

Anger - Tame it or be destroyed by it

Your test seems to indicate that you have some buried anger", said the counselor to his client. "Do you think this could be true?" the counselor asked. "Me--angry? Certainly not," he replied as he stood up and socked the counselor in the face!"

When it comes to anger we all have a tiger of sorts within. At times anger motivates. At other times, we bury it because we are afraid it will get out of control. We don't want anybody, not even ourselves, to know it's there. And don't be fooled: even though some people never show their anger, everybody gets angry sometimes. In fact, things such as social injustice, child abuse, greed, and so on rightfully anger us; and then there are daily events that trigger appropriate anger as well. This type of appropriate anger is triggered to produce some kind of change. And so it's what we do with our anger that counts.

There are plenty of people who channel their anger productively, producing change by lobbying for a new law, raising funds for a new cause, etc. And there are plenty of people who don't. The fact is we are (whether we're willing to accept it or not) in control of our anger. No one else is. The irony is we often blame others for making us angry. It is so easy to place blame and our natural instinct is to do so. But what value is there in getting angry or getting even? Anger will only cause personal torment and may even lead to physical problems. And that's because rather than deal with our emotions productively, more often than not we hide our emotions by smiling when we don't mean to and pretending we're fine when we're really not.

We tend to bury our anger as a false means to control it or because at a young age we were taught not to express our anger because to do so is immature and inappropriate. On the contrary, acknowledging the emotion and dealing with it properly is mature and acceptable. But since we are so schooled in repressing anger, we continue to build a tower of anger within. And this repressed anger leads to hostility and hostility contaminates us. Manifesting itself in a variety of ways, hostility can lead to: a negative attitude, a critical attitude, nagging, sarcasm, gossip, resentment, hatred, slamming doors, shouting, yelling, aggressive driving, whining, rebellion, denial of sex in marriage, deviant behavior, constantly running late, passivity, withdrawal, rage, and even criminal behavior. The list is endless. And as Dr. Cecil Osborne explains in his book, *The Art of Understanding Yourself*, repressed anger may eventually come out in the "form of some psychosomatic illness: ulcers, asthma, arthritis, colitis, neurodermatitis, heart ailments or any one of a score of others."

More importantly, repressed anger does not only cause personal and sometimes physical ailments, but when triggered it can have fatal results. A recent state survey showed that in one year 80 percent of homicide victims were killed by family members or intimate friends. Most of these fatal attacks were the results of quarrels in everyday situations. ¹

And you now, there is probably nothing more destructive to personal relationships than buried anger or hostility. Do you find yourself overreacting to situations? Most likely the cause stems from something that already exists. A helpful question to ask yourself if you think you might be overreacting is: "Should I be this angry?" If your answer is no, take inventory.

Where love is absent or confused, we often find the alternative emotion, anger. But how do you figure this out? And how do you know what the right amount of anger is? You might have heard or read the statement "if you are slow to get angry, you are wise, But if you are quick-tempered, you only show foolishness."² We don't get this from any psychologist or academic scholar, we get it from the book of Proverbs in the Bible. This statement doesn't tell us to deny anger, rather to control it. We must be able to distinguish between the two.

So, if we don't repress or deny our anger, what do we do with it?

1) Be honest and admit how you are feeling. Admitting your feelings can be difficult but the emotion needs to be released--not as an attack or as blame, but as a confession and expression of our feelings as our problem. Believe it or not, when this is done, anger dissipates. But remember:



placing blame isn't appropriate and only puts the other person on the defensive. Rather than saying, "You make me mad." It is more helpful to say, "I need to talk to you about such and such, I feel very angry about this. I know my anger is my problem and I may be over-reacting, but I need to talk to you about this matter." That is, use "I" messages, not "you" messages

- 2) Accept yourself as a normal human being that sometimes has angry feelings. You're not fool proof, no one is so relax.
- 3) Determine to resolve your feelings the same day. Otherwise what you repress will express itself in hostility.
- 4) Express your feelings creatively--perhaps to an understanding friend first or to an "imaginary" substitute, and where necessary, to the person at whom you are angry. Maybe even through creative writing - we see in the Psalms how David expressed his anger and frustrations through poetry over an over again.
- 5) Before expressing anger check to see if you are feeling afraid or threatened, because anger is often used as a defense against feeling afraid. If fear is the problem talk about that.

We're not saying these are all easy things to accomplish. On the contrary, each step takes work and courage.

Lastly, after sharing your anger, forgive. Forgiveness may be a foreign notion to you. If so, try forgiving yourself for getting so angry in the first place. You're never going to live up to your own expectations of yourself, and no one else is going to live up to your expectations of them. Forgive yourself and forgive the person who made you angry. What relief it will be to move on.

1. Cecil Osborne, *The Art of Understanding Yourself*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), p. 61. 2. Proverbs 14:29.