

How to Handle Anger

By Rick Warren

We all get angry, but we do so in different ways. Some of us explode. Others simmer silently. But none of us is immune. It's a very normal human reaction. Jesus got angry. In the Old Testament it says 375 times that God got angry. The Bible says, "In your anger, don't sin." There's a right way and a wrong way to get angry. How do you deal with anger appropriately? Let me give you five steps.

1. Understand why you get angry.

The better you understand yourself, the better you'll be able to control your anger. Anger is simply a warning light. It isn't your real problem. It says that something much deeper is wrong.

Sometimes it's pain. If you hit your thumb with a hammer, you're going to get angry. If you get hurt emotionally, you'll get angry as well. I saw an article in the *Orange County Register* some time back that said, "The divorce is far from over for the former spouses who are angrily ever after. In a study of people who have been divorced, one out of three people, slightly more than one-third of men and women after 10 years, still feel 'intense feelings of anger' associated with the former marriage." Why? Divorce hurts. The deeper your pain, the deeper your anger. When you deal with your hurt, you'll deal with your anger.

Sometimes it's frustration. We often get angry when nothing seems to work, we don't get our way, or we're forced to wait. Instead of letting frustration turn to anger, we need ask ourselves, "Is this really worth getting angry over?" I read an article some time back about a teenage boy who got so frustrated when he got held up by traffic that he took out a gun and shot a warning shot in the air. Unfortunately, the shot hit someone.

The boy, who came from a Christian home, said later, "It's a disaster I've caused and I've got to live with. I deserve to go to jail. Everyday I'm thinking about it. It's like a nightmare I can't wake up from. I can't do a thing to change it. I just pray every morning and night for this man that God will touch his soul and make him well." Was it worth all of that for the boy to get rid of a little frustration? Of course not. But frustration can easily turn to anger if not dealt with properly.

Other times it's insecurity. We're angry because we feel threatened. We feel like an animal being backed into a corner. This doesn't have to be physical. It could come when our self-worth is attacked, when we're embarrassed, or when we're criticized.

What's causing your anger? Before you can beat anger, you've got to know where it comes from.

2. Look to God not others for your self-worth.

A sense of self-worth is essential to controlling anger. Insecure people are easily angered. Confident people are not. When you have a sense of self-worth, you can handle hurt, frustration, and insecurity much easier.

The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 7:21, “Don’t pay attention to everything people say.” The more insecure we are, the more we depend on the opinions of others to feel good about ourselves. If you’re insecure and someone says something bad about you, anger will follow because your self-worth is dependent upon the approval of others.

If you want to overcome anger, you can’t get uptight when people criticize you. How do you get that kind of self-confidence? Proverbs 14:26 (GNB) says, “Reverence for the Lord gives confidence and security to a man.” To overcome anger, believe what God says about you. Believe that he has a plan and purpose for your life. When you remember that, you won’t blow up when someone criticizes you.

3. **Stop and think before reacting.**

Put your mind in gear before you engage your mouth. Often, when we’re angry, our mouth is moving way before we’ve thought about what we’re saying. Proverbs 16:23 (GNB) says, “Intelligent people think before they speak.” Because angry words come so easily, thinking is a key to anger management. You need to learn to delay your response. Thomas Jefferson once said, “If you’re angry, count to 10. If you’re very angry, count to 100.” And during that time you want to ask yourself three questions:

Why am I angry? Am I scared? Am I hurt? Am I frustrated? What’s the real issue here?

What do I want out of this encounter? You don’t really want revenge because revenge rarely gets you what you want. In fact, it usually takes you further away from what you really want.

How can I best get the outcome I want? You rarely get what you want by being sarcastic, cutting the other person down, yelling back, or playing silent. It simply doesn’t work.

You might think you can’t help blowing up, but you can! Anger is a choice. You get angry because you want to get angry. It feels good to get angry. You are responding how you choose to respond. Since you have a choice, choose to wait before reacting!

4. **Learn to relax.**

Proverbs 14:30 (TLB) says, “A relaxed attitude lengthens a man’s life.” Temper and tension always go together. Deadlines tend to bring out the worst in us. They make us more irritable. I’m usually a relaxed guy, but once a week I get PMS – Pre-Message Syndrome. Every weekend I get nervous. What do I have to say to those folks I’m preaching to? Gratefully my wife lets me drive to church in my own car. It has avoided so many irritating experiences!

Some of you are wound so tightly that anything ticks you off. It's week after week of tension, and you're wondering why you're yelling at your loved ones when you get home.

Here are a few simple suggestions to help you relax:

Be aware when tension is building up in your life. If you can notice tension building, you can relieve that tension in a healthy way.

Learn some relaxation techniques. Exercise is a good one. When you feel stressed and ready to blow your top, run, shoot baskets, hit a racquetball – get your body moving.

Develop a sense of humor. Sometimes we just take things too seriously. I have a saying with my staff: "Take God very seriously, but don't take yourself very seriously."

5. **Continually ask God for help.**

Most importantly, you need God's help to overcome anger. The first four fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22 are love, joy, peace, and patience. You need those if you're going to overcome anger.

When the world puts pressure on you and you feel squeezed, what's inside of you is going to come out. When you're filled with the Spirit of God, love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control will come out.

Anger is just a warning light for a deeper issue – whether it's frustration, insecurity, or something else. God wants to help you with that deeper issue. Will you let him?

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