

ANGER AND PERSONAL RIGHTS

restraining anger by surrendering expectations to God



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By David Batty

Student Manual
Fifth Edition



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Chapter 1

How have I used anger in my life?

“You make me so angry!”

Have you ever said that?

Or has anyone accused you of being angry and you shot back, “I’m not angry!”

You don’t have to look very far today before you see someone expressing anger. Whether you are watching the news, or a movie, or just watching the people around you, we often see people expressing anger.

So what about you? Is anger a big part of your life today?

If God were to pull out a video of your entire life, and only play the parts where you were angry, what would the video of your life reveal? Would there only be a few episodes to see? Or would the video include most of your day, every day of your life?

In this course we want to take a careful look at anger and hopefully find some ways to make this a positive part of your life instead of it being a destructive part of your life.

A. What does anger look like in my life?

You are special. You are not exactly the same as anyone else. So anger in your life will not look exactly the same as it does in the lives of others around you.

The question is, “What does anger look like in my life?”

How do you express anger? How often do you get angry? How many different ways do you have of expressing your anger?

If you were to rate yourself, what score would you give yourself on anger?

If “0” means you never get angry and “100” means you are angry all the time, what score would you give yourself?

Now, let’s stir up some trouble right away. If we asked those who are closest to you to score you on anger, what score would they give you? And if they gave you a score that was different in a major way from your score—what is that telling us?

Does that mean that they really don’t know you? Or are you the one who is in denial?

Let's close the door to that question and take a closer look at some of the common ways people respond when they are angry.

1. Angry words

When you are angry, does your tone of voice change? For most of us, we can easily tell when the other person is angry just by listening to them. Their words are sharp, they carry an emotional intensity that lets everyone know they are not happy!

For lots of people, their words get louder. As their anger grows stronger, their words get louder, and louder, and louder!

And for some people, their anger also changes the words they use—cursing is one common expression that goes with their anger.

Sharp cutting words can easily shoot out of the mouth of the angry person, such as “I hate you!”

2. The look

If looks could kill, there would be a lot more dead people! Some people use their eyes to communicate anger. What does that “angry look” do to the other person? It all depends on the relationship they have with that person. Some children will burst into tears when their mom or dad gives them the angry look. Others seem to completely ignore it.

3. Let's fight!

Anger and fighting often go together. Angry words lead to threats, and soon the two are fighting. A war of words can quickly turn into a fight with fists. Anger brings a high level of energy into the situation.

4. Scream

For some people screaming is one of the ways they express their anger. And we are not simply talking about talking louder than normal.

Kristi was a quiet young lady in a Teen Challenge program. She came with her fair share of problems, and was making progress in changing. One Saturday morning she was doing her assigned work, when someone said something to her that she did not like. What started as an argument quickly heated up. Kristi became so angry that she started screaming at the top of her voice.

Her screams were so loud that people in the next building could hear her. It sounded like someone was being killed. Alarmed neighbors quickly tried to find out what was happening.

When they came to the house where Kristi was, everything was “normal.” Kristi was walking around, her quiet self again, acting as if nothing had happened.

5. Revenge

“I don’t get angry, I just get revenge.” Do you know someone like that? They don’t settle for a war of words. They don’t look to jump into a fight with this person. But they look for a way to pay back the person who has wronged them.

This revenge may come within a few minutes, or days, or even longer. But they are holding on to their grudge against this person until they can pay them back for the wrong done against them.

Payback can come in the form of violence—destroying more than the damage originally done against them. An example of this is in 1 Samuel chapter 25. David and his men had been protecting all the people in their area for some months. It was harvest time and David sent several of his men to Nabal and asked for a gift to express appreciation to David for the protection David had provided to his animals.

Nabal had nothing but harsh words for the men who came asking for a gift. When David heard that his men had been treated with such disrespect he was immediate in his response. He told his men to get ready to go and fight Nabal. He said he would not stop until Nabal and every man working for him was killed.

Now this is revenge that is over the top. This is not an “eye for an eye” kind of street justice. David was planning to kill not only Nabal, but every man working for him. Why? Because Nabal had spoken disrespectfully to his men and refused to give them a gift.

Fortunately for David, Abigail, the wife of Nabal, came and tried to get him to stop his plans for revenge. David listened to her, and changed his plans. Had she not stepped in, David would have let his anger take him down a very destructive path, killing innocent people in the name of revenge.

6. Silence

Not everyone is a fighter or a screamer. Others express their anger in a quiet way—the silent treatment. If you ask them, “Are you upset? What’s wrong?” they will respond, “nothing.” But they won’t talk to you.

Another way they can express their anger is by slowing down. If you tell them, “Hurry up!” this person just slows down even more.

This person can even have a smile on their face, sending the message that everything is fine, but on the inside it is a different story. Inside they are very angry at someone for whatever reason. But instead of lashing out with harsh words, they give the silent response. They give the outward sign of peace, but on the inside they are filled with anger. They can easily start a war

with whoever has made them angry, but it is a hidden war, a sneaky war. They begin to do things against this person, but often from a hidden approach.

This is often labeled as “passive aggressive.” The person appears passive, but in reality it is their way of fighting back at the person they are angry with.

7. Hold it in

Some people choose to hold their anger in and try to hide it. They may believe that it is wrong to show their anger, so they just stuff it down on the inside. They think, “If I just stuff this anger down, and cover it up, then it will go away, and everything will be just fine.” But in reality, this response to anger can cause real damage just as much as fighting or arguing.

If someone says to you, “I never get angry,” what thought pops into your head? “What a liar! He’s in deep delusion.”

Perhaps this person is lying, or maybe they are just comparing their life with the way others express their anger. They see people shouting, cursing, fighting and screaming, and say—I never act like that. They use this logic to justify that they never get angry.

But what may be happening is that this person has learned a different way of expressing anger—holding it in. They may not even recognize that they are doing this. They may not even realize that this is anger and how they are reacting—stuffing it down. But stuffing anger inside is a destructive reaction.

8. Turning anger toward yourself

Anger can be turned toward yourself instead of being expressed against other people. You can be angry with yourself and “beat yourself up.” You curse at yourself for being so stupid. In your mind you play the movie over and over, and with each re-run, you heap more disgust and anger on yourself.

When you turn anger inward, toward yourself you can cause a different kind of damage than when you express your anger openly toward others.

Directing this anger toward yourself may seem more “correct” because you blame yourself for whatever you did. You blame yourself for being too weak to fight back. Or you may simply believe that you alone are responsible for whatever is going on in your life. There can be any number of different reasons why you believe the anger against yourself is directed at the correct target, but the reality is that this response to anger is causing more damage. Anger directed inward is not part of the solution to whatever triggered this.

Anger turned inward may seem less harmful, but in reality, it causes real damage. This damage is not just in your own life. Anger turned inward also damages other people. When you damage yourself, you end up hurting others in many different ways.

One way that a person can express this anger toward self is through cutting and self-mutilation. There are other powerful issues going on in the lives of those who end up cutting themselves. It's much more than anger. This behavior is often driven by the issues of power and control in a life filled with chaos and abuse.

Depression can be another result of turning anger toward yourself. The anger feeds the belief that you are no good. The loss of hope feeds the depression and the anger.

9. Humor—sarcasm

Humor can be used to express your anger, but this often can be humor at the expense of the other person. Making fun of the person who is the target of your anger is a way to make yourself look good while you make the other person look stupid.

Another expression of humor is to use sarcasm as a way of responding to the person who is the target of your anger.

B. What gives anger so much power in my life?

Anger is one powerful emotion! It can start as a minor irritation and quickly explode into a volcano of fiery anger. What gives anger so much power?

Anger is fueled by fear, hurt or frustration.

1. Fear

Some people may question that fear has anything to do with anger. But fear is a very common fuel for anger in men. Many men are unwilling to admit that they are experiencing fear in a given situation. They may not even be in touch with their emotions to the point of being able to accurately identify fear at the root of what they are experiencing. But they clearly know that they do not like the situation at hand, so they react with anger.

Anger has become a familiar tool for most men. The same is true for a lot of women, also. They use anger to send a message that they do not like the situation they are caught in.

2. Hurt

This is the most common trigger for anger. You may have been deeply offended by what someone did to you, and the more you think about it, the more it hurts you.

If these hurts are not resolved, they become like a rapidly growing cancer that will grow deep down into your heart and soon this hurt turns to bitterness. Just thinking about that person can make you angry.

Another consequence of these unresolved hurts is that they soon affect our relationships with other people. When someone else says or does something that reminds you of how you were hurt in the past, you can easily react to this new situation with anger. Often this anger is over the top—some small issue can trigger a huge explosion of anger. Why?

Unresolved hurts from the past continue to generate emotional turmoil on the inside. These unresolved hurts can make it easy to over-react when some problem affects you. Think for a minute what it feels like to have a cut or a burn on your finger. In just a second you can be cut or burned. But the pain can last for days. Anything you touch with that finger triggers a very sharp pain. If you did not have that injury on your finger, then the same touch would not cause any pain. But with a cut or burn that has not healed, the slightest touch generates a huge pain response.

Unresolved hurts from our past can generate a powerful angry response much like that cut or burn causes a big pain response.

3. Frustration

Frustration fuels anger because it is based on disappointments caused by unfulfilled desires. We want to be in control, to get our own way. We want peace and quiet, but all we get are problems that just won't go away. These constant irritations, these unmet expectations generate deep resentment. When we can't stand it any more, we react with anger.

This frustration is not just with other people—it can easily be directed at yourself. You can be frustrated that you can't get rid of a problem, frustrated with your own failures, frustrated that you can't achieve what you desire.

4. Is anger a bully in your life?

Whether your anger is fueled by fear, hurt or frustration—or some other cause—the bottom line is that anger is a powerful emotion. And if you do not learn how to handle it appropriately, it will bring all kinds of destruction into your life.

Anger is like a bully in your life. This emotion is so powerful that it crowds out everything else in your heart and mind, and seeks to control you. One young teen put it this way, "I was so frustrated and upset—I could not see any other choice but to respond with anger."

When you allow your anger to control you, it is a bully that will control your thoughts, your emotions, your words, and your actions.

God has a solution to your anger problem, and we will explore these solutions throughout the rest of this course.

C. How did anger come to have such a place in my life?

It would be easy to blame your anger problem on the failures of other people—they failed to show love, they hurt you, they abused you, they betrayed you, they ignored you. And many people—both young and old—have been treated badly. They have a reason to be angry at the people who have brought such pain into their lives.

