

Making Life Count Ministries  
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## How to Control Your Anger

This is a partial chapter from “Anger Mismanagement” in [Slaying Your Giants](#) by Kent Crockett (Hendrickson Publishers 2013). Additional stores and more insights about controlling anger are included in the book.



What causes anger? We get angry when others do something that we don't want them to do, or they aren't doing something that we do want them to do. **Someone is not meeting our expectations.** Husband and wives get mad at each other because their expectations aren't met. They blame each other for what they are, or aren't, doing. The problem multiplies when they keep fighting over the same issues again and again. Here are 5 steps to controlling your anger.

### 1. Find the cause of your anger.

The first step in solving any problem is to figure out what's causing it. Your mechanic has to find what's causing the car to malfunction before he can repair it. Your doctor has to diagnose your health problem before she can treat it. And you must figure out what's causing you to be angry before you can manage it.

Cain and Abel both brought offerings to God. The Lord received Abel's offering but not Cain's, which made him mad (see Gen. 4:5). God asked Cain, "Why are you angry?" (Gen. 4:6) He wanted Cain to look inside his own heart to find out what caused him to be mad. Cain had not murdered Abel yet, but God knew what was going to happen if he didn't get rid of his anger. Unchecked anger can lead to murder (or divorce), and so he warned Cain that "sin is crouching at the door" (Gen. 4:7).

God asks you the same question, "*Why* are you angry?" Stop for a moment and think it through. Are you upset because you are jealous? It is because you think others should show you more respect? Do you have too many expectations of others? Are you angry because something is wrong in your heart?

### 2. Lower your expectations of others.

Imagine being a pole-vaulter trying to please your coach. The highest you've been able to clear is thirteen feet. Your coach thinks he's trying to help by pushing you to the limit, so he sets the bar at seventeen feet. When you keep going four feet under the bar, he gets mad and screams at you, using derogatory names. Now you're mad at him because he doesn't understand that the goals he has set are totally unreachable.

A perfectionist is like that coach who sees everyone as a pole-vaulter. He sets the bar so high that no one will ever go over it, no matter how many attempts they make. The root of the problem isn't really with others, but his own unrealistic expectations of them. Could it be that the source of your anger problem isn't with the other person, but with you because you've set the bar too high?

A perfectionist wants to control everyone's behavior, thinking that if he can get everyone to obey him, then he'll be happy. He's like the circus person who trains a bear to ride a bicycle. The bear feels awkward doing it, and he's only doing it because of the trainer's threats. Garrison Keillor once said, "A bear riding a bicycle can be trained to do it, but he would rather be in the woods, doing what bears do."

Many times we're angry because we're too hard on other people. If we would lower our expectations, our anger would subside. Much of our anger will dissipate if we will humble ourselves and become a servant to others.

### 3. Choose to respond in the right way, not the wrong way.

When you're angry, you can respond in the wrong way or in the right way. After God pointed out Cain's anger, he told him, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (Gen. 4:7 NIV) In several places in the Old Testament, when God approved of an offering, He sent fire to consume it. Perhaps that's how Abel's offering was accepted. Maybe God told Cain if he would go back and give his offering in the right way, it would be accepted just like Abel's. Cain could have said, "God is giving me another chance to present my offering. Instead of holding a grudge against my brother, I'll joyfully give my best offering with faith that God will accept it."

Instead of overreacting, ask the Lord to show you a better way to respond. Lowering your tone of voice would be a good place to start. "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1). Speaking softly will do wonders to improve communication.

When we moved from Kansas to Georgia, my new job required me to start work before I could get my family moved. My wife stayed behind and cleaned out the house, getting rid of many things so we would have to move them. After we got settled in Georgia, I couldn't find a carved wooden elephant that my mother had given to me. I said, "Honey, have you seen my wooden elephant? I can't find it anywhere."

I could tell by her reaction that she didn't want to answer. Finally she said, "Well, uh, I sold it in the garage sale. I didn't think you wanted it." "*You WHAT?*" I shouted in disbelief. "You sold my elephant in a garage sale? I loved that elephant! Why did you do that?" I fumed. It was gone, and I would never see it again.

In my rage of anger, God spoke to me, "Why don't you give the elephant to me?" "Because I don't have it anymore," I answered. "How can I give it to you if I don't have it?" God said, "It's still in your heart. You can offer it to me as a gift."

I had never thought of that before. I prayed, "Lord, I give you the wooden elephant as an offering. Even though I don't own it anymore, it's still in my heart, and I give it to you. It's yours and I won't ask for it back. Amen."

Suddenly I wasn't angry anymore! How could I be mad about something that I had placed in God's hands as a gift? I realized that I had discovered a truth that I could share with others. I've shared this experience with others who were upset over things they couldn't recover. Just offer it to God as an offering.

Not long after this, I was in a store and spotted a miniature elephant, about the same size as my wooden one. I felt as though God wanted to replace the one I had given up, and since it was only \$15, I bought it. Sometimes, if you'll react in the right way and do what God says, He will find a way to make it up to you.

#### **4. Accept the fact that you can't change some things.**

Football fans often get mad about a call made by a referee. I know people who are still boiling over a referee's call from years ago. Is it possible for them to go back in time and change the ref's call? No. Can they alter the outcome of the game? No. Have they lost their joy? Yes.

Many times we get angry over things that we can't change and are completely out of our control. I used to get angry watching the national news every night. I gritted my teeth at the government running up huge debt. I finally realized that I was angry about things that I couldn't do anything about. I decided right then that I wasn't going to let the things that I couldn't change to eat me up inside anymore. If I can't change my circumstances, I must accept them as a fact of life outside my sphere of influence.

By acceptance, I am not talking about putting your stamp of approval on whatever it is that's making you mad. It just means that if you can't do anything about it, then you must choose to be happy anyway. If you don't accept that fact that you can't change things beyond your control, you will stay angry for the rest of your life. Doesn't it make more sense to find ways to be happy instead of frustrated?

#### **5. Divorce yourself from anger.**

God's Word says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in

Christ also has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:31-32). Malice is the anger that wants to harm the person who has hurt us.

To “put away” means “to divorce.” Paul says, “You need to get a divorce—not from your spouse, but from your anger and bitterness.” You can divorce yourself from anger by saying, “I’m not married to you anymore. You’ve got to leave and not come back!” Maybe if more people divorced themselves from their anger, there would be fewer divorces.

We must get a divorce from all bitterness, wrath, and anger. God never commands us to do something we aren’t capable of doing. We must make a decision that we want it out of our lives.

A surgeon named Dr. Kane searched for a candidate to undergo surgery so he could prove that appendectomies could be done under local anesthetic. At last, a patient was found. He was prepared for surgery and wheeled into the operating room. A local anesthetic was applied, leaving the patient able to talk and respond as the surgery progressed.

As he had done hundreds of times, Dr. Kane located the appendix, skillfully removed it, and finished the surgery. During the operation, the patient complained only of minor discomfort. The volunteer was taken to a hospital room, recovered quickly, and was dismissed two days later. Dr. Kane had demonstrated that local anesthesia was a viable and sometimes preferable alternative, thanks to the willingness of a brave volunteer.

What I didn’t tell you was that the courageous volunteer for surgery by Dr. Kane—was Dr. Kane. He had performed surgery upon himself and removed his own appendix!<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the surgery you need can only be performed by yourself, on yourself. You can’t wait for someone else to remove your anger and bitterness for you. You must remove and release it yourself.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Voice of the Village*, July/August 1996.