

OVERCOMING YOUR ANGER (PART 1)

book thirty-seven in the series:

THE OWNER'S MANUAL TO THE NEW YOU

DOUG BRITTON, MFT

Five-day Bible study for individuals, small groups, and churches

- Day One: Adopt God's View of Anger
- Day Two: Consider the Results of Anger
- Day Three: Be Cautious about "Righteous Anger"
- Day Four: Decide to Overcome Your Anger
- Day Five: Review and Test

Overcoming Your Anger (Part 1): Book thirty-seven in “The Owner’s Manual to the New You”

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Forty-eight short books

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By Doug Britton, MFT

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Twelve books on “Developing a Godly Character”

Twelve books on “Enjoying Healthy Relationships”

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The Owner's Manual to the New You

"The Owner's Manual to the New You," published by LifeTree Books, is a series of forty-eight cross-cultural discipleship books by Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist Doug Britton. LifeTree Books is making these books available free of charge for individual use.

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- Book 1: Who is God?
- Book 2: Becoming a Believer
- Book 3: Your Identity in Christ
- Book 4: Quick Overview of the Bible
- Book 5: How to Study the Bible
- Book 6: How to Pray
- Book 7: Key Christian Practices
- Book 8: Successful Christian Living
- Book 9: Living a Joyful Life
- Book 10: Knowing God's Will
- Book 11: Obeying God
- Book 12: Living in God's Power

Developing a Godly Character

- Book 13: Growing in Christ
- Book 14: Changing Your Self-Image
- Book 15: Changing Your Attitudes
- Book 16: Living with Humility
- Book 17: Living with Purpose
- Book 18: Living with Self-Control
- Book 19: Living with Integrity
- Book 20: Growing through Problems
- Book 21: Trusting God
- Book 22: Breaking Free from Our Culture
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- Book 26: Making Friends
- Book 27: Showing Grace to Others
- Book 28: Forgiving Others
- Book 29: Serving Others
- Book 30: Resolving Conflicts
- Book 31: Overcoming Peer Pressure
- Book 32: Helping Others with Wisdom
- Book 33: Dating, Marriage, and Sex
- Book 34: Embracing the Body of Christ
- Book 35: Respecting Authority
- Book 36: Sharing Your Faith

Overcoming Personal Problems

- Book 37: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 1)
- Book 38: Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)
- Book 39: Overcoming Rejection
- Book 40: Overcoming Temptation (Part 1)
- Book 41: Overcoming Temptation (Part 2)
- Book 42: Overcoming Anxiety and Fear
- Book 43: Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
- Book 44: Overcoming Self-Sufficiency
- Book 45: Overcoming Guilt and Shame
- Book 46: Overcoming Discouragement
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- Book 48: Overcoming the Fear of Death

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Foreword

When I was first asked to write a series of downloadable books for intensive discipleship training, I was excited. Jesus has revolutionized my life, and I am glad to share his truths with you.

The pages you are about to study come straight from God's word. They contain truth that puts our feet on the path to the fullest life possible—truth that sets us free.

As Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32).

May God speak to your heart as you read, and may he bring his truth alive in your life.

Your brother in Christ,

Doug Britton

P.S. LifeTree Books is offering this downloadable book and all the other books in “The Owner's Manual to the New You” series free of charge. If you find these books helpful, please feel free to spread the news to churches, ministries, and individuals who might benefit from them.

Small Group Leader's Guidelines

Introduction. These studies are for new believers as well as mature Christians. They are for small groups, discipleship classes, mentors, and individuals. They are ideal for studies lasting from sixty to ninety minutes.

Choose the key points, verses, and discussion questions you will talk about. Don't think you need to cover every verse and question. With new believers, go over the main points, key verses, and selected questions. Go into more depth with mature Christians.

Begin and end each study with prayer. Start by asking God to help each person grow from the study. At the end, ask everyone to pray for help to put God's truth into practice.

Review homework. Before starting the current lesson, ask group members to discuss their answers to some of the previous day's homework questions.

Personalize the lesson. Although it's okay to read each lesson word-for-word, the material will "come alive" if you discuss some of the key points in your own words. Share your own experiences and struggles, and how God has helped you.

