

## **THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO ANGER 8.20.23**

Based on Ephesians 4:26-27

This is the third and final installment of our August sermon series on anger. Today: What is the appropriate Christian response to anger?

We are living in the Age of Rage. These are angry and fearful times. The growing frequency of mass shootings where violent fantasies come to life. Rage drenched political discourse in a slash and burn political climate. (And it will only get worse with the upcoming election year.)

Societies in general are violent and hierarchical places. Good people like us have want society to be less violent and hierarchical and we work at that, but we never actually succeed. Today's anger is remarkable not in and of itself, but because it is so widespread and feels like the defining dominant cultural force.

For sure anger is more expressed these days. We are in an emotional cultural contagion. Another global outbreak, but instead of a virus it is vitriol. And there is an anger band-wagon effect. Someone expresses their anger which drives us to express our's as well...and the angry expressions grow.

Psychologically speaking, the important thing is not the emotion of anger, but what we do with the emotion. Whether we vet, process or suppress our anger. And the important consequence is not just for our own health, but for that of society as a whole. Unprocessed anger pollutes our social sphere. Every outburst legitimizes the next.

Because the effects of anger are so toxic and appalling, it is easy to conclude that anger is inherently bad in itself. But great social transformations, like the fight for women's suffrage or the United States civil rights movement, or the current growing awareness to prevent human trafficking all occurred because some of us got mad enough to speak out and channel our anger to aid society.

One good way to take the edge off your own anger is ask yourself: Is my anger actually going to help the situation I'm angry about? Because if you want to assuage your anger or other people's anger or the destructive effects of anger in the world at large, the only meaningful course is to do something concrete, however modest, do something tangible in ways that will improve the situation, rather than fueling the cycle of anger. Anger can be the start of something. But you need the something.

What is anger? Anger is an emotional state that varies in intensity, from mild irritation to intense rage. Like other emotions, it is accompanied by physiological and biological changes.

When you get angry, your heart rate and blood pressure go up, as do the levels of your energy hormones, adrenaline and noradrenaline.

Anger can be caused by both external and internal events. You could be angry at a specific person, such as a coworker or supervisor at work. Angry at an event like a traffic jam or a canceled flight. Or your anger could be caused by brooding and worrying about your personal problems. Memories of traumatic events can trigger angry feelings.

The instinctive, natural way to express anger is to respond aggressively. Anger is a natural, adaptive response to threat and it inspires powerful, often aggressive feelings and behaviors.

Anger allows us to fight and defend ourselves when attacked. A certain amount of anger is necessary to survive.

Anger management encourages us to not suppress our anger, but to express it constructively. The goal of managing our anger is to reduce our emotional feelings and the physiological arousal anger causes. You can't get rid of or avoid the things and people that enrage you, nor can you change them. But you can learn to control your reactions.

Is it good to "let it all hang out?" Psychologists say this is a dangerous myth. Some of us use this let it all out method as a license to lash out and hurt others. It might make us feel better, but researchers have found that letting it rip actually escalates the anger instead of reducing it.

Aggression does nothing to help you or the person you're angry with resolve the situation. It is best to find out what is triggering you and then develop strategies to keep those triggers from pushing you over the edge.

Uncontrolled anger takes a toll on both your health and your relationships, even your relationship with God. Today, let us consider ten anger management tips.

- 1) Think before you speak. In the heat of the moment, it's so easy to say something you will later regret. Take a few moments to collect your thoughts before saying anything. And allow for others involved in the situation to do the same.
- 2) Once you're calm, express your concerns. Once you are thinking clearly, express your frustration in an assertive but nonconfrontational way. State your concerns and needs clearly and directly, without hurting others or trying to control them.
- 3) Get some exercise. Physical activity reduces stress. If you feel your anger escalating, go for a walk or spend some time doing an enjoyable physical activity and blow off some steam.
- 4) Take a time out. Timeouts are not just for children. Give yourself short breaks especially during those times of the day that tend to be stressful. This will help you be better prepared to handle what's ahead without getting irritated and angry.
- 5) Identify possible solutions. Instead of focusing on what made you mad, work on resolving the issue at hand. Be realistic about what you can and cannot change. Your anger won't fix anything and usually only makes the situation worse.
- 6) Stick with "I" statements. Placing blame and criticizing only increases tension. Instead, use "I" statements to describe the problem. Be specific and respectful. Here's the difference: Say "I'm upset that you left the table without offering to help with the cleanup" instead of "You never do any housework."
- 7) Don't hold a grudge. This is a killer, literally. Many a relationship has been killed by holding a grudge. Forgiveness is a powerful tool. If you allow anger to crowd out positive feelings, you will find yourself swallowed up by your own bitterness and sense of injustice. Forgiving someone who angered you might help you both learn from the situation and strengthen your relationship.
- 8) Use humor to release the tension. Lighten up, diffuse the tension. Avoid sarcasm, though. Sarcasm only hurts feelings and makes things worse.
- 9) Of course, pray. Breathe deep, talk with God. Share your anger with God and ask for God's help with your anger and the specific situation.
- 10) Know when to seek help. Learning to control anger is a challenge. Seek help for your anger if your anger is often out of control. Don't allow your anger to do things you regret or hurt those around you. It may be time to seek professional help, a therapist, a counselor, your church staff.

This sermon is on our Facebook page and there's a copy of the manuscript on our website if you'd like to have these ten steps.

In the New Testament Book of Ephesians (4:26-27) we are told, "Be angry but do not sin." This means that we can express our anger in positive ways, without letting anger turn into hatred or revenge. The Bible encourages us to be slow to anger because God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Psalm 103:1.) That means that we should think before we react in moments of frustration or rage, always seeking to show love.

Since we live by God's Spirit, we have a different perspective on all things, even our anger. The things people do to us don't need to have a debilitating effect on us.

When something happens that angers us, our spirits should rise up as we try to respond in love. We are encouraged to forgive just as God in Christ and has forgiven us.

And we need to forgive people as much for our sake as for theirs. Live like the person God created you to be. Clothe yourself with compassion and patience.

Our example is always Jesus. We think of His attitude and actions as He went to the cross. When they were hurling insults at Him and striking Him, He made no threats and did not respond. He entrusted Himself to God.

Like Jesus, let us stop focusing on ourselves and our angry judgments and instead submit to God's judgment. Like Jesus, regardless of what is inflicted upon us, anger is not the response God desires.

We never end up with God's best or our best when we say and do things out of anger. Let us be slow to speak, responding with the love of Christ, showing compassion, always refusing to be dominated by anger. Amen.