But this still falls short of the full answer. How did anger come to have such a place in your life?

1. You learned how to use your anger

The reality is that you learned to use your anger by watching others. From the day you were born, those around you were influencing you—in some ways for the good, and also the opposite. Perhaps your parents set a positive example for you of effective ways to manage anger, and did not allow anger to become a destructive force in their lives.

But all too often we saw anger used in negative ways—anger out of control, anger being used as a weapon to hurt others. These negative examples may have been deeply embedded in your life before you were even able to talk or understand the damage it was doing in your life.

Today for many of us, we use anger without even thinking about it. Anger has become such a deep part of our life that it comes out in a split second. It's easy to convince yourself, "Well this is the way I am—I've always had a hot temper."

For many today, they do not control their anger—instead their anger controls them. Push the right button and they explode in anger in an instant. We respond with anger without even thinking about it.

But the truth is that we have made a series of choices through the years—we have chosen to embrace anger, giving little thought to its destructive power in our life. We have used it as a weapon, believing that we had a right to be angry. We have seen its power, and we like power!

2. You must take responsibility for your anger

Earlier in this chapter we looked at different ways people express their anger. We also looked at how powerful this emotion can be in our lives. So what is your honest answer to this question:

Is anger a problem in your life?

One of the biggest challenges some of us face is being willing to admit when we have a problem. But whether you have a big problem with anger, a little problem with anger or no problem at all—you need to start here. You must take responsibility for your anger. Other people don't "make you get angry." You choose to respond with anger. It's your anger.

This is a big step to learning how to use your anger in a way that will please God. Every day you need to say to yourself, “I must take responsibility for my anger.”

Whether you are irritated, upset, frustrated, disgusted, angry, filled with hatred, or exploding with anger—whether it’s a little thing or a huge thing in your life—you still have to say, “I must take responsibility for my anger.”

3. Anger can become addictive

One young man who had been a drug addict before coming to Teen Challenge stated, “When I couldn’t get drugs, anger gave me what I craved for. I got high off the feelings of anger, and I used it to hurt other people. I was in control, and it made me feel good.”

Anger is an emotion filled with energy. It can release adrenalin in your brain and give you an emotional high. For some people, anger becomes the path to emotional pleasure. When the person is giving full vent to their anger, it leaves them with a feeling of emotional power.

Anger can become so powerful that it seems to have a life of its own. It seems to be in control of your life, instead of you being in control. Your anger can become so toxic that it destroys everything—especially your relationships with other people.

Conclusion

So how do can you begin to bring this powerful emotion into its proper place in your life? Is there hope for real change? Is there a need for change? Before you answer these questions, take a moment and consider this question. If Jesus were here right now, how would he respond to the question: “Is there a need for (your name) to change the way s/he uses her/his anger?” What would Jesus say about you? How much change would Jesus say you need to make in how you use anger in your life?

If you are going to make any changes in your life regarding your anger, then you must start with taking responsibility for your anger today. “I choose to use my anger.” And if we are honest, most of us must face the reality that we have made a lot of bad choices in using our anger. The consequence is that anger has become a destructive power in our lives.

Chapter 2

How do I break the destructive power of anger in my life?

The title of this chapter asks an important question which has several issues built into it. First it assumes that in fact anger is having a destructive impact in your life. Clearly some people have a greater anger problem than others—some have killed a person because of anger. It's easy to fall into the trap of comparing yourself with others and concluding—that person really has an anger problem—I'm much better than they are. I don't have an anger problem.

But when you take an honest look at your life, can you see the destructive power of anger in your past? How would those closest to you respond to this question?

The chapter title also has another built in assumption—that you truly are interested in learning how to break the destructive power of anger in your life. Only you can determine how important an issue this is in your life.

A. There are no “magic wand” solutions

When it comes to dealing with an anger problem there is no “magic wand” solution where you can say a simple prayer and “poof” your anger problem disappears. Magic wands only work in fairy tale movies.

In the real world where you live, it will take determination and hard work over a period of time to find real solutions to your anger problems. The Bible is filled with practical advice that will help, and there are mature Christians who can provide positive help in this process. Don't be overwhelmed by the size of the task. Instead look to God who is ready to help you with every problem you face.

Do not ask God to take away your ability to feel anger. He won't take it away any more than he will make your hand disappear if you have a problem with stealing. He created you with the ability to experience the emotion of anger, and when you learn to use it the way God wants you to, it will not be a destructive force in your life, but it will be a positive force.

B. Start with the end

If you are going to learn how to break the destructive power of anger in your life, it would be good to start with the end. Where do you want to be when you have this anger problem completely solved? What do you want your life to look like?

Even more important, where does God want you to be? What does he want your life to look like when you are using anger the way he wants you to?

It is very helpful to start with the end so you have a target to aim for. Then you can begin to take one step at a time, all the time keeping your eye on the target you have set.

1. Where do you want to be?

Take a few minutes and dream about your future. What would your life be like if you did not have an anger problem? How different would you feel and act if you no longer allowed anger to have a destructive role in your life? How would it affect your relationships with your family and others close to you?

There's a real complication for some of us here. You may be saying, "Everyone I know has an anger problem. And if someone says they don't have an anger problem, they are probably lying or simply in deep delusion!"

The truth is—there are some people who have learned how to bring their anger under control so it is no longer a destructive force in their lives. They have learned how to use it in a positive way.

One of the keys to learning what your future can include is to discover the promises of God that relate to this issue and then stand on those promises.

2. Where does God want you to be?

God did not create you to be a slave to your anger. He does not want anger to bring destruction into your life. Instead, he created you with this emotion so you could experience the richest life possible—and anger is part of his creative design for you.

The real challenge facing you today is: How can I use my anger in a way that honors God? That's where God wants you to be.

It's very easy to read the paragraph above, and then say, "OK, that's my goal." But getting to that place where you use your anger in a way that honors God—well that may take some time. Perhaps you are tempted to say, "Forget it. I'll never be perfect."

This is not a call to be perfect. It's a call to take one step at a time toward becoming the person God wants you to be. When you arrive at this goal—no matter how long it takes—you will find that your life is much more fulfilling. You will be able to look back on your past and say, "Thank God, I am no longer the way I was. I have really grown in a positive way."

To achieve this place will require God's help, and he is ready to help. It will also take the help of others who are farther down this path than you are.

3. Where are you at today?

Once you have an idea of where you want to go, you need to take a close look at yourself and see where you are at today. How are you currently using anger in your life? Are your anger problems mainly with other people, or are you mostly angry at yourself? Or God? Or do you find yourself getting angry at things—your computer, for example.

Another issue that is closely related to this is taking responsibility for your anger. It does no good to say, "If you would stop irritating me, then my life would be fine." Even if everyone else around you was perfect, and never did anything wrong, that would not change your anger problem. You would still be you!

All these other people around you simply reveal your anger problem. When they do something which causes you to respond with anger they are not the problem—they are simply exposing your problem. This does not mean that what they are doing is OK—they may be treating you badly—their actions may be evil. But in spite of this you must take responsibility to "own" your anger.

It may be very difficult for you to accurately pinpoint where you are at today regarding your anger. You may find it helpful to ask those who are closest to you to describe what they see as your anger problems. You need to determine where you are today so you can begin to take steps in the right direction, growing into the person God wants you to be.

4. Step one—have you become a Christian?

Overcoming an anger problem is not a battle you can win in your own strength. You need God's help, and he is ready to help you. If you want to break the destructive power of anger in your life, then you need to have a solid foundation for beginning this growth.

If you have not surrendered your life to Jesus, and asked Him to become your Savior and the Leader of your life, then now is the time. As you enter into this new life that Jesus has for you, He has promised to give you the power you need to face every problem situation that comes your way. But this promise of God is for those who are His followers. If you have not become a Christian, then trying to fix this on your own may be difficult if not impossible. God is willing to help you, but you have to be willing to take His help on His conditions.

You can't just surrender the sin-filled parts of your life that are in crisis and say, "God I need your help in this area, but don't tell me what to do with the rest of my life." Giving your whole life to Jesus is the best decision you can ever make. It's an "all or nothing" choice. Either you are going to let Jesus be Leader of all of your life, or He will not be Leader. Just like a woman cannot be "partly pregnant," you can't be partly surrendered to Jesus.

So if you have become a Christian, Jesus is ready to help you with your anger problem. But just because you are a Christian does not mean He will automatically take away your anger

problem. Just because two people are married does not automatically mean the wife will become pregnant.

There are lots of books on anger and how to control it. These books give many good suggestions on how you can change. In the rest of this course we are going to look at only a few of the strategies you can use to overcome the destructive power of anger in your life.

C. How do my personal rights connect to my anger?

We are going to tackle one of the most difficult issues in your life that relates to the destructive power of anger. That issue is your “personal rights.” If you understand how your personal rights are feeding your anger, and if you surrender your personal rights to God, you will kill the most powerful root of anger in your life. This will not instantly solve all your anger problems, but it will be the key to a dramatic transformation in your life as it relates to your anger.

1. What are personal rights?

Personal rights are rules that we have made for our life. Many of these rules define how other people should or should not treat us in different life situations. Here are a few examples of personal rights:

- You have no right to be disrespectful to me.
- You should always be kind when speaking to me.
- You should not interrupt me when I am talking.
- You should do what I tell you to do.
- You should not accuse me of doing something wrong.
- You should not take my things without first asking permission.
- You should not ignore me.
- You should not get angry at me.
- I have the right to wear whatever I want to.
- My computer should always do what I want it to do—immediately!
- I have the right to listen to any kind of music I want to listen to.
- I have the right to my free time/ personal time.

A personal right is a rule I have made up for myself which I expect others to obey.

Personal rights usually focus on one or more of the following issues:

1. Something a person owns.
2. Something that a person may properly claim as his.
3. Something to which a person has a just and legal claim.
4. The freedom to do something.
5. Something you have the right to do.

This list of rules could go on for pages. Now, most of us have never written down these personal rights and handed them out to everyone who comes in contact with us. But we operate on the inside as though these are the “rules for life” especially my life. We look at these rules and say, “I have a right to be treated this way.”

Now would be a good time to complete Project 2, “My Personal Rights,” in your Study Guide. This project gives a number of different areas in your life where you can have personal rights—rules for your life that you expect others to obey. Think about the things that irritate you, frustrate you, and make you angry, and then try to identify what is the personal right behind those feelings.