As you read, identify important points and key parts of verses. Ask group members to circle them, and then explain why you want to emphasize these points.

Get everyone involved. The more people are actively involved, the more they are impacted by what you are studying. Don't ask questions that can be answered by "yes" or "no." For example, don't ask, "Do you have any thoughts about this?" Instead, ask, "How does this insight speak to you?"

Consider breaking up into smaller groups to discuss the questions if you are leading a large group or class.

Use day five for a review and test. Use the questions in day five as a review and/or test. Remove these pages if you do not want group members to see the questions ahead of time.

Want to Learn More?

Free online resources: For more suggestions for small group leaders as well as many online Bible studies on Christianity and daily living (anger, marriage, self-image, finances, and more), visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/small-groups

Small group leader's book: For detailed information on how to lead small groups and overcome typical problems, visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/small-groups.

Day One: Adopt God's View of Anger

This book is the first of a two-book series on anger. (Both are part of “The Owner’s Manual to the New You,” a forty-eight book series.) In these pages you will learn how to look at anger through God’s eyes. In the next book, *Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)*, you will learn practical, Bible-based truths to overcome your anger.



Are you grumpy, irritable, or angry?

Many angry people say they do not have an anger problem, or they try to minimize their anger, saying they aren’t mad—just grumpy or irritated. They don’t seem to realize how much their grumpiness or irritation affects people around them.

If they agree that they are angry, they usually justify their anger. “After all,” they say, “I have a right to be mad.” Or “I wouldn’t be angry if that person didn’t make me mad.” Their comments are usually understandable. It’s easy to become angry when confronted with a strict parent, disobedient child, disapproving boss, lazy employee, insensitive spouse, noisy neighbor, slow waiter, dishonest friend, or dangerous driver on the freeway.

Take God’s warnings about anger seriously

Although most of us justify our anger, God doesn’t let us off so easily. It’s true that anger is appropriate on rare occasions, but our anger is usually a serious problem that harms us, our relationships, and our walk with God.

Throughout the Bible, we see warnings about anger. For example:

Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil. (Psalm 37:8)

A wise man fears the Lord and shuns evil, but a fool is hotheaded and reckless. (Proverbs 14:16)

It is to a man’s honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel. (Proverbs 20:3)

You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, “Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.” But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. ... But anyone who says, “You fool!” will be in danger of the fire of hell. (Matthew 5:21-22)

Discussion questions

1. What type of person does the Bible say is “hotheaded and reckless” (Proverbs 14:16)? Does that describe the way you sometimes act? Explain your answer.
2. Do you think God is pleased or displeased with your anger? Explain your answer.

Common justifications for anger

In spite of the many warnings in the Bible, we often justify our anger. Let's take a look at some common excuses.

“I have a right to be angry.”

When others do terrible things to us, we think we have the right to be angry. But this is not how God wants us to respond. Consider Stephen: After he preached a hard-hitting sermon, his listeners were so upset that they stoned him to death (Acts 7). If anyone had a right to be angry, it would have been Stephen. Yet he forgave his murderers just before he died (Acts 7:60).

Discussion questions

3. Describe a recent incident in which you got mad. How serious was it compared with what happened to Stephen?
4. Read Acts 16:16-25. How would you respond if you were falsely accused, flogged, imprisoned, or put in stocks?
5. What can you learn from Paul and Silas' example in Acts 16:16-25?

“Paul said it's okay to be angry.”

Some Christians ignore the many Scriptures that warn against anger and go straight to one verse in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which they use to justify their anger.

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

Some think this verse gives us permission to get angry. Yet as you can see from the verses that immediately follow, that wasn't his main point.

“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry and do not give the devil a foothold. He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:26-32)

By writing, “In your anger do not sin” (Ephesians 4:26), Paul acknowledged that sometimes we get angry—and that it's possible to be angry and not sin. But he went on to caution, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up” (Ephesians 4:29). He also said to get rid of our anger and replace it with kindness, compassion, and forgiveness (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Many other verses in the Bible make the same point. For example:

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:43-44)

Discussion questions

6. What is Paul's main message in Ephesians 4:26-32?

7. Read Matthew 5:43-44. How does Jesus want us to respond to our enemies?

“Anger is normal. It’s not bad.”

