

Problem Thinking & the Lord's Healing: Anger

In this series Problem Thinking and God's Healing, today we discuss anger. Anger is sometimes so common that we do not think of it as a problem. Bible Studies often stress Ephesians 4:26 be angry and sin not as a way to help us acknowledge it. Many times, it is said that forgiveness is not for the other person, but for oneself. These are true and not to be discounted, but we are also told to not let anger control us, that it gives the devil a foothold, to get rid of it and put it away. (Eph. 4, Col 3). It certainly affects both the angry person and any person who it is directed at. In fact, the harm anger does to relationships is so strong it wounds and breaks them.

Looking over more verses about anger, these ideas stand out. Anger can, but should not be nursed; can tempt us to say things that are harmful; involves other emotions; is related to un-forgiveness. Hard hearts and wickedness cause God to be angry. Redemption frees us from His anger and ours. Worship, confession, prayer and thanksgiving can play important roles in this freedom.

When anger is not resolved or it is nursed, it can turn into resentment or bitterness which hardens our hearts and taints everything we see. Anger seeks to separate us from the object that we are angry at. It drives us from something and to something. If we are striving to be free from it, noting what we are being driven from and/or driven to can help calm us and makes us more aware of the consequences and how it is affecting our relationships. Is our anger negative or positive? Does it drive us from something we truly do not want in a positive sense or as we are separating from that, are we also letting it drive us from what we want and need. When we have a need and it is not met, pain and frustration can increase to anger. Sorting out the need and the way it can be met in a healthy way, and trying to understand the other person can give a better perspective that helps us choose better interactions. In this way we can reach and keep what we need. In the long run anger is decreased.

When we are angry, it is really important to watch our words. We are responsible for and need to not let anger cause us to speak negatively about others. When we are angry, we can become not sensitive to others. Calling someone good for nothing is bad, but calling them a fool puts us in danger of God's judgement. (Matthew 5) The translation of fool in this context comes from the Hebrew word moros and includes concepts of dull, brainless, stupid, dull, without edge, lacking a grip on reality, mentally inert, and, not all there. (Strong's concordance, helps word studies) Anyone who has been called these can attest to the pain and psychological damage it brings to those who believe it. (Matt. 5, Eph. 4 & 6) Angry words may cause the other person to act the way you want them to but it does not bring the closeness God intends or that we need. James 1:19-20 says "My dearly loved brothers, understand this: Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for man's anger does not accomplish God's righteousness."

The things Christ was angry at were lack of pity, stubborn, stony or hard hearts, lack of repentance, un-forgiveness, and people not accepting his invitation. (Matthew 18:33, Mark 3:5, Luke 14:21) We are warned that living self-seeking lives, living wickedly, disobeying the truth, having out bursts of anger and provoking children to anger can cause separation and God's wrath. (Gal. 5 Eph. 5 & 6, Col 3)

In his teaching on Emotions that Destroy, Chip Ingram makes the point that anger is what covers many other emotion's such as shame, unmet expectations, exhaustion or insecurity [and several others]. This can be noted when looking at several translations. Christ's anger and sorrow were described as He made noise or groaned in his spirit and was, deeply moved in his spirit, deeply troubled, troubled within himself, chafed, sighed & was disturbed, terribly upset, touched, and was distressed, angry in his spirit, deep anger welled up in him, sad in his heart, visibly distressed, enraged in the spirit and stirred himself, within himself, perturbed, greatly disturbed in spirit and grieved. Neshamah – breath, blast that breathes inspiration, soul, and spirit. These words reflect what He identifies with. His redemption gives us new identities and new things to identify with.

Just telling someone they should not be angry is not enough and may make them angrier. So, what is the antidote? Recognizing Christ's redemption and work in us is key. Keeping in mind our relationship with Him and how our relationship with others affects Him is critical. Worship, prayer, directing our desires, confession and thanksgiving all play a part.

Talk to God about your anger and about what you are angry about. Remember that He changes our identity with His love. Knowing that He loves you and cares for you and that He puts other people in your path

and gives you His love for them is the foundation. Let Him replace the anger with kindness. Ephesians 4 speaks about our uniqueness and our unity, calling, and having soft hearts. Putting away the old, including falsehood, and speaking truth are addressed. Verse 30 (CV) says “and do not grieve or bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.” In verse 31 we are then instructed to “Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior”. And in 32 to “Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”

1 Thess. 5:8-10 (NLT) also reflects this. “But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation. For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us.” “Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever.”

Worshiping can take our focus from anger to Him. This changes our hearts. “...praying with hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy” (I Tim. 2:8), Trusting (Hebrews 11) and allowing God to accomplish what we want our anger to accomplish (James 1). In NLT this is worded “Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.” Directing anger at someone may change or control their behavior but will not produce the attitude or closeness we are looking for.

Hunger and thirst for righteousness and justice and you will be satisfied. (Matt. 5 NLT) How good it is to let that take the place of anger.

Confessing our sin brings forgiveness. Sometimes confession to God alone is enough. If that brings us calm when contemplating the subject that made us angry, that is good and may be enough. But there are times that we need to confess and pray with others. James 5 tells us that when we are sick, we are to call the elders for prayer and that with confession and effective prayer healing will come. Discussing the situation may help us untangle emotions and unmet needs showing themselves in anger. Finding God’s comfort and Godly ways to meet those needs will bring relief and blessing.

Sometimes anger needs to be resolved and thanksgiving replaces it naturally. Sometimes thanksgiving in itself can turn us away from anger. Once when Saul was angry about something, he had the task of preparing a message on thanksgiving. In the process of preparing and concentrating on thanksgiving his anger was gone. As he shared this with the residents in the service, I got a good laugh because one elderly lady in her wheelchair who did not have an “attitude of gratitude” pipes up, “You should be thankful she painted the wall and you did not have to!” About a year later I had the same experience. I was angry about something and had to prepare for Alanon’s gratitude night. In the process of working on gratitude my anger dissolved.

The verses about anger in Revelation talk of God’s wrath against evil. It is important that we know and avoid God’s wrath. How thankful we can be that Christ paid this price. (Romans 5)

For further work on this see also the Anger packet & Anger Packet Supplement

Questions for you from this lesson. 1. What do you struggle with being angry about?

2. What is the thing you are trying to separate from?
3. What are you trying to go towards and connect with?
4. Are there healthier ways you can work towards this goal?
5. Have you prayed about the situation you are angry about?
6. Have you prayed for the person or people involved?
7. The book of James tells us that if we cry out for wisdom God will not “upbraid” us but will give it. Have you cried out to God for wisdom around this situation or to understand these people? Have you asked Him to help you be clearheaded?
8. If man’s anger does not accomplish God’s righteousness, what does God want for this situation that will produce it?
9. How do grace, mercy and justice play into this?
10. What confessions do you need to make?
11. Are these ones that should be between you and God alone or should you confidentially confess to another person also? www.mecjailminsty.com 651-408-1300 mec@usfamily.net