For example, take the category of clothes. What kinds of situations related to your clothes make it easy for you to respond with anger? What about persons borrowing your clothes without asking for your permission first? How about the person that intentionally gets your clothes dirty—for example, wiping their muddy hands on your jacket?

Each of these situations may reveal a “rule” that you expect other people to obey:

- (1) You must get my permission first before you borrow any of my clothes.
- (2) You are not allowed to wipe your dirty hands on my jacket.

If you are still totally clueless of what personal right was violated, then you may need to have a trusted friend or counselor help you process these experiences and help you identify the personal rights that are involved.

2. How do personal rights feed my anger?

We use our anger as a reaction when people violate our personal rights. We say on the inside, “You should not be treating me this way, and I am not going to let you get away with trashing my rules—my life.” And so we get angry because they have not respected our personal rights.

Steve was telling a friend about a situation where he had recently become very angry. Steve said, “Even though this other guy was angry, I was doing fine—until he started accusing my wife. Then I lost it, and my anger exploded.”

So what personal right did Steve have that triggered his anger? “No one can accuse my wife and talk disrespectfully about her.” When his neighbor broke Steve’s rule, Steve got angry.

Now Steve did not start this conversation by telling his neighbor, “Let’s try to solve this conflict, but I have a rule that you cannot violate—you can’t accuse my wife and talk disrespectfully about her.”

Yet when Steve's anger exploded, it was triggered by his realization that his neighbor had broken his rule—his personal right, and Steve was not going to let him get away with that.

Your personal rights can focus on big issues, or little ones. They are not necessarily the same for all people. A close friend of yours may be able to say something to you and you receive it, even though it is tough. But if another person says the same thing, you may explode with anger saying, "They had no right to say that about me, especially in front of all my friends!"

The main truth you need to see here is that your personal rights set you up to get angry, and this anger is usually destructive.

Another important truth to see is that God did not tell you to make your own rules for life—to try to run your life living by your personal rights. Here is the real truth—these personal rights are often in conflict with what God wants you to do.

If you are choosing to follow Jesus, then you must learn to submit to his rules for your life.

3. How do I give my personal rights to God?

As we said at the beginning of this section, our personal rights are the root problem to the destructive power of anger in our lives. If you want to see real change in your life where you can overcome this kind of destructive anger, then you will have to give your personal rights to God.

These personal rights are like the main root of a weed that goes deep into the ground and provides that plant with plenty of food and strength to stand whatever comes against it. If you simply pick off the leaves of this kind of a weed, it will simply grow new leaves.

Why should I give my personal rights to God?

1. Because God loves me

God is good. His ways are perfect. He does not make mistakes. His love for you is greater than anyone else's love for you. If you are convinced that God loves you, then you can trust him and give your personal rights to Him. Psalm 34:8

2. To show God I love him

The greatest commandment in the Bible tells us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. (Mark 12:30) One way you can show God that you love him is to give your personal rights to him. It's a choice you make.

3. Personal rights go with ownership

When you become a Christian, God becomes the owner of your life. He is now the One in charge. Since He is the owner, you should give Him your personal rights.

1 Corinthians 6:19b-20, Romans 12:1

4. God is the leader of my life

In our country, the laws are made by those in authority. When you become a Christian, you need to allow God to become your final authority. He knows what is best for you. Matthew 11:28-30

5. So I will not get angry

We get angry when people violate our personal rights. If you give these rights to God, you no longer have a need to force others to obey your rules. God will take care of you. Psalm 37:8

If you are going to kill this weed, you have to cut off the main root—that will cut off the weed from its source of water and food.

If you are going to kill the destructive power of anger you will have to surrender your personal rights to God. And that may not be easy. The question is—how desperate are you to change? Are you sick and tired of how anger messes up your life? Do you really want God’s help to become the person he wants you to be?

Here are four steps that will help you give your personal rights to God.

a. List the things which make you get angry, uptight, upset, irritated, or cause worry

Your work on Project 1, “Identifying My Anger,” in the Study Guide gave you one way of looking at the situations that make you angry. You can add more examples as you look at what makes you angry in the days ahead. These can also include situations that make you get uptight, upset, irritated, or cause you to worry.

Examples: I get angry, upset, or worried when:

- People don’t respect me.
- My roommate wears my clothes without asking my permission.
- I am told what kind of music I should or should not listen to.
- A person who is angry touches me.
- Someone lies to me.
- My personal time is interrupted.
- People say bad things about my family.
- Something happens concerning my children.

When you find yourself feeling anger, stop and ask yourself, “What started me down this path of anger?”

b. Make a list of all your personal rights

It is important for you to know what your personal rights are if you are going to give them to God. You may have already started this list in your work on Project 2, “My Personal Rights,” in the Study Guide. But this is a list that you will want to continue to review, and add more “rules” as you look at what makes you angry in the days ahead.

As you take the time to write down each of these personal rights, it will also help you to remember which ones you have given to God. If you find that you are still getting angry for the same reason, you can remind yourself that you have already given that to God.

c. Pray and give your personal rights to God

The process of giving your personal rights to God is simple—but not easy. You must take these personal rights of yours and bring them to Jesus and say, “Jesus, I am giving you all my personal rights. They are no longer mine—now they belong to you. I want my life to be fully surrendered to you. I want your rules to be my rules for life.”

You may find it helpful to read off each personal right you have written on your paper and then say, “Jesus I give this personal right to you. It’s no longer mine. And with your help, I will not respond with anger when someone violates this personal right that is no longer mine—but yours. Instead I will respond the way you want me to respond.”

You can use Project 3, “My Personal Rights Commitment,” in your Study Guide to help you in this process of giving your personal rights to God.

In the days ahead, when you discover more personal rights, bring them to God and pray, giving them to him. If you find that you have taken back a personal right, bring it to God again, and give it to him again.

d. Make a decision to thank God for whatever happens

First Thessalonians 5:16-18 in the New Life Bible says, ¹⁶ “Be full of joy all the time. ¹⁷ Never stop praying. ¹⁸ Give thanks for whatever happens. This is what God wants you to do because of Christ Jesus.”

It’s easy to say, “God, I give you my rights.” But it is much harder to thank God for whatever happens as a result of this decision. This means you must learn to thank God when someone violates one of your former rights. This may be very hard to do. This does not mean that you thank the other person for violating one of your personal rights.

Each time someone violates one of your personal rights, stop and thank God for taking good care of you and His personal rights. Remember, God will always give you everything you need. See Philippians 4:19. Look to God for wisdom on how to respond to this person who is violating your personal right. God’s Word is very helpful in telling us how to respond in many difficult situations. See Luke 6 and James 1:2-5. These verses in James give us a new way of responding to problems. See also Romans 5:1-5.

When you learn to thank God each day for whatever happens, you will experience a new freedom from anger and worry. You will find it easier to practice Luke 6:27-38. As a Christian who is seeking to follow God, there is more to life than overcoming anger. God wants you to learn to respond His way in each of these difficult situations. That will probably take more than a couple of weeks to learn. In fact, it takes the better part of your whole life.

4. What will happen when I give my personal rights to God?

a. I will get killed!

The thought of giving your personal rights to God may seem ridiculous, crazy, stupid, and more stupid! “The world I live in is filled with all kinds of mean people. If I surrender my personal rights to God and don’t do anything to protect myself, I will get killed! I’m not that stupid!”

Giving your personal rights to God may be frightening, but it is not stupid. Doing what God wants you to do is the best thing you can ever do no matter how stupid it may seem to other people. The promises of God are clear and filled with hope for you.

Deuteronomy 31:8 New Living Translation

Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.

Jesus also promised to never forsake you.

Matthew 28:20 New Living Translation

And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

You can have full confidence in Jesus as you give your personal rights to Him. He will be there with you every day for the rest of your life.

When you stop and think about the reaction, “I will get killed!” this is rooted in another emotion—fear. The devil wants you to be afraid of leaving your comfort zone. He wants you to see this idea of giving your personal rights to God as a stupid thing to do.

Don’t listen to the lies of the devil. Instead, throw yourself into the arms of Jesus and he will take you through this difficult time of adjustment and growth. And even if you do die—you go to live with Jesus in heaven for eternity!

What happens if I do not give my personal rights to God?

1. You disobey God

James 4:17 says, “If you know what is the right thing to do, but you don’t do it, you sin.” If you know that the right thing for you to do is to give your personal rights to God, but you don’t do it, you disobey God and sin. God wants to be the leader of every area of your life. Matthew 16:24-26

2. You will get angry when someone breaks one of your personal rights

If you have not given your personal rights to God, then you are still holding on to them. When someone violates one of your personal rights, you will find it very easy to respond with anger.

This anger will continue to have a destructive effect on your life.

3. You will worry

You will worry because you are personally responsible to take care of your personal rights.

4. I provide Satan a foothold in my life

When you refuse to give to God any area of your life, that gives Satan a foothold. You give Satan control through your rebellion and disobedience.

Psalm 31:14-15 New Living Translation

¹⁴ **But I am trusting you, O LORD, saying, “You are my God!”**

¹⁵ **My future is in your hands.**

Put your trust in Jesus and you will never be in a better place! Your future is in His hands!

b. You will still get angry

Probably one of the first things you will discover when you give your personal rights to God is that you will still get angry. Even if you “nailed those personal rights to the cross” yesterday, somehow they jumped off the cross and crept back into your mind.

These angry response patterns have been part of your life for a long time, probably years. Old habits die hard.

You may have to keep nailing these personal rights to the cross every day, and each time say, “Jesus, I want you to have this personal right. It is yours, not mine.”

These tests may come from the same people who have made you angry in the past. They may not treat you any different just because you prayed to God and surrendered your personal rights to him.

Plus, the devil is going to do everything he can to trip you up and get you to go back to your old ways of using your anger. These tests may be situations where you truly feel you have been wronged. You may be saying to yourself, “I’m not going to let them get away with this!” But if you have given that personal right to God, then it is his responsibility to deal with that person.

c. Expect God to test you

When you give your personal rights to God, you can be sure that God will test you to see if you were sincere. God will allow other people to violate your personal rights to help you to learn to live without your personal rights.

d. You must develop new response patterns to the situations that easily made you angry

Just surrendering your personal rights to God is not the total solution to your anger problem. It is only one of the first steps. Once you have surrendered your rights to God, then you

have to begin to work on developing new response patterns to these situations. There are three steps to developing new response patterns:

1. Hard work
2. Hard work
3. Hard work

There are no magic wand solutions. If you want God to help you develop new response patterns for your life, He is ready to help you, but on His terms. You need to study the Bible and discover how God wants you to respond in these different situations. His solutions will take you on the path to real life—the kind of life He wants you to have.