Anger is a normal emotion. We all experience it from time to time. But God doesn’t want us to be controlled by our emotions. Rather, he wants us to be transformed by his Holy Spirit.

Discussion questions

8. Some people say, “It’s okay to do whatever comes naturally.” How do you think God would respond to that?
9. Do you want to be transformed by Jesus? Explain your answer.

“Anger is a secondary emotion.”

Some say that anger itself really isn’t a problem since it’s a “secondary emotion.” They say a person gets angry because he or she feels depressed, anxious, rejected, or any of several other emotions. There is some truth to this. Anger often stems from underlying emotions. However, even if your anger is prompted by underlying emotions that you should examine, it’s also important to deal with the anger itself. Remember that the Bible says to refrain from anger and turn from wrath.

Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil. (Psalm 37:8)

“It’s not healthy to stuff anger.”

Simply stuffing anger, holding it inside as it festers, is not wise. Yet neither is it wise to always say something when you are irritated, or to vent your feelings by screaming, yelling, or hitting. In coming lessons, you will learn many alternatives to stuffing and venting.

“I’m not going to let anyone push me around.”

If you are like most people, you don’t want to seem weak. When you get mad or fight, you may think you are standing up for yourself, that you aren’t letting someone else control you. Yet many times just the opposite is true. The other person may be “pushing your buttons” to get you to react. When you explode or yell, you are doing just what he or she wanted. In fact, you are being controlled by the other person.

Discussion questions

10. What are some things that “push your buttons”?
11. Do you agree it shows more strength to avoid fighting instead of giving in to anger? Why or why not?

Is it ever wrong to show strength?

Learning to overcome anger does not mean you should avoid talking about difficult topics or take a strong stand. There’s a difference between passion and anger. But don’t let your passion get out of control. It can turn into anger.

There are times when it’s appropriate to have uncomfortable discussions, make tough decisions, or take unpleasant actions. We can be strong (and wise) without being angry.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

Discussion questions

12. What is a difficult situation you would like to handle without giving in to anger?
13. Say a prayer asking God to help you do this.

Do you know Jesus?

This book was written to help believers in Jesus grow in their faith and personal life. You will get the most out of these pages if you know Christ, since it is through his love and power that you can truly change. If you have not yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, let me invite you to accept him as your Savior and Lord. Make this your personal prayer:

Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God, and I need your help. I confess I have sinned and failed you in many ways. I invite you to be my Savior and Lord, and I ask you to help me follow you the rest of my life. Thank you for loving me, forgiving me, and accepting me as your child.

If you prayed this prayer, welcome to the family of God. God has plans for you—to transform you. You have an exciting life ahead of you!

Memory verse

It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel. (Proverbs 20:3)

Want to learn more?

Free online Bible study

What God Says about Anger in the Bible

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources/anger-in-bible

Book by Doug Britton

Victory Over Grumpiness, Irritation, and Anger

www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore/anger

Day Two: Consider the Results of Anger

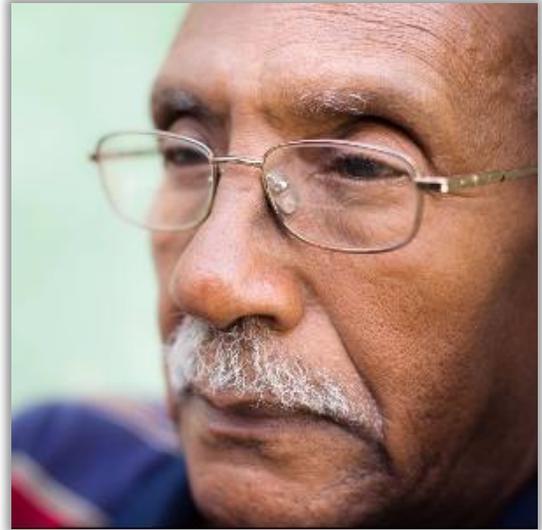
Sometimes it seems that anger works, at least in the short run. If you scream at your child, the child may obey—for a while. If you yell at somebody who is bothering you, the other person may settle down—for a while. If you physically beat someone, it may bring a type of “peace”—for a while.

