

Five Keys to Managing Anger

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James said, "for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." (James 1:20). God's anger is always justified and is always expressed perfectly. Why? Because he's able to determine, without error, when a wrong has been committed. God never gets angry about a perceived injustice.

He never flies off the handle because of an imaginary evil. We, on the other hand, do that all of the time. In fact, I suspect all of us get angry at perceived wrongs or irritations, far more often than we do real ones. I know I do. And that's why we should lose our cool slowly--our anger never achieves the rightness of God's.

Jesus Lost His Cool Four Times

When we look at Jesus we find that even when wronged, he seldom got angry. In fact, there are only four instances in the gospels where he got mad--the two cleansings of the temple at the beginning and end of his ministry (John 2:13-25; Matthew 21:12-17), the time when the disciples prevented the children from coming to him (Mark 10:14), and when the religious leaders indicated it was unlawful for him to heal on a Sabbath (Mark 3:5).

The Greek word used in John 10:14 "I'm the good shepherd. I know My sheep and My sheep know Me,¹⁵ just as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father. I lay down My life for the sheep." toward the disciples. Whereas when Jesus looked at the Pharisees with "anger" a different word is used, "orge", which refers to anger as the strongest of all passions (W.E.

Vine, Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, (McLean, Virginia, MacDonald Publishing Company, p. 57)). Make no mistake about it, Jesus lost his cool and felt intense anger toward the hard-hearted Pharisees. Yet, in that same verse Mark notes that he felt "sympathy" or "grief" for the religious leaders.

Compassion Tempered His Anger

I'm curious, how often when you're mad do you feel compassion for the person you believe wronged you? If you're like me, not very often. I suspect it was his compassion that tempered Jesus' anger--he genuinely understood and cared for the people who repeatedly disrespected and slandered him.

He Entrusted Himself

But there's another reason why Jesus maintained his cool. In 1 Peter 2:23 we read, "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."

Instead of threatening those who crucified and mocked him, Jesus trusted his Father to right any wrongs. Too often I get angry because of insignificant wrongs. In those moments I become like the guy at the gym. I take it upon myself to confront the offender. Like the guy:

- Who darted into the parking spot I had been waiting for.
- Who has 15 items at the nine-item check-out line.
- Who closed the restaurant ten minutes early and wouldn't let me eat even though my family and I had driven across town to make it before ten.
- Who talk in the theater.
- Who drive slowly in the left lane of a freeway.
- Who let their kid kick on the back of my seat while flying.

All of these, and an endless list of similar offenses, are irrelevant. And even the big-time offenses we suffer could often best be handled by walking away and letting God set things right. But whether we walk away or confront, we need to process our anger quickly. Paul said we shouldn't even let the sun set on it. Why? Because unprocessed anger doesn't just go away. It festers and infects our mind with bitterness, rage and hatred. The devil delights in using our ill-will to accomplish his evil ends (Ephesians 4:27-28).

A Tight Spot

All of this puts us in a tight spot. I see clearly that anger is an issue that requires maturity to manage. We can lose our cool, but not control--easier for some men to say than to do. The steps that will help us do that are these:

1. When we feel our temperature rising we need to listen and seek understanding.
2. We need to perceive if the wrong was real or perceived.
3. We need to avoid acting on our initial impulse.
4. We need to be slow to speak--express our anger only after we've processed it and can speak and act redemptively.
5. In most cases we simply need to allow God to right any wrong.