

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?

When strong feelings of anger are repressed and crammed into the unconscious mind, they can lead to an inward rage and usually result in depression and anxiety. These mental and bodily tensions can also bring on various physical disorders. Unless these feelings can be safely released, a person may eventually "blow-up" and hurt someone he/she deeply cares for and perhaps do or say something embarrassing or sinful.

In response to this kind of emotional turmoil, some counselors advocate venting or openly verbalizing our hatred. Some recommend things like cursing, shouting, beating a punching bag, or throwing things. Although this is meant to be only in private, it may develop a habit that will sometimes get carried over to inappropriate times. In contrast to these actions, the Bible teaches Christians to take charge of their emotions and to control anger. It is not some kind of sinful emotion that cannot be appropriately expressed and must be stuffed inwardly. Instead, one should seek healthy and constructive ways to deal with anger. We are told that "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); and "In your anger do not sin; do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (Ephesians 4:26-27).

From these instructions, we learn that we should not allow our anger to smolder inwardly, but should find positive ways to deal with it, ideally before the day ends. Immediate angry reactions to what seems like an injustice may cause us to sin in our anger and perhaps provoke further injustice. Be "slow to anger" and "slow to speak" in your anger. After taking the time to allow the heat to go out of the moment, we can engage in thoughtful reflection and evaluation. Then, before carrying away any inner anger and resentment from the situation, we should go deal with the problem that was the cause of our anger. At that point, we should be able to express our feelings appropriately and attempt to resolve the problem. Having done this, we do not have to feel the inner pressure of hidden anger.

In addition, I believe Jesus would recommend the following principles for dealing with pent-up

emotions: (1) Make our daily irritations a matter of prayer. We may not be able to control our anger by ourselves; but with the help of our Lord, we can. (2) Talk over our negative feelings with a mature and understanding Christian friend who can more objectively advise us. (3) In a spirit of love and forgiveness, seek an appropriate and less emotional time to talk with anyone that may have offended us. (4) Remember our own sinfulness that has been forgiven by God and by others in our lives. This should lead us to be forgiving of others. (5) Look for ways that God can use life's frustrations and irritations to teach us patience and to help us grow spiritually. May God bless you with spiritual and emotional health.

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