But anger doesn’t work in the long run. Children become resentful or rebellious. You push friends away. You destroy marriages. Your relationships seem shallow. People seek revenge.

Even if you don’t say mean words or act angry, if you let bitterness and irritation fester inside, the results are bad. You may think what you feel inside doesn’t affect those around you, but it does.

Anger creates problems in all kinds of relationships—marriage, parent-child, boss-employee, and friend-friend. As the Bible says, “An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins” (Proverbs 29:22).

Let’s look at some of the results of anger.



Look at the results of anger

Your anger grieves God.

What is the most serious downside of anger? It is that your anger grieves God. When you give in to anger and treat people in an unloving way, you violate Jesus’ commandment to love others (Mark 12:31). When you do that, you grieve the Holy Spirit.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. (Ephesians 4:30-31)

Discussion question

1. Why do you think anger grieves God?

Your anger can harm others.

When you speak with anger to your spouse, child, parent, boss, employee, or others—calling them names, belittling them, or criticizing them—you inflict deep wounds. If you were raised by angry parents, you know what it feels like. Even if you are an adult, it’s possible you still have painful memories of your parents’ angry words.

Discussion questions

2. Think of a time when angry words hurt you. How did the words affect you?

3. Now think of a time when you wounded someone with your words. How did your words affect him or her?

Your anger can harm your Christian testimony.

As a Christian, you are an ambassador of Christ. Every time you interact with someone—stranger, co-worker, friend, or family member—you represent Jesus. If others see you as angry or hateful, you harm the cause of Christ.

God wants us to love others and draw them to Christ. Anger pushes them away.

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

Discussion questions

4. How well do you represent Christ when you are with others?
5. Has anger hurt your example as a Christian?

Your anger can hurt you.

If you are an angry person, you may suffer as much as, or more than, those with whom you are angry. Here are some ways you may be affected:

Your emotions: Life is usually miserable when you are constantly angry. It can be especially frustrating to see yourself push others away.

Your walk with God: Your anger puts a wedge between you and God. It is hard to grumble and rejoice in the Lord simultaneously.

Your health: Angry people often develop stress-related health problems.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8)

Discussion question

6. Can you identify ways in which your anger has hurt you personally? If so, how has it harmed you?

Your anger can damage your relationships.

If you have an anger problem, your spouse and children may be afraid of you and think they always have to be on guard. People on the job may stay away. Promotions may be denied. Friendships may be destroyed.

Anger also hurts relationships in an indirect way. When you are mad or grumpy, you have trouble seeing clearly and may not see when others reach out to you.

Discussion question

7. What are some ways that relationships in your life have been damaged because of your anger?

Your anger can give the devil a foothold.

If you hang on to anger, you “give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:27). The devil is pleased when you give in to bitterness, self-pity, and anger.

“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. (Ephesians 4:26-27)

Although anger can give the devil a foothold, don't blame all your anger on the devil. The Bible says that hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, dissensions, and factions are some of the “acts of the sinful nature” (Galatians 5:19-20). In other words, they come from within us.

Discussion question

8. What do you think the Bible means when it says we can “give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:27) when we are angry?

Biblical examples of anger's harm

The Bible has many stories that illustrate the tragic results of anger. Here are a few:

Cain was angry because God accepted his brother Abel's sacrifice and not his, so he killed Abel. God cursed Cain and made him a restless wanderer (Genesis 4:2-12).

Joseph's brothers were angry with him because of his father's love, so they sold him into slavery. They ended up fearing for their lives and spending time in prison (Genesis 37:2-45:15).

King Saul was angry with David because of David's popularity. He tried to kill David, and eventually lost his kingdom and his life (1 Samuel 18:6-31:6).

Haman was angry with Mordecai because Mordecai would not bow down to him, so he planned to hang him. Haman ended up being hung instead (Esther 3:5-7:9).