Romans 12:1-2 The Message

So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

A huge part of these new response patterns will be to change the way you think. Learning how to renew your mind is a challenging process. This is the subject for another class, and we cannot cover all these issues here in this lesson.

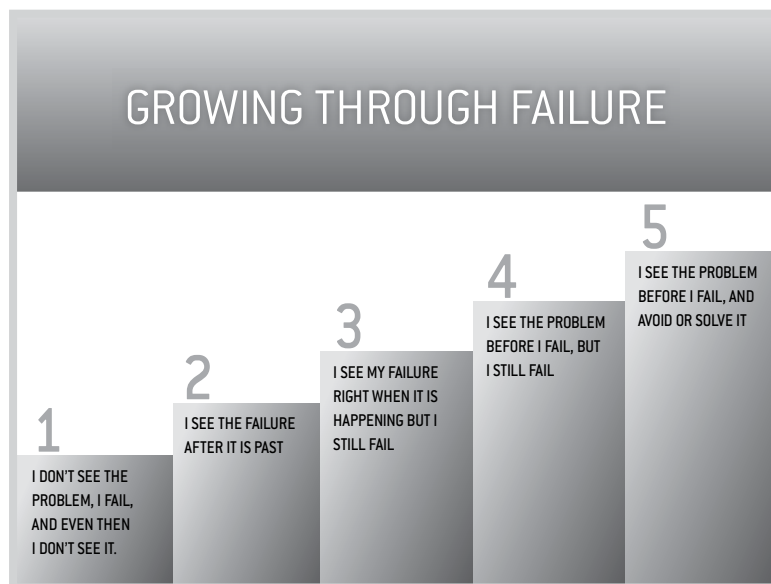
You will be faced with a variety of choices almost every day. You can choose to react the way you have in the past—the angry way—or you can begin to develop new responses, asking God, “How do you want me to respond to this situation in a way that will honor you?”

We will take a closer look at this issue of developing new response patterns in Chapter 4 of this course.

e. Embrace the change process one step at a time

In the *Group Studies for New Christians* course, *Growing Through Failure*, we take a careful look at how failure has affected our lives and how we can begin to grow through our failures. You may want to take a closer look at that course, because many of the issues covered there directly relate to the challenges you will face in developing new response patterns to these situations where you are tempted to get angry.

One chart in that course identifies the process of change that takes place where we are struggling to make a difficult change in our life.



From Growing Through Failure, Student Manual, 5th Edition

When you look at this chart, the steps to change are filled with a lot of failures. That's reality, and God understands that. Just as a young child learning to walk falls many times in the process, so your life may be filled with many relapses back into destructive anger before you master a new way of walking through these challenging life situations.

The important thing is that you stay committed to this new way of living, looking to Jesus every day for strength and wisdom.

5. What are the benefits of giving my personal rights to God?

a. You can be at peace

When you give your personal rights to God, you surrender control of your life to God in a deeper way. You are now saying, "God, I am trusting you with my life today. I am willing to follow you and respond to whatever comes my way, knowing that you are with me and ready to give me the power and the wisdom I need for each new challenge."

This adventure means that you are not in control, God is in control. You can embrace his peace, knowing that his power is made perfect in your weakness. God has this promise for you today.

2 Corinthians 12:9 New Living Translation

"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."

Instead of reacting with anger, choose to fix your eyes on Jesus and embrace the peace that he has for you today.

John 14:27 New Living Translation

“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.

b. You can focus on developing new patterns of response that will honor God

Anger is like a bully—it does not leave any room for growth in other areas of your life. Anger is much like weeds in a garden. If they are not removed, they will take over the garden and not allow your garden plants to grow and bear fruit. In the same way, if you do not bring your anger under control, it will prevent you from developing other more effective ways of responding to difficult situations in your life. When you give your personal rights to God, you open your life to new opportunities to develop patterns of response that will honor God.

Every day you may face challenges where you feel anger beginning to rise inside. Instead of allowing this anger to keep growing, you can simply say, “Jesus, you are my leader. I am ready to learn in this situation whatever lesson you want to teach me.”

Instead of seeking to protect your personal rights, you can focus on personal growth. As you focus on learning new ways of responding to these situations, you need to fill your mind with verses from the Bible. His truth will be a light to your path. These new life skills may be very hard and slow in coming. But keep at it.

In chapter 4 we will take a closer look at how you can develop positive inward character qualities to use in responding to each situation you face. These positive character qualities will provide you with a whole new way of responding where you used anger in the past.

c. God will help you

There is no verse in the Bible where God promises to help you do a better job of protecting your personal rights as you hold on to them with all your might. Nowhere does God promise to fight against those who are violating the rules you have made for them.

But there are many verses where God has promised to help us if we surrender our lives to Him and let Him be in charge. When He is in charge, then we are in good hands. Even when others attack you with evil motives, God will be there to help you.

Joseph in Genesis chapters 37-50 is a good example of this. His brothers sold him into slavery. God didn’t free him from slavery, but in that setting, God gave him favor with Potiphar, who promoted him to a position of influence in his house. But he was still a slave.

When Potiphar’s wife falsely accused Joseph of attempting to rape her, God did not keep Joseph out of prison. But in prison, God gave Joseph favor with the head of the prison. Now I am

sure that Joseph would much rather have been freed from prison than to simply have favor with the head of the prison. But Joseph did not become bitter and angry.

Then in one day, God's next plan for Joseph was revealed, and he went from prison to being second only to Pharaoh. He served in this leadership position for many years in Egypt. When his father died, his brothers were afraid that now Joseph would get revenge for their evil actions. Instead, Joseph shows that he had learned God's way of responding to their evil actions of the past.

Genesis 50:19-21 New International Version

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Don't allow fear to rob you of what God has for you. As you surrender your personal rights to God and embrace His path to life, you will find that He is there to help you every day.

d. You can become a role model to others

As you learn to give your personal rights to God and develop new ways of responding to life challenges, you will find that anger will lose its power and instead, you will be able to use it the way God wants you to. When you learn how to use your anger in a way that honors God, you will know that you really have experienced a transformation in your life.

As you grow, God will open doors for you to be a role model to others. God is not looking for people who have never had an anger problem. He is looking for those who have surrendered their anger and their personal rights to Him and said, "I want you to be the leader of every part of my life."

You don't have to wait until you are perfect before God can use you. But He is looking for real growth, lived out over time which provides evidence that you have been tested many times and are making real progress in learning to respond the way He wants you to.

There are lots of people looking for someone to help them in this process, and you could be one of those God will use. But in the meantime, you need to focus on your own growth, not the anger problems of others.

D. What else besides personal rights feeds my anger problem?

We described "personal rights" as the main root to destructive anger. But there are other issues that can feed your anger. If these issues are not resolved, your anger will continue to cause destruction in your life.

1. Unresolved hurts from the past

You may have been deeply hurt by someone in your past, or even recently. The pain and the damage are still affecting you today. Your anger seems justified as you play those hurts over and over in your mind.

Finding God's path to healing is essential if you want to overcome the anger that you feel toward the one who hurt you.

These unresolved hurts from the past may be causing more damage in your life than you realize. Your anger today may be spilling over to other relationships in your life. You may not even be aware of the connection between these past hurts and your angry reactions in new situations you are facing today.

When these hurts from our past are not resolved, then anything that reminds us of the past hurt becomes a trigger for our anger response. But more than that, if hurts are left unresolved, they will generate more and more anger on the inside. When we experience the slightest new hurt, we can find a volcano of anger erupting on the other person. Our angry response is way out of proportion to the offense, and we also fail to see the connection between our past hurt and our current explosive anger.

Unresolved hurts from your past are causing present damage whether you admit it or not. It is essential that you learn God's way to resolving these hurts from the past so you can move ahead into the full life that God has for you today. This may require the assistance of a counselor or someone who can help you process these issues and find God's path to healing and growth.

2. Unforgiveness and bitterness

Unforgiveness is a powerful force for feeding anger. It keeps the offense fresh in your life and prevents you from experiencing God's healing. Jesus made it clear that we need to forgive those who have offended us.

Matthew 6:14-15 New Living Translation

If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

This does not mean that what the other person did to you is OK. Jesus makes it clear that unforgiveness is a dangerous place for you to be. Unforgiveness easily grows into bitterness in your life.

Hebrews 12:15 New Living Translation

Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.

This unforgiveness and bitterness drives distrust to a deep level, affecting not only your relationship with the person who offended you, but it spills over and affects your relationships with others.

3. Your anger in conflict situations

Even if you have given your personal rights to God, and are seeking to live out this new relationship with Jesus, you may find yourself getting angry because of the way you respond when you are in a conflict situation. When you face new conflicts, are you still falling back on your old patterns of responding to conflict—which most likely includes anger and frustration?

Many people use anger as their primary reaction when they are involved in a conflict situation. They simply do not have new strategies for responding to conflict—so they fall back on their anger.

If you are going to win the battle over the destructive power of anger, you will have to learn how to respond to conflict without getting angry. Learning new ways of responding in conflict may be a big challenge and it will require some hard lessons. Learning how to handle conflict in a way that honors God is a whole new course of study, so we will not go into more detail here.

4. Family traditions—“Hand-me-downs”

Have you ever said, “Well, that’s the way we (your family name) are! My parents had a lot of anger issues, and so did my grandparents.” You can easily explain away your anger problem by simply labeling it as a trait of your family.

These hand-me-downs from your parents and grandparents can set you up for the same kind of anger problem they have. Instead of excusing these problems, the Bible tells us that Jesus came to redeem (set us free) from that empty way of life.

1 Peter 1:18 New International Version

You were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers.

The truth is that every family has passed down to the next generation both good traits and bad habits. Destructive use of anger is one of those bad habits often passed down from one generation to the next.

If you are going to break the destructive power of anger in your life, you will have to take responsibility for your anger, and “unlearn” the anger response patterns that have been taught you by your family. This may be a very difficult process, because these may have been a part of your life from when you were a very young child.

You can be the one to begin a new family “hand-me-down” tradition, and teach the next generation how to use their anger in a way that honors God.

