

Dealing With Anger  
ValleyConneX Biblical Counseling Center  
Monthly Training Session  
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Our training began with a presentation by one of our counselors, Charles Dunning, and Mike with whom Charles had counseled about two years ago due to the presenting issue of anger. A physical altercation between Mike and his teenage son prompted Mike to seek counseling.

Mike revealed that he had had a problem with anger from the time he was a teenager. Angry outbursts or a desire for revenge had become a problem at home, work and in most of Mike's interactions with others. He revealed that he had become comfortable with his anger and saw it as a defining part of his identity. He also made an insightful observation that the anger skewed his view of reality as he interacted with others. This played out as perceiving hostility and/or ulterior motives from people which, most often, were not true.

As Charles and Mike began to work together, Mike expressed that he was not hopeful about the process and the early sessions seemed to justify his attitude. As the supervisor of our counseling ministry I (Pastor Larry) often debrief with our counselors. Charles shared how he came to me to talk about his sessions with Mike. I encouraged Charles to look past the presenting issue of anger to see what may be the heart issue exposing the anger. A short time after this, God revealed to Mike that he had a long history of unforgiveness. Mike shared that he had never before entertained the idea that unforgiveness is a sin. He also did not know how to forgive. Mike shared this revelation with Charles on a Wednesday evening. They realized that God was beginning to do a powerful work in Mike's heart. The next day both Charles and Mike received devotionals from two independent sources related to forgiveness. Both devotionals dealt with Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus' parable about the servant who was forgiven a huge debt by the king, but who refused to forgive another servant who owed him a small debt. Charles forwarded the devotional he received to Mike, resulting in both of these devotionals coming to Mike in sequence as he read his messages that day. The two of them also talked about how Jesus and Stephen set the example for us in forgiving those who were executing them, even though the executioners did not ask for forgiveness. Mike responded to the biblical instruction about forgiveness and experienced God's forgiveness, cleansing and deliverance from the anger which had controlled him for so many years.

Mike has since approached many of the people toward whom his anger was directed and confessed his ill feelings toward them. He has experienced a remarkable change in his interactions especially in his family and at work. Mike still reacts at times to situations with anger but it no longer has the controlling influence over him as it did in the past. He is learning to bring the situation quickly under lordship of Christ and to respond as led by the Holy Spirit. Mike related that now peace rules in his heart.

## Anger: A Biblical Perspective

Anger is a reality everyone experiences.

The danger of anger is revealed in the constant warnings about anger in scripture.

The image of fire is often used in referring to anger. Exodus 32:10-11, Deuteronomy 32:22.

The image of a wild animal is also evoked by the constant phrase about one's anger being aroused or provoked. Another picture which may come to mind is poking a hornet's nest. See Genesis 32:2; 39:19 as examples.

<sup>1</sup> Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD."

<sup>2</sup> Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

<sup>3</sup> And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.

<sup>4</sup> Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering,

<sup>5</sup> but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

<sup>6</sup> So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?"

<sup>7</sup> If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire *is* for you, but you should rule over it."

<sup>8</sup> Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

*Genesis 4:1-8 (NKJV)*

<sup>4</sup> Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah

*Psalms 4:4 (NKJV)*

<sup>22</sup> An angry man stirs up strife, And a furious man abounds in transgression.

*Proverbs 29:22 (NKJV)*

<sup>8</sup> Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret--*it* only *causes* harm.

*Psalms 37:8 (NKJV)*

<sup>9</sup> Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools.

*Ecclesiastes 7:9 (NKJV)*

<sup>1</sup> But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.

<sup>2</sup> So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You *are* a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.

<sup>3</sup> Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for *it is* better for me to die than to live!"

<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD said, "*Is it* right for you to be angry?"

<sup>5</sup> So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.

<sup>6</sup> And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant.

<sup>7</sup> But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it *so* damaged the plant that it withered.

<sup>8</sup> And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "*It is* better for me to die than to live."

<sup>9</sup> Then God said to Jonah, "*Is it* right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "*It is* right for me to be angry, even to death!"

<sup>10</sup> But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.

<sup>11</sup> And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left--and much livestock?"

*Jonah 4:1-11 (NKJV)*

<sup>21</sup> "You have heard that it was said to those of old, '*You shall not murder*, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'

<sup>22</sup> But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

<sup>23</sup> Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

<sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

*Matthew 5:21-24 (NKJV)*

<sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

<sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

<sup>19</sup> Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay*," says the Lord.

<sup>20</sup> Therefore "*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*"

<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.  
*Romans 12:17-21 (NKJV)*

<sup>25</sup> Therefore, putting away lying, "*Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,*" for we are members of one another.

<sup>26</sup> "*Be angry, and do not sin*": do not let the sun go down on your wrath,  
<sup>27</sup> nor give place to the devil.

<sup>28</sup> Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

<sup>29</sup> Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

<sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

<sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

<sup>32</sup> And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

*Ephesians 4:25-32 (NKJV)*

Actions based on anger result in sinful behavior.

<sup>19</sup> So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

<sup>20</sup> for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

*James 1:19-20 (NKJV)*

Note the contrast in the following passage the difference between the anger of God (Jesus) and the anger of man. Jesus was angry at the hypocrisy of the religious leaders in trying to keep Him from applying a healing touch on the Sabbath day while at the same time they were allowing their anger to plot murder. Jesus responded to this situation by doing the will of the Father in healing the man. The people reacted to Jesus out of their anger by plotting his death.