Discussion question

9. What is the underlying theme in these four examples?

Be wise if anger seems to work

Anger may seem to be the only way to get the results you want. For example, if your child doesn't obey you until you are screaming and your face is beet-red with anger, you may think yelling is the only way to bring about obedience. Along the same lines, you may think you have to verbally blast your spouse, neighbor, or co-worker to get his or her attention.

Be wise. Although anger sometimes gets immediate results, the long-term results are usually bad. Some examples:

- If you scream at someone you disagree with, you may get the person to stop talking, but you won't change his or her heart.
- If you shout at someone, he or she is likely to become resentful and pull away emotionally.
- If you yell at your children, they may obey you, yet they are likely to become fearful and distant—and eventually rebellious.

- If you make a loud scene when upset with a store clerk, the clerk may appease you by doing what you want, but you harm your Christian witness to the clerk and look like a bully to anyone who is watching.
- If you get angry with someone who is rude to you, you miss out on an opportunity to repay a blessing for an insult.

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. (1 Peter 3:9)

- If you act out, you strengthen a bad habit and are more likely to become angry again in the future.

Memory verse

An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins. (Proverbs 29:22)

5. If you control your children, your spouse, your employees, or others by getting angry, isn't that a good thing since you get the results you want? Explain your answer:

6. What are some ways your anger can hurt others?

7. What are some ways your anger can hurt relationships?

8. What are some ways your anger can hurt yourself?

Day Three: Be Cautious about “Righteous Anger”

Have you ever heard people talk about “righteous anger”? When people use this term (which isn’t found in the Bible), they mean that they have the right to be angry because someone did something really wrong.

The problem with this is that our anger usually isn’t righteous. Look at the sobering words James wrote:

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. (James 1:20)

Discussion question

1. What was James’ point when he wrote about “man’s anger”?



What is “righteous anger”?

The Bible does not use the term “righteous anger,” but it does identify times when anger is appropriate. When you see a child beaten, people starving, or a university professor bullying a student for faith in Christ, anger is called for.

But even in these cases, we never have the right to treat others badly. The way you express righteous anger is critically important. The best response is wise, strong words and actions. Following are some examples of righteous anger from the Bible:

Anger toward people who pervert the gospel can be righteous.

Jesus offers eternal life to those who believe in him. Yet as Paul wrote, some people distort this wonderful truth and preach a “Jesus other than the Jesus we preached” or a “different gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:4). Read Galatians 1:9 to see Paul’s strong response to those who were trying to turn believers away from the true faith.

However, don’t use this passage (Galatians 1:9) as your example every time you deal with sin. Although Paul proclaimed the Gospel fearlessly, he also loved unbelievers intensely—even those who were persecuting Christians—as you can see in this amazing verse.

For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race. (Romans 9:3)

If you come across a cult, a preacher, or a TV evangelist who is preaching false doctrines, you should be angry because people are being misled. Pray for them.

Anger with those who turn others away from God can be righteous.

Throughout history, secular rulers, religious leaders, and other prominent people have tried to turn people from God. They do so today. Many university professors, media personalities, Hollywood producers, and others actively attack Christianity.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus was extremely upset with people who tried to keep children from coming to him. The same is undoubtedly true today.

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. 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." (Mark 10:13-14)

Anger at people who mistreat others can be righteous.

In the following passage, we read about Nehemiah's righteous anger when he heard the outcry of oppressed people:

Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. We have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others." When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. (Nehemiah 5:4-6)

Anger over sin in society—from child abuse to racism to pornography—should prompt us to get involved by sharing the gospel, ministering to people, and doing our part to pass moral laws. We should get angry at sin and do something about it.

Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter. (Proverbs 24:11)

Discussion questions

2. What are some examples in the Bible of things that angered godly people?
3. What are some things in today's society that should concern or anger us?

Express righteous anger wisely

Righteous anger should inspire us to make a difference. Since our main goal is to introduce people to Jesus and his love, it would be wrong to respond to them with hate. Instead, we should get involved in our community, pray, and reach out to others with wisdom and love.

Remember to love others, even when upset with sin.