5. Your attitudes and habits

One lady stated, “If you take away my anger, you take away my identity.” Many people have become comfortable with their anger. It’s a weapon they have learned to use skillfully in proving that they are more powerful than the other person. Their anger response patterns have become second nature as they have used them year after year. “This is the way I am!” they say.

These deeply rooted attitudes and habits will make it a huge challenge to change. The real question becomes, “Do you really want to change?” Do you want to find a new identity in your relationship with Jesus?

It’s important to realize that every attitude you have and every habit has been learned. If you desire to change, you can learn new attitudes and develop new habits in how you use your anger. But make no mistake, it may be very hard work.

Conclusion

How many people really do succeed at breaking the destructive power of anger in their life? All things are possible with God! God will give you the power to lay down your personal rights. You can be a real success story in learning new ways to respond to life situations. With God’s help you can bring your anger into a place where it does not bring destruction into your life, but where you use anger in a way that honors God.

In the next chapter we will take a closer look at what God says about how we should use our anger. We will examine the way several people in the Bible used their anger—both good and bad examples.

Chapter 3

What does God say about anger?

You need to do a personal checkup on how you handle your anger. So where should you start? If you listen only to yourself, you will likely miss the full truth. The Bible is filled with stories and teachings on anger. Many verses also tell us when and why God gets angry.

This emotion is described from the first chapters of Genesis all the way through the Bible to the very last book of Revelation. To study every verse on anger would take you a long time. The words anger, angry, wrath, fury, and rage are used over 600 times in the Bible. You can easily see all these verses by using a concordance or going on-line to www.BibleGateway.com or another website that has the entire Bible on it and do a search for these words.

So let's explore what God says about anger and use these verses as a means of identifying some ways that we can use our anger the way God wants us to.

A. Is anger a sin?

1. God created you with the ability to experience anger

Having anger is not a sin. God created you with the ability to experience anger, to express anger. It's an emotion that God gave you. The devil did not give you the emotion of anger.

Genesis 1:27, 31 New Living Translation

²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. . . . ³¹ Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

God created you with the ability to experience a full range of emotions: love, joy, peace, sadness, and anger. So from the very beginning we need to see that God did not make a mistake when he created us—in fact, when He looked at what He created, He saw that it was “very good!”

2. The Bible tells you how to be angry without sinning

Our challenge today is to learn how to use these emotions that God has created within us—to use them in a way that honors God. All too often our anger gets us in trouble, which often leads to more problems. Here’s a verse that sets a high standard for us—one that may seem impossible for you to achieve today.

Ephesians 4:26-27 New International Version

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

These verses in Ephesians make it clear that you can be angry and at the same time not be sinning. Clearly this verse points out that you have a choice to make. However, this is a warning, a challenge to you to be careful. Verse 27 warns you not to give the devil a foothold in your life. How can your anger “give the devil a foothold” in your life? It’s quite easy.

Anger easily opens a door that can lead you to a place of sinning in your angry response. Anger and sin come together when you use your anger in a way that goes against God’s plan for your life. Out-of-control anger easily takes you down a path to sinful thoughts, sinful words, and sinful actions.

3. Jesus and anger

The life of Jesus is also proof that anger is not automatically a sin. On more than one occasion Jesus was angry. Now if anger is always a sin, then Jesus sinned. And if he sinned, then his death will not provide salvation for you or anyone else. And if Jesus did not die for our sins, then we are all headed to hell, no exceptions!

Mark 3:4-5 New International Version

Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent. ⁵He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.

In this story Jesus was talking to a group of religious leaders. He asked them if it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Their refusal to answer the question angered Jesus—but he didn’t sin and call fire down from heaven to consume these stubborn men.

Instead Jesus channeled his anger toward a productive project, and he healed the man with the crippled hand. Jesus showed us that a person can get angry without sinning.

Let’s take a look at what else the Bible tells us about anger. While you are looking at how these people in the Bible handled their anger, see if you can begin to understand the place anger has in your life.

B. How people in the Bible used anger

The Bible has many stories that help us understand anger and how it can affect our life. Anger shows up in the first few chapters of Genesis and weaves through the whole Bible. As you look at these famous people in the Bible, it's important to realize that they faced choices just like you do. We each choose what place anger will have in our lives.

1. Cain

Cain and Abel were the first two children of Adam and Eve. When they were young men they brought sacrifices to God that soon sparked an angry response in Cain.

Genesis 4:3-8 New Living Translation

³ When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the LORD. ⁴ Abel also brought a gift—the best of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The LORD accepted Abel and his gift, ⁵ but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.

⁶ “Why are you so angry?” the LORD asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? ⁷ You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master.”

⁸ One day Cain suggested to his brother, “Let’s go out into the fields.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him.

Cain had an anger problem, and God spoke to him about it. What an incredible opportunity God gave Cain! How many times has God spoken directly to you when you were angry?

God makes some very clear points to Cain.

1. He tries to get Cain to examine “why he is so angry?”
2. God tells Cain that he will be accepted if he does what is right.
3. God then warns him that if he refuses to do what is right—then watch out!
4. Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you.
5. God tells Cain that he must subdue it and be its master.

The next verse gives us the decision that Cain made. He did not follow God’s advice, but instead killed his brother. What a powerful picture of the danger of anger that is allowed to take control of one’s life when they refuse to listen to God. Ignoring God led to a huge tragedy—murder, one that has been repeated countless thousands of times, even up to today.

What a tragic lesson on anger from the very first family in the Bible! Out-of-control anger will leave a trail of tragedy behind everyone who allows it to master them.

2. Joseph

The life of Joseph gives us a picture of a young man who had every reason to be angry with his brothers, God, and the whole world. His brothers hated him so much that they were plotting to kill him. The only reason they did not murder him was they found a way to make some money and sold him as a slave. See Genesis 37.

Joseph ends up in Potiphar's house in Egypt where the wife of his owner falsely accuses him of rape. The result—he ends up in prison—for years. Later God rescues him from prison, and places him in a great position—second only to Pharaoh. During the following years, his brothers come to Egypt for food, and he helps them. He could have gotten revenge, but he did not. In fact, he made arrangements for all of his brothers and his father to move to Egypt where he provided for them.

Years later his father dies, and the brothers are still afraid that Joseph will now seek to get revenge for the evil way they treated him when he was much younger. So the brothers make up a story telling Joseph that their father asked him to forgive the brothers for their actions of years ago.

Genesis 50:19-21 New Living Translation

¹⁹ But Joseph replied, “Don’t be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. ²¹ No, don’t be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.” So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.

This could be a story filled with anger and revenge. But instead it is filled with forgiveness and kind words for those who had treated him so badly in years past. He chose not to go down the path of revenge. Joseph had learned how to see hurts from the past in a new way. He points out that what his brothers meant for evil, God turned it into something good which resulted in the saving of many lives.

How difficult is it for you to see the potential for God to use hurts in your life as a path to helping other people?

3. Moses

Anger became a major problem in the life of this man who rose to become the leader of the nation of Israel. He led them out of Egypt after a massive showdown between God's power and Pharaoh. Even though Moses was doing God's will every step of the way, he still had an anger problem.

Nine different plagues came on the nation of Egypt because Pharaoh refused to let Israel leave. When Moses finished his announcement of the next plague, which would result in the death of the firstborn of every Egyptian family, the Bible says, “Then burning with anger, Moses left Pharaoh.” (Exodus 11:8 New Living Translation)

Some months later God called Moses up to the top of Mount Sinai where God gave him the Ten Commandments. However, when he came down to the bottom of the mountain, he found the nation had abandoned God, created their own god in the form of a golden calf, and they were celebrating with a wild party.

Exodus 32:19 New International Version

When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.

On this occasion, the anger of Moses felt was similar to what God was feeling as well. Moses was angry that they had so quickly abandoned the God who had brought them out of Egypt in such a miraculous way.

Many years later, when Israel was still wandering in the desert, the people started arguing with Moses, complaining that they did not have any water. Moses went to God in prayer, but still allowed his anger to get out of control, and take him down a path that dishonored God

Numbers 20:7-12 New International Version

The LORD said to Moses,⁸ “Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink.”

⁹ So Moses took the staff from the LORD’s presence, just as he commanded him.¹⁰ He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?”¹¹ Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

¹² But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.”

Moses allowed his anger to take him down a path that dishonored God. First, Moses took credit for this miracle. He said, “Must we bring water out of this rock?” Second, he did not speak to the rock as God had instructed him. Instead he “struck the rock twice with his staff.”

What is amazing is that even though Moses was dishonoring God, God still performed the miracle and water came out of the rock to provide for all the people.

But God did not ignore Moses’ disobedience. God rebuked him and told him that because of this, Moses would not personally enter the new land that God had promised to the nation.

4. David

David was another person that God chose to use in a special way. As a young man he had been used by God to kill the giant named Goliath. In following years, David went through a lot of difficulties because King Saul was jealous of David's popularity. David had to run for his life because Saul tried to kill David more than once.

One time a neighbor named Nabal insulted some of David's men. (See 1 Samuel 25.) When David learned of how his men had been treated, he became so angry that he was on his way to kill Nabal and every other man working for Nabal. It was only the direct intervention of Nabal's wife that prevented David from carrying out his plans for revenge.

Here was David, a man who clearly had a deep love for God, yet he was so angry that he was ready to murder not only Nabal but also all of his servants. David was ready to kill innocent people—all in response to words of insults. Talk about a reaction that was too extreme! But is it any different today? How many fights and murders started out because of an insult?

Many years later David faced another difficult situation where Shimei was insulting him and throwing rocks at him. See 2 Samuel 16:5-15. David could have responded with anger and killed this man, but instead he chose to respond in a completely different way.

5. Jonah

The story of Jonah is best known for the three days he spent in the belly of a fish, and then he lived to tell the world about it. Jonah was an evangelist, but he had a problem. God wanted him to go and preach to Nineveh. But those people were not the friends of the Jews, in fact not much has changed even today. It would be very much the same if God called an evangelist from Israel to go to the capital of Iran or Iraq today and preach against the people of that city.

Jonah finally agreed to go to Nineveh after his 3 day ride in the belly of the fish. He goes and preaches, "Judgment is coming!" The people of the city do not kill Jonah—instead they listen to him, and repent—including the king. This was a huge city even when compared to the cities of today. There were over 120,000 young children, so this city could easily have had close to one million people.

This revival that swept through Nineveh was one of the greatest revivals recorded in the whole Bible. But Jonah was angry at God when the people repented.

