



GUARDING AGAINST BITTERNESS

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NORTHSTAR INSPIRATION

*Emotional
Health Insights
from a Christian
Perspective*



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HURT AND ANGER

We all get angry, and some of us get angry often. The actions and reactions of others irritate us. And when people are mad, they say and do hurtful things. Consider the following story about how anger, hurt, and bitterness grow.

TINA'S STORY

After twelve years of marriage, Tina was weary of the cynical attitude her husband constantly showed toward her. Like a stream eroding the riverbank, it ate at her. Just as the moving water weakens a mighty oak by slowly removing the soil under it, the foundation of Tina's marriage was being eaten away. The destructive process is slow, silent, and mysterious.

At first glance, Tina's family and her friends thought she was happy and content. The undermining hurt was deep inside Tina and not easily seen by others. But it took its toll, building up and developing over time, undermining her self-esteem, and even her relationship with God. Tina's hurt slowly turned to anger. It first came in short bursts, mixed with tears, reflecting her hurt. Over time, the hurt seemed to diminish as the anger intensified. Her outbursts became intense, and on several occasions, anger erupted into hostility and violence.

Tina's marriage grew more strained and she tried to

talk things through with her husband, but reacted with more anger and deeper bitterness. During one of their many conversations, something unusual took place as her husband repented of his negative, destructive, cynical behavior and attitudes. He had true change of heart, and shortly afterward, his behavior began changing. Unfortunately, the bitterness in Tina's heart had grown and she could not stop her angry outbursts. Even the mildest inconvenience enraged her and she vented her fury full-force at her husband.

THE INFECTION

This unfortunately typical scenario reveals some common components for those dealing with anger:

1. There is a real and painful wound.
2. The wound becomes infected. This very common piece is best understood as bitterness. This bitterness, or infection, is what makes Tina so sensitive and reactive, even after her husband repented and changed. The hurt has stopped but the infection keeps the wound open and extremely painful.
3. Tina forgiving her husband is the antibiotic needed to reduce the infection and begin the healing process. This involves repentance for her own actions and attitudes. Repentance is difficult because Tina's hurt and anger seemed justified.
4. While her husband's repentance and change are good and proper, they are not the essential ingredients to eliminate her bitterness. The key is forgiveness.

RIGHTEOUS ANGER

The Bible speaks of anger as a naturally occurring emotion, expressed by both God and man. Jesus modeled human anger and its proper expression when he disapproved of buying and selling merchandise in the Temple. Likewise, our anger may be proper and healthy as we protect the rights of others or stand up for truth, justice, and righteousness.

Scripture gives guidelines for expressing anger, outlined in Ephesians 4:26, "Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry." Do not hold on to your anger but instead, find ways to quickly get over it.

EXPRESSIONS OF RAGE

Denial: The angry person is emotionally unable and unwilling to admit their anger.

Blamer: This person blames other people or situations for making them angry.

Exploder: This style is characterized by volatile explosions and angry outbursts, often frightening others.

Passive Aggressive: Anger is repressed and comes out toward a person they are overly dependent on. The expression of anger is very indirect and is denied.

Revenge: This person seeks to hurt others when angered. They want to get even.

Fault Finder: This person displays an intense, unrelenting desire to point out mistakes. The more angry they are, the more they criticize.

Controller: Insecure people often seek to control their environment and the people in it. Lecturing, dominating, insisting, begging, and demanding are different forms of controlling others.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT ANGER?

Not all anger is wrong. In 2 Kings 17:18, we see God's anger toward His own people when they rebelled against Him.

BE PATIENT, KIND, AND UNDERSTANDING

"A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly." Proverbs 14:29

"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 1:19-20

DO NOT TAKE OFFENSE

"A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." Proverbs 19:11

"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." 1 Peter 4:8

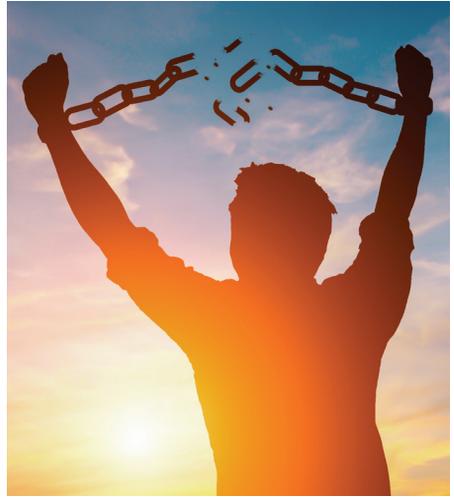
DO NOT LET ANGER CHARACTERIZE YOU

"A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel." Proverbs 15:18

"Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared." Proverbs 22:24-25

SELFISHNESS

Selfishness is the main cause of unrighteous anger. "I didn't get what I wanted, when I wanted it, or how I wanted it! And now I'm ANGRY!" Even though Jesus was mocked, neglected, ridiculed, rejected, tortured, persecuted, and even placed on a cross, He did not get angry. He was completely without sin, so this mistreatment was, of course, unjust and



unfair. But His motives were not selfish. He was able to endure without becoming irate. Much of our anger is an expression of disappointment because our selfish desires are not met.

MANAGING ANGER

Here are some practical suggestions based on Scripture to help you control anger. You can change your actions and your relationships. You can choose your attitude and learn to not depend on someone else to calm you down.

1. Overlook offenses. When you can, don't let small concerns cause big disagreements. Let it go!
2. Practice self-control. Living a disciplined and self-regulated life is not common in our "I need it now" culture. Self-control is one of the Fruits of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5, so we know its importance. "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control." Proverbs 29:11
3. Reduce selfishness. Respect, esteem, consider, and show compassion to others. "Each of you should look

not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”
Philippians 2:4

4. Speak to others softly. Being gruff, swift with your words, and demanding is usually met with disrespect and resistance. Approach others with a gentleness that reveals your understanding of their situation and feelings, as well as your own. “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Proverbs 15:1
5. Examine your motive. Is it love or control? Love should be our motive. “Love is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.” I Corinthians 13:5
6. Take personal responsibility for your own attitude. Don’t justify
- rage because someone said or did something you did not like. Try determining in advance what kind of character you want to display. Practice this attitude in all situations.
7. Be quick to forgive. This is the simple, yet profound, message of the gospel of Christ. We can love others because He first loved us. “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Colossians 3:13
8. Pray for your relationships. “For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.” Ephesians 1:15-16



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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