Jesus wants us to love our enemies, share the gospel, and help reconcile people with God. He wants us to be consumed by love, not anger. Our task is to lovingly present the truth and try to rescue people from sin.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

Even if you are upset about sin, express your concern in a way that pleases God. Sometimes it's right to feel angry about wickedness, but it's not right to speak or act hatefully. As Paul wrote:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

Discussion questions

4. Is it possible to treat people with love and respect when you are upset or angry about what they are doing? Explain your answer.
5. Think of a situation that would anger you. How could you respond while maintaining a respectful, loving attitude?

Don't justify hatred as "righteous anger"

If you are upset about other people's sins, ask God to help you respond with love and concern for them. Don't give in to hatred.

Let's look at two examples of people who thought they were acting with righteous anger—but who were very wrong in their attitudes. In both cases, they accurately identified wrongdoing. Instead of being ministers of God's love, they reacted with hate.

Jesus' disciples

When the people in a Samaritan village did not welcome Jesus, two of his disciples asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" (Luke 9:54). Rather than commend them for righteous anger, Jesus rebuked them (Luke 9:55).

Religious leaders

On another occasion, some Jewish leaders asked Jesus if a woman caught in adultery should be stoned. He responded, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). At that, the leaders left Jesus and the woman alone.

Jesus, well aware of her sin, asked, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" (John 8:10).

She responded, "No one, sir," and Jesus said, "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11).

If you need to take action, pray for wisdom and love.

There may be times when it's appropriate for you to confront someone about a sin, campaign against a corrupt politician, protest an immoral law, or join a community group such as a child abuse council or social service support group.

If you are involved in a political or social conflict, address the issues and take godly stands, but be sure to speak respectfully. Remember that Jesus loves your opponents and the way you act may make a difference in how they look at Christ. Be loving in your words and actions.

Discussion question

6. How could you talk about political issues and also be a good representative of Jesus?

What about God's anger?

Some Christians think it is okay to act angry since God has been angry—sometimes really angry. However, even when God has pronounced judgment, his main desire usually has been for people to stop sinning and turn to him. Read the book of Jonah. God told Jonah that Nineveh would be destroyed, yet when the people repented, he withheld his judgment.

We cannot judge others the way God does. He is God. We aren't. Remember that:

- God's anger is holy, righteous, and appropriate.
- Our anger is usually unholy, unrighteous, and inappropriate.
- God can pronounce judgment on people. We don't have that authority.
- We are called to be ministers of reconciliation.

Discussion question

7. Since God gets angry, why can't we? What's the difference between him and us?

Memory verse

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. (James 1:20)

Homework – Day Three

1. What does the Bible mean when it says “man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:20)?
2. Aren’t we supposed to try to be like God? Since he gets angry, what’s wrong with us getting angry?
3. What are three reasons in this lesson for righteous anger?
4. How should we respond to something that “makes” us angry?

5. If someone cuts you off in traffic, would it be righteous anger to yell at him or her? Why or why not?

6. Read John 8:7-11. What was Jesus' response to the woman who broke God's law?

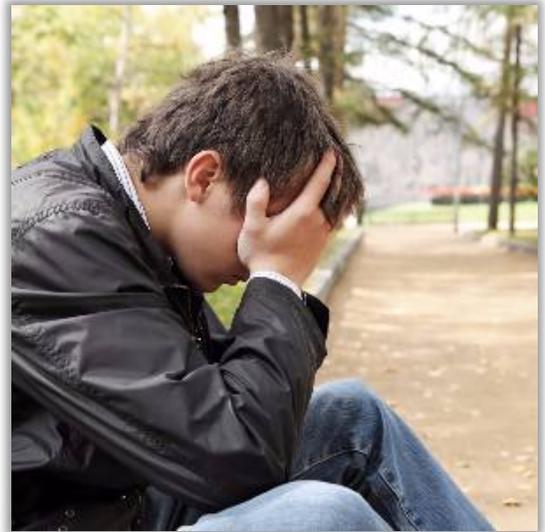
What lesson do you think God would want you to learn from Jesus' example in this passage?

7. Two of Jesus' disciples wanted to call fire down on people in a Samaritan village who did not welcome Jesus. Was this a good idea? What did Jesus think about it?