Jonah 4:1-4 New International Version

¹ But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. ³ Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴ But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"

Jonah had just been used by God to bring a mighty revival to this city that impacted hundreds of thousands of people. Instead of rejoicing at their repentance, he is so angry he asks God to kill him. He says it would be better to die than to live.

So why would God use such a messed up evangelist like Jonah? I don't know. But the fact is, God did choose to use Jonah, and God accepted the prayers of repentance of the people of Nineveh and did not bring judgment on the city.

So what lessons should we take from these famous people in the Bible? Some people look at these stories and use them as an excuse to justify their own anger. But that is not why these stories are in the Bible. Instead, they are put there as examples for us, so we can learn from their strengths and their weaknesses, and hopefully avoid the mistakes they made.

C. What makes God get angry?

When you look at all the verses in the Bible that talk about anger, about half of them are talking about God! Wow, does God have an anger problem? No! So why does the Bible talk about God's anger?

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible presents a clear picture of God and how he uses his anger. Even with all his problems, Jonah understood God.

Jonah 4:2 New International Version

I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

God is slow to become angry. He is not temperamental like some people, who easily get angry at the slightest thing. Over and over we see the compassion and kindness of God expressed to those who do not deserve such treatment.

So what makes God get angry?

Hebrews 3:10 New International Version

So I was angry with them, and I said, "Their hearts always turn away from me. They refuse to do what I tell them."

God is speaking in Hebrews 3, and He explains why He gets angry with people, especially those who have been given the opportunity to learn about Him. He gets angry when they turn their hearts away from Him and refuse to obey Him.

God has rescued us from a death sentence that includes eternity in hell. And yet those who know this have still turned their backs on Him and rejected His love and His commands.

Does this mean God gets angry at you every time you sin? No, and Jonah 4:2 makes this clear—God is slow to become angry. But sin destroys all your potential to experience real life, real joy, real peace, real meaning in life. Because God loves you so much, He wants what is best

for you. And He is grieved when you allow other things to rob you of the best that He has for you.

Even though God expresses His anger toward sin, He loved us so much that He was still motivated to send Jesus to provide for our salvation.

In the next chapter we will take a closer look at how we can use our anger in ways that please God. You can have confidence in victory. You do not need to be a slave to your own anger. You can learn how to channel this emotion into a powerful and productive force in your life.

Chapter 4

How can I use my anger in a way that pleases God?

Chapter 2 laid out a plan to kill the destructive power of anger in your life as you give your personal rights to God. In Chapter 3 we looked at how Jesus and other people in the Bible used their anger. Now we need to find new ways to use our anger. The issues we will explore in this chapter could be a whole separate course. Some of these areas need continued growth for the rest of your life. In this chapter we will only introduce these ideas and give a quick overview of the potential for you to use anger in ways that please God.

God is not asking you to live a life with no anger. He created you with the ability to experience anger. But now you have to choose how you will use it. You cannot change your past, no matter how good or bad it was. But as you look at today and tomorrow, you now have the opportunity to change the way you will use anger in your daily living.

For most of us, that means we will have to learn how to put the brakes on what has been our normal way of responding with anger. Take a minute and create an imaginary movie in your mind. If anger is like a fire, then some of us are fire-breathing monsters! Every time we open our mouths in anger, we are starting fires. Our house is burning. People around us are burning. And when you look at your own body, you realize you, too, are on fire!

Learning to use your anger in a way that pleases God is not accomplished with one simple prayer. There are many steps in this new growing process. For most of us, one of the first steps in this new growth is to stop starting fires with our anger. Instead, you need to put out the fires that are burning down your house and everyone around you, including yourself. Once you have those fires under control, and have stopped starting new fires every time you open your mouth, then you can begin to take a look at using anger properly in your life.

A. Prepare for problems with this new decision to give your personal rights to God

Do not expect that giving your personal rights to God will solve all your problems. What you may soon discover is that this decision brings more problems into your life. But don't get discouraged—this is part of the reality of growing. Change is often painful, but you can have confidence that God will help you with each of these problems. If you will take the time to look

at the potential problems that lie ahead, you can prepare for them, and not be surprised when they show up in your life. So don't dread these problems, but prepare for them.

1. Win the battle with fear

Don't be surprised if you have a battle going on in your mind. Your thoughts are racing ahead—filled with fear over how others will abuse you and hurt you if you do not defend yourself. Give yourself a reality check-up. If you are feeling this fear on the inside—admit it! Then face it with God's truth.

Lots of Christians have surrendered their personal rights to God and they are not dead! God would not ask you to do something that would destroy you—well, maybe He would! You need God's help to destroy the old sinful way of living that has kept you from experiencing the real life that He has for you.

So if you give your personal rights to God, are you going to die? Not physically, but hopefully the old way of thinking that made anger such a destructive power in your life will die.

So instead of letting fear defeat you, take the hand of Jesus and trust Him to help you through each situation that you face for the rest of your life.

2. Don't condemn yourself every time you fail

Anger has been such a deeply rooted part of your life, that you will likely find yourself reacting with anger before you even realize it. Waves of condemnation may sweep over you as you realize one more time what a big failure you are.

Do not assume that God is pouring this condemnation on you. It is very likely the devil himself who is bringing this to you. The devil wants you to give up, and condemnation is one of the best ways he can discourage you.

Romans 8:1-2 New Living Translation

¹ So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ²And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.

God loves you even when you fail. John Maxwell has written a book entitled, *Failing Forward: Turning Mistakes into Stepping Stones for Success*. You need to learn from your failures, and keep growing.

3. You will still feel anger

The feeling of anger will still pop up inside you when you face problems in your daily activities. Giving your personal rights to God does not stop you from feeling anger. The real test is what you will do—how you will respond—now that you realize you are feeling anger on the inside.

You must take responsibility for your anger and choose your response. Don't allow yourself to think, "You make me angry!" When you think that, you are giving this person control of your emotions. Don't give your personal rights to other people, give them to God.

If you simply hide your anger—especially from yourself—or stuff it down inside—then you have not solved your anger problem. You need to release this anger in ways that will please God. We will cover this in more detail later in this chapter.

4. You will see others with their anger problem

When you begin working on your own anger, you will likely be more aware of how other people are using their anger. Be very careful about using other people as your mentor in this area. You need to make sure they are using their anger in ways that please God.

There are many Christians in leadership positions who use their anger in destructive ways. Many of these leaders have not given their personal rights to God.

Do not assume that because they are being used by God, they are a good example to follow regarding how they use their anger. There are a lot of people like Jonah that God is using in powerful ways, but they still have an anger problem.

Fix your eyes on Jesus as the one to follow, and He will never disappoint you.

5. Don't "over-spiritualize" your anger

In learning new ways to use your anger, do not deceive yourself into taking the "quick fix" path. You need to be careful that you do not simply put a new layer of delusion on your destructive ways of using anger.

You can "over-spiritualize" your anger and justify your reactions and say, "I have given my personal rights to God, and now what I am feeling is 'righteous anger.' God wants me to show that I am displeased with that person, because they deserved what I gave them."

But is this the Holy Spirit at work in your life? Or is it simply your old personal rights dressed up in a new set of clothes—called delusion?

What you may need to do is lay down your anger and develop new ways of responding before you take up anger again.

There may be lots more problems in addition to the five listed above. Keep pressing on in your commitment to follow Jesus in this area of your life and you will begin to see change—real change—positive change. And yes, you will still face more problems!

B. First steps to new growth

You can experience real change in how your anger fits into your daily life. Here are some steps to growth that you can begin immediately. Some may come easy to you—others may be very difficult and take a long time to master. The important thing is that you get started—today!

1. Fill your mind with God's truth on anger

The Bible talks about anger from Genesis to Revelation—over 600 times. You need to find verses that tell you how God wants you to use your anger. Study these verses. Memorize ones that speak to your life. Then meditate on those verses on a daily basis.

Let God's teachings about anger fill your mind. Keep reviewing these on a daily basis, looking for ways to use them in the situations you face. See the box below which gives some examples of the verses that talk about anger.

You may want to make a list of the things that trigger your anger. Then look for verses in the Bible that can help you respond in a new way.

The words anger, angry, rage, wrath, and similar words are used over 600 times in the Bible. Here are a few of the verses that teach us important lessons about anger.

Psalm 103:8 New International Version

The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.

Proverbs 12:16 New Living Translation

A fool is quick-tempered, but a wise person stays calm when insulted.

Proverbs 16:32 New International Version

Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.

Proverbs 19:11 New Living Translation

Sensible people control their temper; they earn respect by overlooking wrongs.

Proverbs 19:19 New Living Translation

Hot-tempered people must pay the penalty. If you rescue them once, you will have to do it again.

Proverbs 22:24-25 New Living Translation

²⁴ Don't befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, ²⁵ or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul.

Ephesians 4:26-27 New Living Translation

²⁶ And "don't sin by letting anger control you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

Ephesians 4:31 New Living Translation

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.

James 1:19-21 New Living Translation

¹⁹ Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. ²⁰ Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. ²¹ So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.

2. Daily commitment to lay down your personal rights

Giving your personal rights to God is not a one-time event. It must become a daily process of putting off the old way of living and putting on the new.

Begin each day with a new commitment to put God first in this area of using your anger. Tell God that you want to give Him all your personal rights, and that you want Him to show you if there are more that you need to surrender to Him.

You may want to specifically pray about those areas where you have the greatest problems with your anger. Don't promise God that you will never get angry again. Instead, renew your commitment to follow Jesus, no matter how many times you get angry today.

At the end of the day, you may want to take a few minutes and reflect back on your day. Did you use your anger? If so, what caused you to get angry? You may want to review the Bible verses on anger and see how these speak to that situation.

If you know that you fell short of God's best, then re-live that situation in your mind, asking God to help you see how you could have responded differently. Make a commitment to seek God's help for what you will face tomorrow. Then go to sleep in peace, knowing that God will help you every step of the way.

3. Decide to stop allowing anger to control you

As you look at each new day, there may be many situations where in the past you would have used your anger in response to what is happening. One of the big choices you have to make each day is deciding to stop using your anger as you did in the past, if you are going to break its destructive power in your life.

Bob Newhart has done a humorous 5 minute video, playing the part of a psychologist treating people with problems. His solution is simple—he tells them to “Stop it!” You can see it on YouTube. This comedy contains a very simple truth—we do need to stop using the response patterns and the thought patterns we have used in the past.