<sup>1</sup> And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand.

<sup>2</sup> So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.

<sup>3</sup> And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward."

<sup>4</sup> Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent.

<sup>5</sup> And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched *it* out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.

<sup>6</sup> Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against

Him, how they might destroy Him.  
*Mark 3:1-6 (NKJV)*

<sup>11</sup> But they were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.  
*Luke 6:6-11 (NKJV)*

Although much is said about the anger of God in scripture, His anger is not capricious but consistent with total character.

<sup>11</sup> God *is* a just judge, And God is angry *with the wicked* every day.  
*Psalm 7:11 (NKJV)*

<sup>38</sup> But He, *being* full of compassion, forgave *their* iniquity, And did not destroy *them*. Yes, many a time He turned His anger away, And did not stir up all His wrath;  
*Psalm 78:38 (NKJV)*

<sup>8</sup> The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.  
*Psalm 103:8 (NKJV)*

<sup>8</sup> The LORD *is* gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy.  
*Psalm 145:8 (NKJV)*

<sup>2</sup> So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You *are* a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm.  
*Jonah 4:2 (NKJV)*

<sup>18</sup> Who *is* a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights *in* mercy.  
*Micah 7:18 (NKJV)*

<sup>13</sup> So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He *is* gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.  
*Joel 2:13 (NKJV)*

<sup>3</sup> The LORD *is* slow to anger and great in power, And will not at all acquit *the wicked*. The LORD has His way In the whirlwind and in the storm, And the

clouds *are* the dust of His feet.  
*Nahum 1:3 (NKJV)*

## Dealing with those who are dealing with anger

Anger is a reaction to the actions of other people.  
This action is a real or perceived offense.  
This real or perceived offense will expose the anger that resides in your heart.

Addressing the anger means biblically addressing the offense

Note that forgiveness and dealing with anger are inseparable.

<sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. <sup>32</sup> And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.  
*Ephesians 4:31-32 (NKJV)*

If the offender is a believer work toward reconciliation:

This biblical approach means to deal with the offender first in private. If this does not accomplish reconciliation then it is dealt with in a semi-private manner (one or two other godly brothers or sisters who have no vested interest other than seeing that God's glory is achieved are brought together) if these fail then the resources of the body of Christ are brought to bear on the situation.

<sup>15</sup> "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.  
<sup>16</sup> But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that *'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'*  
<sup>17</sup> And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. *Matthew 18:15-17 (NKJV)*

If the offender is not a believer practice unilateral forgiveness:

If the offender is not a follower of Christ and the person offended is there is only one recourse. The Christ follower must exercise forgiveness. The question is often asked, "What if the person does not ask for nor desires forgiveness?" The following passages give clear example of forgiveness extended without any remorse or response from the offenders.

<sup>32</sup> There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death.

<sup>33</sup> And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.

<sup>34</sup> Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots.

<sup>35</sup> And the people stood looking on. But even the rulers with them sneered, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if He is the Christ, the chosen of God."

<sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine,

<sup>37</sup> and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself."

*Luke 23:32-37 (NKJV)*

<sup>59</sup> And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on *God* and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

<sup>60</sup> Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

*Acts 7:59-60 (NKJV)*

Uncontrolled anger is a sure sign that one is living according to the flesh as opposed to walking in the Spirit.

Uncontrolled anger should be viewed as a warning light on the instrument panel of your car. Rarely is the warning light the problem. You must get to the source to provide real remedy.

Questions to ask: (Note the following are questions you, the counselor, need to have answered. You will need, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to formulate the appropriate questions to ask the person with whom you are counseling to get to these answers.)

Is this person a follower of Jesus Christ?

Is this person living in rebellion to the revealed will of God?

Does this person need deliverance from false teaching, wrong views of God's character or his or her own ideas of how to deal with anger?

Here is the place where we need to see the importance of praying for and/or with the person to call down the power of God into his or her life to effect a healing only possible through a divine supernatural touch by God. Many people will express how they are trapped in their anger, desire to be free from it but stand powerless before it. We need to be confident that God can and will bring healing to that heart.

Does this person need biblical instruction on how to live by God's Spirit in such a way that the fruit of the Spirit may be formed in them?

This emphasizes the nature of biblical counseling as “intense discipleship”. Many people have simply not been taught how to wield the weapons of our warfare in living victoriously in God’s kingdom. This also reveals the importance of moving people from intense discipleship to a setting in which they may continue in their consistent growth as a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>16</sup> A fool's wrath is known at once, But a prudent *man* covers shame.  
*Proverbs 12:16 (NKJV)*

<sup>29</sup> *He who is* slow to wrath has great understanding, But *he who is* impulsive exalts folly.  
*Proverbs 14:29 (NKJV)*

<sup>18</sup> A wrathful man stirs up strife, But *he who is* slow to anger allays contention.  
*Proverbs 15:18 (NKJV)*

<sup>16</sup> I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

<sup>17</sup> For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

<sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

<sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,

<sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

<sup>21</sup> envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

<sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

<sup>24</sup> And those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

<sup>25</sup> If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

*Galatians 5:16-25 (NKJV)*

<sup>32</sup> *He who is* slow to anger *is* better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

*Proverbs 16:32 (NKJV)*

<sup>11</sup> The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, And his glory *is* to overlook a transgression.

*Proverbs 19:11 (NKJV)*