8. Have you ever wanted to "call fire down" on someone? If so, what can you learn from Luke 9:54-55?

Day Four: Decide to Overcome Your Anger

Do you agree that you have a problem with grumpiness, bitterness, resentment, rage, or another anger-related emotion? And do you agree that this is your problem, even if others around you also have problems? If you answered “yes” to both these questions, you are well on your way to victory.



Decide to do things God's way, not your way

The next step is to make a decision to change—to learn how to see and do things God's way instead of continuing to give in to anger.

I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on your laws. (Psalm 119:30)

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Why do we need to make a conscious decision to do things God's way? Because in our everyday life most of us do things our way.

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. (Proverbs 14:12)

When angry, we usually base our actions on:

- First: What our emotions say
- Then: What logic says
- Last: What God says

When we follow the above pattern, we are acting exactly opposite to the order we should follow. Let's look at a much better decision-making sequence:

When angry, we should base our actions on:

- First: What God says
- Then: What logic says
- Last: What our emotions say

Listen to God first, especially through his word, the Bible. If the Bible doesn't give a clear answer, it's usually best to think things through rather than react emotionally. Your third step should be to listen to your emotions.

Are all our emotions bad? No. God gave us emotions as well as intellect. Listen to your feelings, and if you feel upset, evaluate why. You may learn some valuable information. Just don't let your emotions control you.

Discussion questions

1. Are you willing to make a commitment to work on overcoming your anger? If so, what do you think will be your greatest challenge?
2. Do you normally base your actions first on what God says, then on what logic says, and last on what your emotions say? Describe the typical way in which you respond to difficult situations.

Make it your goal to respond, not react

When you see a doctor, he or she may tap your knee with a small rubber hammer. When that happens, your leg probably jerks up a little. You don't think about it. It just happens. Most of us have similar "knee-jerk" reactions to certain events in our life. When they happen, we automatically respond with annoyance, irritation, or anger.

Make it your goal to choose how you will act—to respond as God would want, not simply react emotionally.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

Discussion questions

3. Does it seem possible to be able to respond, not react? Why or why not?
4. Do you want to learn to respond, not react? Explain your answer.

Reject your excuses for getting angry

Take a few minutes to look at common excuses people make for getting angry. As you read the following statements, check each one that you sometimes say or think. Substitute "he" for "she" (and vice versa) when appropriate.

- He makes me angry.
- I don't get really mad very often.
- My anger is no big deal. I get over it quickly.
- I was raised by angry parents.
- I have a hot-tempered personality.
- I'm never angry with others, just my spouse.
- I need to defend myself.
- She knows I don't mean it when I am mad.
- I need to punish my children.
- I only get mad if someone else gets angry first.
- That's the only way I can get his attention.
- I only get angry about ...

- I want revenge.
- I need to confront her sin.
- It's all his fault.
- I'm not angry. I'm just irritated (or upset).
- I'm not angry. I'm just intense.
- I don't yell.
- I'm just being honest.
- I'm angry, but I don't act angry (at least I don't think I do).

There's some truth to the last point. We all get upset sometimes and need to exercise self-control. But if you feel angry much of the time, you are missing out on God's promises of peace and joy in your life (John 14:27 and 15:11).

Discussion questions

5. Which of these excuses best describe reasons you get angry?
6. Do you have any other excuses that are not listed above? If so, what are they?

Make these your three goals

The following three goals summarize much of what the Bible says about anger. Make them your personal goals.

Goal 1: To be angry less often

God doesn't want you to be grumpy and upset. Nor does he want you to spread grumpiness and resentment to others. Make it your goal to become more Christ-like, to be changed on the inside so you don't feel angry so often.

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

Goal 2: To lower the intensity of your anger

Since you are a human being, it is inevitable that you will feel grumpy, irritated, or angry from time to time. But with God's help, you can learn to get less upset.

Goal 3: To be self-controlled and wise when angry

Learn how to respond to difficult situations with self-control and wisdom. Remember Paul's words: "In your anger do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26).