But simply telling yourself to “Stop It!” usually does not complete the change process needed. It will take many steps of building new response patterns, and God is ready to help. But one of the strategies that can help you move in the direction God wants you to go is to say, “Stop It!” when you find yourself starting to react with anger—going back to the old ways.

The Bible has a lot to say about the importance of keeping our anger under control. Here are three verses that talk about this.

Proverbs 29:11 New International Version

A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.

1 Corinthians 6:12 New International Version

I will not be mastered by anything.

James 1:20 New International Version

For man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

We need to stop anything that prevents us from growing in the way God desires us to grow. Ask yourself this question: “What do I need to do to develop the righteous life that God wants me to develop?” Anger will not get you there! You must choose new ways of responding to these daily situations, ways that do help you develop this new lifestyle that God desires you to have.

4. Set as your goal to be slow to become angry

One of the new ways God wants us to use our anger is to slow down! The Bible says that God is slow to become angry. And that is how He wants us to respond as well.

James 1:19-20 New International Version

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,²⁰ for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

God tells us three things here about the new response pattern He wants us to use.

1. “Everyone should be quick to listen.”
2. We should be “slow to speak.”
3. We should be “slow to become angry.”

You could call these God’s three basic steps of anger management. All three of these are choices that you make—hard choices. Each one of these steps is the opposite of how most people respond when angry.

Let’s take a closer look at these anger management steps.

a. Everyone should be quick to listen

When we get angry, most of us are quick to speak and slow to listen!

God wants you to be quick to listen—but to what? To whom? You might be saying, “Well, God wants me to listen to the other person.”

But is that really going to prevent you from getting angry—especially if they are saying mean and hurtful things to you?

The most important way you can apply this truth in your life is to be “quick to listen to God” when you are faced with an anger issue. Send an emergency prayer to heaven saying, “God, I need your help right now! Help me to hear what You are saying to me about how I should respond to this situation!”

Don’t expect to hear a booming voice from heaven or see angels with flashing swords appear at your side. Instead ask God to help you remember the verses in the Bible that will help you respond to this situation.

And yes, do listen to the other person, but at the same time squeeze tightly to the hand of Jesus as you listen, and realize that Jesus is right there with you to help you respond in the right way.

b. Everyone should be slow to speak

We get ourselves into all kinds of trouble by what we say when we are angry. God doesn’t tell you to just shut up and say nothing. Instead He tells you to learn to be slow to speak when you are angry.

This may go against your whole life history of responding when angry. Usually our anger takes control of our mouth and we have plenty to say to the other person.

So how do you begin to make this change in your life? You may want to use three words—STOP—THINK—PRAY! Or maybe you should stop, pray, think. Stop—keep your mouth shut. It’s your mouth—take responsibility for it.

Think—what?

1. First, realize you are walking into a dangerous situation—not because of what the other person will do to you, but because of how you normally respond when you are angry.
2. Tell yourself, “I need to choose my response carefully, not just react with anger.” Do not surrender control of your brain to your emotion of anger.
3. You need to stay in control of your thoughts—so tell your brain to THINK! Don’t let it shift into auto-pilot and allow anger to jump into the driver’s seat.
4. Choose your words carefully. If you do not trust yourself to talk with this person right now, then tell them that you want to talk about this later. This may give both of you time to calm down. It can also give you time to plan how to respond to this person.

c. Everyone should be slow to become angry

Learning how to become angry slowly—now that is going to take some serious learning and growth for most of us!

Part of the answer to this will be covered in the next part of this chapter where we talk about developing new skills in responding to situations where we used anger in the past. But realize this—God would not tell you to be slow to become angry unless it was something that could be done.

If you are going to learn to be slow to become angry, then one step is to learn how to “turn on” your emotion of anger, rather than letting it turn on automatically. Your emotions can be controlled. You can laugh with joy when something good happens to you, or you can choose to be sad when someone tells you of a loss they have experienced. Your thoughts can be used to trigger your emotions.

But for most of us, anger is the “bully” of our emotions. It doesn’t ask permission to act out, it just pops out whenever it feels like it. Why? Because we have given it this freedom for so many years in our life.

The best way to be slow to become angry is to choose a different response as the starting point of responding to this situation. One of the ways to do this is to tell yourself, “I will not use anger as my first response to this situation.” You are telling anger to sit down, until you tell it to stand up. You then choose to use some other thought as the first response to this situation—such as, I will pray and listen to God. Or I will keep my mouth shut. Just as anger is a powerful tool, so silence is a powerful tool.

When David was running for his life because of the civil war that had broken out in his country, Shimei was throwing rocks and dirt at David and cursing at him. One of David’s generals asked if he could go up and kill this man, but David said “no.”

2 Samuel 16:11-12 New Living Translation

¹¹ Then David said to Abishai and to all his servants, “My own son is trying to kill me. Doesn’t this relative of Saul have even more reason to do so? Leave him alone and let him curse, for the LORD has told him to do it. ¹² And perhaps the LORD will see that I am being wronged and will bless me because of these curses today.”

David could have reacted to Shimei with anger and said, “This man has no right to be showing such disrespect to me—I am the king!” But instead of holding on to his personal right to be respected, David chose to respond with a thought that protected him from using his anger in a destructive way—he started with the thought that God may have told Shimei to do this. David was willing to allow God to use anyone to speak into his life—even if they were doing it disrespectfully.

James 1:20 says that our “anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” (NIV) This is not saying we can never get angry ever again in our life. It is more a statement of what normally happens in our lives. When we get angry, rarely do we see this anger drawing us closer to God. Rarely does it produce in us the righteous life that God desires.

Our anger usually takes us down a path of self-protection, a path of revenge, a path of our personal rights where we are saying to the one who offended us, “You have no right to do what you did to me!”

5. Develop new skills for responding to situations where you used anger in the past

Just as you have developed your anger skills over the past years of your life—now you must develop new skills to use instead of using anger. This will be a huge challenge.

You need to develop a whole new way of living when it comes to anger in your life.

1. New thought responses
2. New emotional responses
3. New action responses
4. New speaking responses
5. New looks—not the anger look of “I could kill you!” but a different look.

All of these areas need your attention. You need to take God’s Word and begin to look for practical ways to respond to those situations where you used anger in the past.

1. Patience instead of anger
2. Looking to God when insulted instead of responding with anger
3. Looking to understand others instead of retaliation and revenge

4. Blessing those who curse you
5. Praying for those who spitefully use you
6. Growing closer to Jesus instead of getting even with others
7. Building others up instead of tearing them down
8. Becoming a peace-maker instead of fighting
9. Forgiving instead of becoming bitter
10. Being quick to listen instead of being quick to get angry
11. Giving a soft answer instead of shouting in anger

This list could be much longer, but you can begin to get an idea of some of the different responses that you can focus on as your growth priorities.

For most of us, choosing to use one of these new responses will take much more than a simple decision of “I will respond in _____ (this new way).” It will be a long hard process to develop skill in using this new response instead of anger. God will give you wisdom and power to use these new responses.

So where should you start?

One of the best places to start is to make a list of the areas where you have the greatest problems with anger. Look for verses in the Bible that will help you respond in a new way.

Another approach is to make a list of the personal rights that have been most important to you, and then set goals on how you will respond the next time someone breaks that old rule of yours. You can use Study Guide Project 8, “*Developing new response patterns,*” to help you in this process.

How we handle conflict is one area where many of us need to develop new ways of responding without anger. Because this is such a big problem, it deserves special attention.

6. Develop new patterns of responding to conflict

Conflict situations often trigger anger. If you are going to learn how to use your anger in a way that honors God, you will have to learn new ways of responding to conflict. This is a whole new study course by itself, and there are many books written on this subject as well.

If conflict has been one of the main triggers for anger in your life, then you will need to give special attention to rejecting your old response patterns and developing new ways of responding.

7. Celebrate small victories

You will have plenty of failures as you seek to develop new ways of responding instead of using your anger. So take time to celebrate small steps of progress! Don't demand perfection out of yourself. If you only got angry 5 times today instead of 8 times yesterday, celebrate! You are moving in the right direction!

Thank God each day for the help He is providing. Stand on the promises of God, even if it is not a reality in your life today. Read James 1:19 and say, "This is the person I am becoming, and I celebrate that today!"

Celebrate each time you are able to use a new response pattern in your daily activities.

8. Use anger as your "alarm clock"

Just as you use an alarm clock to wake you up in the morning, use anger as an "alarm clock" that will trigger this thought—"I need to give attention to how I respond right now!" Are you simply falling back to your old way of reacting to a problem? Or are you ready to respond in a new way—a way that will honor God? Is your anger a signal that you are holding on to a personal right that needs to be given to God?

Using anger as your alarm clock is a way of telling yourself, "Wake up! Pay attention! You are facing a situation where your anger wants to control your response!" Instead of hitting the snooze button, and giving anger control of the moment, you need to focus your thoughts on how God wants you to respond to this situation.

9. Choose new rules for living your life

With your old way of living, your personal rights were often closely tied to your anger. As one new Christian stated, "These were my rules for everyone else to obey. But those rules were often violated, and then I got angry."

When you give your personal rights to God, this does not mean you live with no rules in your life. You still have rules, but they are not the rules you make for your life. Now you must choose to fully submit to God and the rules He has for you.

These are not God's rules that you enforce on others—these are God's rules that you will use on yourself. As you face each daily situation, you will ask, "God, how do you want me to respond?" The way He wants you to respond may seem stupid compared to the ways you responded in the past. But if you will fully embrace God's way of responding, it will produce in you the new lifestyle—the new Jesus-style of living that pleases Him.

Your focus will not be to get others to respond the way God wants them to respond. Instead you will focus on yourself—your responses—no matter how the other person responds.

Psalm 119:11 New International Version

I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

It takes more than memorizing this verse—you must commit to making it your heart’s desire to not sin against God. When you take God’s truth and deeply embed it in your heart, it will be your guide in responding to each situation you face. Is this easy? Absolutely not! Is it possible? “With God nothing is impossible!”

So what are these rules God has for me?

Some deal with anger: James 1:19-20, Ephesians 4:27-27, Proverbs 29:11, Proverbs 15:1, Proverbs 22:24

Other scriptures show what I need to use in my life instead of getting angry. See 1 Corinthians 13, Ephesians 4, Colossians 3, Galatians 5, and Romans 12.

