

How to restrain your anger

Written by Bill Perkins

Jesus was 30-years-old when he first cleansed the temple. That means he had visited the temple during all of the Passovers since he was twelve. He repeatedly saw the money tables, herds of animals and crates of birds. He smelled the steaming dung, and heard the cacophony of mooing, bleating, and shouting. I suspect each time he entered the Temple the scene stoked his anger. Yet, he waited for years before saying anything. Instead, he gathered information and processed his anger with God.

Only Then

Jesus only expressed wrath after he had the facts and understood how worshippers were being ripped-off and his Father's house dishonored. Only then did he use a rope to drive out the cows, sheep, oxen and owners. Only then did he pour out the coins of the stunned money changers, flip over their tables and drive them out. To those selling doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" (John 2:16).

Anger Without Sinning

During the entire ordeal Jesus never lost control of himself. He expressed anger without sinning. He even showed restraint by ignoring the doves. Animals could be rounded up. Money picked up. But released doves would fly away, never to return.

Jesus' anger propelled him to right a wrong. But his actions weren't knee-jerk. Nor should ours be. It makes sense to remember the words of Solomon, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). Harsh words show disrespect and stoke anger. A wise person may lose their cool, but they're careful how they express it.

Swallow Your Words

With anger, it's a good idea to restrain your initial impulse. Swallow words. Walk away. Use the time to process your anger with God.

A Scathing Email

One day a friend said something that angered me. I immediately wrote a scathing email. And it felt good. I savored the wound my words would inflict. My argument was air tight with no wiggle room for escape.

But I didn't send it. Instead, I ran it past my wife and a friend. I rewrote it numerous times. Finally, with the rough edges sanded smooth and my anger under control, I sent a redemptive message. A few days later I called my friend and we had a healing conversation.

The outcome would have been different if I had sent the first draft.

Don't we all need to process and communicate anger with care? Isn't that why Solomon said, "A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control" (Proverbs 29:11). Losing your cool doesn't mean losing control.

When There's No Time

The problem is when you suffer or see disrespect or injustice, you may not have several days to process it. In that case, don't act on your initial impulse. If you can't act with grace . . . walk, or drive away. And then follow the Lord's lead. Process your anger with God.