Discussion question

7. Discuss these three goals. Would you like to make them your goals, or would you like to make different goals? Discuss how you will put these goals into practice.

Pray for victory

We can't change our hearts or our core attitudes on our own. We need God's help to make the changes he wants. Unless he transforms us, we are certain to be controlled by our human nature. When you combine your decision to overcome anger with God's power, you can be sure of success. Although you are bound to stumble from time to time, nothing can stop you from changing.

Discussion question

8. Read Ephesians 1:18-21. What type of power is available to help us change? How can we take advantage of this power?

Pray with a prayer partner.

Ask one or more mature Christian friends, preferably of the same sex, to support you in your campaign to overcome anger. Make plans to pray together by phone or in person. Also consider studying this book together.

Looking ahead

This study is continued in the next book in "The Owner's Manual to the New You" series. In this book, *Overcoming Your Anger (Part 2)*, you will learn practical Bible-based steps that will help you change your attitudes and your actions.

Memory verse

I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on your laws. (Psalm 119:30)

4. What are three excuses for anger you checked? Write each one, then briefly write what you think God would say about each excuse:

a.

b.

c.

5. What are the three goals suggested in this lesson? Write a brief comment beside each one explaining whether you agree with the goal or not (and why):

a.

b.

c.

6. Make a commitment:

With God's help, I will work to overcome grumpiness, irritation, and anger in a godly manner, regardless of what others say or do. I will make it my goal to be controlled by God's Spirit, not by my emotions or others' actions.

Signature

Date

Day Five: Answer Key to Test (may be removed by leader)

Note to teachers and small group leaders

Remove this page if you do not want group members to see these answers ahead of time.

True or false

- F 1. Since anger is normal, we don't need to control it.
- F 2. The Bible says it's okay to be grumpy as long as you don't get angry.
- F 3. It's okay to get angry and yell as long as you are being honest.
- T 4. Anger grieves God.
- T 5. Anger can give the devil a foothold.
- F 6. It's okay to yell at your children as long as you don't do it very often.
- T 7. It is possible to take strong action without being controlled by anger.
- F 8. It's usually best to trust your emotions when deciding what to do.
- F 9. Everyone should learn to react, not respond.
- T 10. If you have an anger problem, it would be a good idea to pray about it with a prayer partner.

Memory verses

1. Proverbs 20:3

It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.

2. James 1:20

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.



About the Author

Doug Britton, Bible-based Marriage and Family Therapist, has helped hundreds of thousands of people as a therapist, clinical director of a treatment center, seminar speaker, radio co-host, and author of over twenty books that show people how to apply God's truths in their daily lives.

He has also trained pastors, counselors, mentors, and lay leaders in biblical counseling, mentoring, and small group leadership.

Doug and his wife Skeeter live in Northern California.



Books

Doug has written Bible-based books on many daily-living topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/bookstore.

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Read and download Doug's free online studies on marriage, parenting, anger, self-concept, anxiety, depression, temptation, fear of death, biblical counseling, mentoring, small group leadership, and other topics. Visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com/resources.

Seminars and retreats

Doug is the founder and president of LifeTree Institute and LifeTree Books. If you would like him or another member of the LifeTree team to speak in your church on any of the above topics, please visit www.dougbrittonbooks.com and click on the "Seminars" link.

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More Books by Doug Britton

In addition to “The Owner’s Manual to the New You,” Doug Britton has written many more cross-cultural, Bible-based books on leadership, discipleship, and key areas of daily living.

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First Things First
Living by Grace

Living Free

Breaking Free (from Drugs and Alcohol)
Conquering Depression
Defeating Temptation
Healing Life’s Hurts
Overcoming Jealousy and Insecurity
Six Keys to Personal Growth
Six Keys to Successful Relationships
Strengthening Your Marriage
Victory over Grumpiness, Irritation, & Anger
Who Do You Think You Are?

Marriage by the Book

Laying a Solid Foundation
Making Christ the Cornerstone
Encouraging Your Spouse
Extending Grace to Your Mate
Talking with Respect and Love
Improving Your Teamwork
Putting Money in its Place
Celebrating Intimacy and Romance

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Parenting Foundations
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