Take a minute and look back over this list of 9 specific things (pages 40-48) you can do as some of the first steps to growth in learning how to use your anger in a way that pleases God. Which ones do you think will help you the most with your anger? Pick one or two of these and begin using them in your life today. As you make these a part of your responses every day, you will begin to see change come into your life.

The next three issues we will look at are going to take more time to master. Each one is an essential area of growth and understanding if you are going to see long-term change in your life. Let’s take a closer look at three priorities God has for us to help us grow to become the men and women He wants us to be.

C. Develop positive character qualities in your life

One of the most powerful ways for you to overcome the destructive effects of anger in your life is to focus on developing positive inward qualities, also called character qualities. These are the qualities that will give us the strength to control our emotion of anger and use it in a positive way.

These character qualities are not just for anger management. They are essential building blocks in your life so you can become the strong, mature Christian God wants you to be. As you develop these character qualities, they will bring balance into your life, and they will equip you to be successful in doing what God has called you to do in your life.

So what are these character qualities that God wants you to develop? Here are several scriptures that give lists of character qualities that God wants us to develop.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

2 Peter 1:5-7 gives a list of 8 qualities we need to develop in our life. God gives a wonderful promise as you develop these qualities in your life.

2 Peter 1:8-10 New Living Translation

⁸ The more you grow like this, the more productive and useful you will be in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ But those who fail to develop in this way are shortsighted or blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their old sins.

¹⁰ So, dear brothers and sisters, work hard to prove that you really are among those God has called and chosen. Do these things, and you will never fall away.

In the *Character Qualities Class*, which is part of the *Personal Studies for New Christians*, there are 49 character qualities listed. All of these are important for you to develop in your life. Needless to say, you will not become an expert at all 49 in one week. But as you work to make these a part of your life, they will provide you with new ways of responding to those situations where anger was your response in the past.

D. Learn the difference between personal responsibilities and personal rights

1. What is a personal responsibility?

Everything you do or want to do is not a personal right. Some things are responsibilities—something you have been given to do, or something you must do. In giving your personal rights to God you must not make the mistake of giving Him your personal responsibilities. Here are examples of people giving their responsibilities to God:

1. I gave God my “personal right” to protect my apartment, so I never lock my doors or windows any more.
2. I gave God my “personal right” to pass my tests, so I don’t study any more.
3. I gave God my “personal right” to discipline my children, so I never correct them when they disobey.

In each of these three cases, the people were not giving God their personal rights—they were giving Him one of their personal responsibilities. You must be careful to give God your personal rights, but keep and fulfill your personal responsibilities.

Are you still confused on this? Personal rights are rules that you made which you want other people to obey. Personal responsibilities are things or jobs that have been assigned to you by someone who has the authority to tell you what to do.

You may find it helpful to make a list of all your personal responsibilities. This may include responsibilities given to you by God in the Bible, or responsibilities given you by family members, employers, teachers, community leaders, etc. Here are some groups under which you can list your personal responsibilities:

God	your leaders
your church	your friends
your family	your work

Learning to be responsible in all areas of living is a challenge that will face you for the rest of your life. God will help you as you look to Him. Anger may be a major battleground for many weeks, but God is ready to help. Don't look for excuses to justify your irresponsible behavior.

2. Do I have the right to protect myself and others from danger and abuse?

One new Christian asked, "If I give my personal rights to God does that mean that I no longer have the right to protect myself and my children from my abusive husband?"

This lady does not have a personal right to protect herself and her children—she has a personal responsibility to protect herself and her children from danger and abuse. Giving your personal rights to God does not mean that God wants you to let other people abuse you.

You have a God-given responsibility to protect yourself from those who would try to abuse you. How you go about protecting yourself and others may require the help of someone who can give you good advice.

Don't be surprised if some Christians tell you that you should stay in that abusive situation and "just forgive them and trust God." You need to reject that advice. You need to seek help from someone who can direct you in the proper steps to take to protect yourself and your children. You need to pray and take action to get out of that abusive situation.

You may want to talk to your teacher about the *Committed to Freedom* curriculum or visit the website: www.committedtofreedom.org for more helps on how to handle abuse.

E. Develop boundaries

If you are going to grow into the balanced mature person that God wants you to be, then you need to develop boundaries in your life. At first glance this may sound a lot like personal rights. But they are not the same.

Personal rights are rules that I make which I want you to obey. Boundaries are rules that I make for myself to obey.

Boundaries are really God-given responsibilities not personal rights. These boundaries will help protect us in relationships. They are not rules that rob us of freedom. Instead boundaries provide a safe place where we can do all that God wants us to do.

An example of a boundary is to stay away from a person who has a big anger problem.

Proverbs 22:24-25 New Living Translation

**Don't befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people,
²⁵ or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul.**

These boundaries can protect you from situations that are high risk where you may be tempted to get angry. These boundaries can also protect you from going down a path where you say or do something that will cause another person to get angry at you.

There is a series of books on the issue of boundaries written by Henry Cloud and John Townsend. You may want to start with the one entitled, *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life*. This will provide you with excellent teaching on how to make boundaries a positive part of your life. They have also written books on boundaries for your marriage, for your teens, and boundaries for singles.

F. Use your anger in a way that pleases God

So when can a new Christian use their anger in a way that pleases God? That's a good question with no simple answer. But it's not so much about time as it is about growth—getting to the place where God can trust you to respond in a way that will honor Him.

Earlier in this book we looked at how God created us—He gave us the emotion of anger. Most of us have allowed anger to become a destructive power in our lives. It's hard work to change those old response patterns of anger. But God has promised to help us grow, and His power is more than enough to give us the strength we need to change. Here are several different examples of how you can use your anger in ways that will honor God.

1. Learn how to respond with anger instead of reacting with anger

Angry reactions became such a part of our life that we hardly gave any thought to them. "That's just the way I am," stated one young man. The truth is—we all learned our anger responses.

One of the ways we can please God with our anger is to use it carefully and intentionally, with one eye on Jesus and one eye on the situation at hand. We need to understand how Jesus wants us to use our anger. We must put our own agenda to the side, and be willing to do what Jesus has called us to do.

If you choose carefully and intentionally to use your anger in a way that will please God, then you may be using it far less often than you have in the past.

Another benefit of learning how to carefully respond with anger is that you can set a good example to others around you of how to use anger in a way that honors God. This is especially important if you have children. They need to see you as a parent who puts God first in this area of your life. They need to see that anger can be used in a constructive way, not just for selfish destructive purposes.

2. When you do become angry, don't hold grudges

Anger is a powerful emotion, and we need to be careful to use it carefully and not let it get out of control. When you do use your anger, you need to quickly get over it. The Bible says to make sure you resolve before sundown the situation that caused you anger. This may mean that you learn to forgive quickly the one who offended you.

Ephesians 4:26-27 New Living Translation

And “don't sin by letting anger control you.” Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

Holding on to anger gives bitterness a chance to take root in your heart, and soon anger is controlling your heart instead of you controlling your anger.

Getting over your anger quickly and showing love and acceptance toward the other person lets them know that you value them even though you were angry with them.

3. Channel your anger into something positive

Anger is an emotion that is charged with lots of energy. You need to find ways to release it without sinning. For some people this involves physical exercise, sports, or just getting out for a walk.

Jesus provided a great example of how anger can be turned into something positive. In Mark 3:1-6, Jesus felt anger toward the religious leaders who were in the service with him. But Jesus did not retaliate against these men—instead He went ahead and healed the man with a withered hand.

Jesus did not allow His anger to keep Him from doing what God wanted Him to do.

In the Old Testament, David faced lots of frustrations. A number of the Psalms are prayers that David prayed, asking God to wipe out his enemies. Yet David did not get up from praying and send his generals into battle. He waited on God to direct him. You may want to develop the discipline of talking to God about the things that make you angry.

4. Bring God into your stressful situations

Another way you can honor God with your anger is to develop the skill of bringing God into your daily situations that are filled with stress. As you develop the discipline of immediately turning to God in these stress situations, you will find that He is ready to give you wisdom on how to respond.

There may be some of these situations where God wants you to respond with anger as the best way to communicate God's heart toward those involved in this situation. For example, if you have a friend or family member that is making unwise decisions, and heading down a path of sin, God may want you to choose the response of anger as a way of getting their attention and helping to break through the delusion that is blinding them to God's truth.

5. Become a peace-maker for others who are angry

One of the great ways that God wants to use you is to be a peace-maker with others who have not yet learned how to handle their anger in a way that pleases God. As you learn how to manage your own anger and use it carefully and appropriately God will see that He can trust you to help others.

When you serve as a peace-maker, you are usually working with people who are angry and hurt. They may not see anger as you do, and they may still be using it as a weapon to hurt those who are hurting them. You will have to learn how to work with angry people, yet at the same time not allowing their anger to make you angry.

6. God may give some of your personal rights back to you—but now they are privileges

As you demonstrate a heart to put God first in every area of your life, including how you use your anger, you may find God blessing you in unexpected ways. He may give some of your personal rights back to you, but they are no longer your personal rights—now they are privileges.

A privilege is a gift, a surprise, something you do not deserve or expect, something you cannot demand, an honor, something special.

So when another person shows respect to you, you can say to yourself, "I have no personal right to require this person to respect me, so I should not be surprised or upset if they do not show me respect." But if they do show you respect, you can respond with joy and thanksgiving to God for the privilege of being respected by this person.

Mark 10:29-31 New International Version

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children

and fields--and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. ³¹But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

You have no right to ask God to return to you the personal rights you gave Him. And God may give your friend or loved one a lot more privileges than you get. That's OK. God is the one who gives these, not because you have earned them, but simply as an expression of His love and trust in you.

If you do not expect or demand God to give back your personal rights, then you will not be disappointed or angry when He doesn't give them back.

Whenever God does give one of your personal rights back to you, then you should respond to God with the character quality of gratefulness.

Conclusion

This course on anger and personal rights is probably one of the most challenging ones you will face in a long time. If you have made the decision to give your personal rights to God, then you can expect God to help you with each step you need to take in the days ahead to learn how to use your anger in a way that pleases God.

Probably the biggest challenge for you will be to keep your eyes fixed on Jesus instead of going back to your old familiar patterns of anger response. As you commit to a life-long goal of using your anger in a way that honors God, you are choosing to go down a path that will bring you closer to Jesus. We need to have the same attitude that Paul had when he talked about his life.

Philippians 3:13-14 New Living Translation

¹³ No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

As you follow Paul's example, and continue to seek God's help, and study God's word, you can experience the rich full life that God has for you.