

You Make Me So Mad | David Powlison

Reviewed by Warren Coe (The book was read from a Kindle for which the Reviewer apologizes for the missing page numbers)
August 15, 2013

Introduction

I don't know a person who doesn't struggle with anger. It is a DNA-thing. We are born with anger. As David Powlison reminds us, anger is an aspect of human nature. It is the way God made us—to possess the capacity for holy anger. Anger is also part of the fallen condition of humanity—a bad sort-of- thing. The question isn't whether or not we have anger. The question is what do we do with anger when it arises?

This is a book review of *You Make Me So Mad! Managing Your Anger* by David Powlison. The purpose of this book is stated by the author. "God intends us to understand anger and to know how problems of anger can be resolved." That alone should draw many readers to this important book. Imagine the joyful advancement of our sanctification and walk with Jesus Christ if we can rightly manage our anger.

Outline of the book

Lie #1 Anger is Something Inside Me

Lie #2 Its Okay to be Angry at God

Lie #3 My Big Problem is Anger at Myself

A Pathway out of Anger

Questions to Assess Anger

Questions Leading to a Resolution of Anger

Lie #1: Anger is something inside me

The author begins by identifying three harmful lies or misconceptions about anger that "plague our society and our personal lives." Lie #1 considers anger as a "thing." Powlison says anger "is a moral act of the whole person, not a 'substance' or a 'something' inside you." The author is careful to point out the importance of this distinction. "When people believe that anger is something inside them, not something they do, it points them to a solution other than repentance."

Lie #2: It's Okay to Be Angry at God

Lie #2 served as a rebuke. We've heard counselors and pastors say it is alright to be made at God. Ashamedly, I've said that to people. Powlison explains, "The anger at God that counselors often see typically masks self-righteousness and expresses blatant unbelief." From the therapeutic world, this is acceptable. It is one thing to ask God the why questions or bring our grief to God but quite another to blow up at God.

Here the author navigates us through some important truths in the Bible. God is sovereign. He is working out his will for His glory. "God has never promised freedom from tears, mourning, crying and pain—or from the evils that cause them—until the great day when life and joy triumph forever over death and misery." In fact we learn from Romans 8:28 that God "causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Pain is the scalpel in the divine surgeon's hands. Suffering and grief are used by God to heal, deepen and grow His children to maturity in Christ Jesus.

Lie #3: My Big Problem is Anger at Myself

Mr. Powlison exposes a false but common held premise in the Christian and non-Christian community. “If I’m angry at myself—and the phenomenon is a common one—current wisdom argues that I chiefly need to forgive myself.” The author declares this is “misguided.”

It is a faulty premise built upon a personal moral standard or a moral standard other than God’s standard. Anything built upon a standard other than God is a “counterfeit reality.” At this point “only truth can bring wisdom and joy. Every believer needs to read this section of Powlison’s book. He demonstrates Solomonic wisdom.

What is the real standard? “Jesus gives a real righteousness—his own perfect life—to people who sin. He gives real forgiveness—his perfect self-sacrifice to bear our punishment—to people who sin. He gives indwelling power—his Holy Spirit—to renew our minds, give us joy, and change us. Does this sound familiar? You are right, Powlison is saying only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can bring victory over sin—anger being just one item of that mixed bag.

Here is where the book is priceless. Powlison points us back to the cross. When our anger is getting the best of us; when it hurts personal relationships, we must remember the cross of Jesus Christ. Only the Gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to deliver through repentance and faith.

A Pathway Out of Anger—Questions to Assess Anger

I knew a person of later years who now faced the truth about herself. She had been and continued to be an anger person. How, after all these years, could she be rescued from her family destroying-anger? Powlison suggests eight questions to assess anger.

Question #1: What is my situation? What usually causes me to be angry?

Question #2: How do I react? “This question is meant to help me identify the specific ways I express sinful anger.”

Question #3: What are my motives? “If I’m grumbling and complaining, some set of cravings and false beliefs must be driving me.” What are my motives?

Question #4: What are the Consequences? Anger can produce terrible results. It is most destructive in human relationships. Every believer needs to think deeply about the consequences of sinful anger.

A Pathway Out of Anger—Questions Leading to a Resolution of Anger

Question #5: What is true? “Who is God? What does he say?” Here is another reason to buy this book. The author builds a biblical worldview: (1) God is sovereign. (2) God’s law holds up a mirror to me. (3) God’s truth speaks of Jesus. The law drives us to grace. Moses leads us to Jesus. The law slays but truth and grace are found in Jesus Christ. In this section of *You Make Me So Mad* we find the greatest use of Scripture in helping us deal with anger.

Question #6: How Can I turn to God for help? Powlison’s answer is very non-therapeutic. “I need to turn from the desires and deeds of the flesh to the Lord of life. I need to confess my sins, ask forgiveness, believe the gospel, ask for the wisdom to know how to respond and the power to do it.” Beautiful!

Question #7: How should I respond in this situation to glorify God? Powlison simply states, “Do it!” Repentance always leads to action. “At the simplest level, I may simply take a deep breath and relax, trusting that God is indeed in control.”

Question #8: What are the consequences of faith and obedience? "Many-sided blessings." Powlison is profound here. "Question 8 does not create heaven on earth, but it creates tastes of heaven, even though the last enemy has not yet been put under Christ's feed. If on the day I see Christ I will be made completely like him." The now and not-yet reality of the Christian life is seen here. We have been saved by the blood of Christ but when Christ returns we shall be like him!

Final Thoughts

I recommend reading this book. As a pastor who has conducted many counseling sessions and heard many stories about brokenness and hurt, I've concluded that two basic problems affect us all; anger and un-forgiveness. Our inability to handle anger and our unwillingness to forgive others has poisoned our souls—even those of who are considered mature in Christ. These two sins have destroyed marriages and families and churches. With Powlison, we have a biblical antidote for anger. The answer is Gospel-centered and Christ-proclaiming.