

***Question: Lately I've been struggling with a lot of inner anger and resentment. How can I deal with these emotions without blowing up at someone? What would Jesus do?***

It is unhealthy to "repress" or internalize feelings of frustration, anger or resentment instead of having some outlet for dealing with the cause. When strong feelings are crammed into the unconscious mind, turning the rage inward, they usually result in depression and anxiety. This causes mental and bodily tension that can bring on physical disorders. Unless these feelings can be safely released, people may eventually "blow-up" and hurt someone they care for, or they may do or say something embarrassing and sinful. In response to this kind of emotional turmoil, some counselors advocate venting or openly verbalizing our hatred. Some even recommend things like cursing, shouting, beating a punching bag, or throwing things.

The Bible does not teach that anger or expression of anger under control is sinful. Jesus became angry and demonstrated it when he drove some unscrupulous money-exchangers out of the temple in Jerusalem (John 2:13-17). The apostle Paul wrote, "In your anger do not sin; do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Ephesians 4:26-27 NIV). A person does not need to repress anger as if it is a sinful emotion. He should look for ways to deal with any anger, ideally before the day ends instead of allowing it to smolder inwardly.

The Bible also teaches Christians to take charge of their emotions and to control angry expressions. Under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, James said, "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires" (James 1:19-20 NIV). Immediate angry reaction to what seems like an injustice may cause a person to sin in his or her anger and perhaps provoke further injustice. At that moment, one needs to exercise patience. Be "slow to anger" and "slow to speak" in your anger. After time to allow the heat to go out of the moment has been taken, thoughtful reflection and evaluation may be possible. Then, before carrying away any inner anger and resentment from the situation, one should go and deal with the problem. At that point, it is easier to express feelings and attempt to resolve the problem instead of carrying away inner anger and resentment.

I believe Jesus would recommend the following principles for dealing with pent-up emotions: (1) Pray about each day about what irritates you. (2) Talk over negative feelings with a mature and understanding Christian friend who can more objectively advise you. (3) Seek an appropriate and less emotional time to talk with anyone that may have offended you in a spirit of love and forgiveness. (4) Remember your own sinfulness that has been forgiven by God and by others in your life. (5) Look for a way that God can use life's frustrations and irritations to teach you patience and to help you grow spiritually.

I pray that God will bless each of us with spiritual and emotional health.

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