to the person with whom you are angry (James 1:5).

(3) Speak in a way that is helpful.

Read Ephesians 4:15,29.

Speak with the provoking person in a way that is helpful.

- **Your speaking must be the truth.** Do not falsely admit to more wrongdoing than you are guilty of in order to appease the other person. Both of you must learn to take responsibility for your actions.
- **Your speaking must be helpful.** Express your righteous anger, criticism or rebuke in a tactful and helpful way. Plan ahead what, when and how you will say it. Discuss the provoking issue together, without raking up old and unrelated issues of the past. Listen to one another until the other is finished speaking (Proverbs 18:13). Try to understand one another’s point of view and feelings (Proverbs 18:17). Try to feel his hurt, pain, grief, etc. (Proverbs 25:2). Be quick to admit your share in contributing to the problem. Continue to seek a solution until you both agree which action steps you both need to take.
- **Your speaking must be in love.** Love is patient, kind, generous, modest, humble, courteous, unselfish, meek forgiving, sincere, protective, trustful, hopeful and persevering (1 Corinthians 13:1-8).

5. Express your anger in a pleasant way.

Teach. Take care that your words, the tone and volume of your voice, and your facial expressions and gestures do not convey rejection, but acceptance (Proverbs 15:13).

6. Do not take revenge, but forgive and love.

Discover and discuss. Which things must you do to the person with whom you are angry?

- (1) **Forgive** the offending person again and again from your heart (Matthew 18:21-35).
- (2) **Love** him, bless him, pray for him and do good to him (Luke 6:27-28).
- (3) **Never take revenge** (Romans 12:14-21).

7. Let God heal your hurt feelings.

Discover and discuss. What should you do with your hurt feelings?

- (1) **“Pour out your heart to him”** (Psalm 62:8).
- (2) **Pray for deliverance.** Ask him to deliver you from your feelings of anger, hurt feelings and to give you grace to forgive and love the offender.
- (3) **Claim God’s promise.** The Bible promises: “The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18)
- (4) **Ask for help.** If you keep on struggling and find it difficult to forgive the offender, discuss your feelings with a Christian friend and ask him to pray with you for healing from your hurt feelings. “Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. ... Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:13-16).