



## **Anger: Handling a Powerful Emotion in a Healthy Way**

By Gary Chapman

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Getting angry is easy. Daily irritations and frustrations poke at us. Feelings of disappointment, hurt, rejection, and embarrassment prod in us. And once the unwieldy cluster of emotions of anger are aroused, our thoughts and actions can feel out of control and impossible to manage.

Dr. Gary Chapman, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The 5 Love Languages*<sup>®</sup>, offers helpful - and sometimes surprising - insights into why you get angry and what you can do about it. Using real-life stories and practical principles, Chapman explains how you can channel anger in ways that are healthy and productive. You'll also be equipped to help those you love deal with their own anger, as well as effectively deal with those long-simmering feelings of anger toward people in your past.

This is an updated version of *The Other Side of Love*. While his suggestions for handling anger are certainly very helpful, they must be implemented and practiced over time. Perhaps the biggest issue not addressed is the common situation where two parties are both convinced the other is the wrongdoer.

"Anger is a response to some event or situation in life that causes us irritation, frustration, pain, or other displeasure ... Anger is fed by feelings of disappointment, hurt, rejection, and embarrassment." (16) Human anger is rooted in the divine nature. God's concern for both justice and righteousness stimulate His anger. When He sees evil, He experiences anger. (19) "Anger is not evil; anger is not sinful; anger is not a part of our fallen nature; anger is not Satan at work in our lives. Quite the contrary. Anger is evidence that we are made in God's image..." (21) "Human anger is designed by God to motivate us to take constructive action in the face of wrongdoing or when facing injustice." (23) "The divine model is clear: God's response to anger is always to take loving action, to seek to stop the evil, and to redeem the evil-doer." (26) Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) is perhaps a good example of anger expressed in a more constructive way.

Healthy ways to deal with anger:

1. Consciously acknowledge to yourself that you are angry
2. Restrain your immediate response
3. Locate the focus of your anger
4. Analyze your options
5. Take constructive action.

Sometimes we deny that we are angry until we suddenly explode! Admit it. Delay action. Count out loud. Take a walk. Call time out. Figure out why you are angry. What wrong did I commit? How serious is it? What responses would be prudent, positive and loving? Should I lovingly confront the person, or decide to overlook the matter? Forbearance is turning the matter of justice over to God.

"Rebuke is not verbal abuse. Rebuke is laying a matter before a brother or sister whom you perceive to have wronged you. Such a rebuke needs to be done kindly and firmly, recognizing that there is always a possibility that we have misunderstood...." (44) Of course, the ideal is reconciliation. "There are times when choosing not to seek justice is the best alternative ... If the person denies wrongdoing, then you cannot be reconciled and you must eventually acknowledge that the person is choosing not to continue his relationship with you. (49)

"In all anger there is first a provoking event; second, an interpretation of that event; and third, the rising emotion of anger ... All of this occurs whether the anger is definitive [appropriate] or distorted." (57) A wise response requires discerning whether the anger is based on actual wrongdoing, which requires time. What was the wrong? Do I have all the facts? Wrong perceptions often feed our resentment. We conclude incorrectly that we have been wronged. Our anger is not valid. So how do we address it? Begin by explaining our concern to the other person in a non-judgmental manner. Get the facts and negotiate understanding. And, where appropriate, request changes.

Some people react to anger by exploding (ie. by screaming, throwing, kicking, punching etc.) Abusive patterns typically do not change without outside help. Explosion is not an acceptable way of handling anger. When people handle anger by holding it inside, their lives gradually crumble around their anger. Implosive anger begins with silence and withdrawal which leads to resentment, bitterness, and hatred. These are often typified by denial, withdrawal, and brooding. (80) The 'silent treatment' often expresses itself in passive-aggressive behavior, the appearance that nothing is wrong accompanied by subtle resistance. "For some who internalize anger, the end result will be an explosion ... possibly some act of violence toward the person who wronged them." (84) To defuse this explosive anger, admit that it is your tendency and get advice and help from a trusted friend.

Sometimes we have hidden anger arising from an accumulation of past experiences, and our inability to achieve resolution. Wrongs are not forgotten unless they are dealt with in healthy ways. When we have experienced wrongs and not dealt with them over a long period of time, we may overstretch our emotional capacity to absorb them. Then the anger gets expressed toward people and/or result in depression; a dark cloud of anger hovers over our lives. (102)

"To experience God's forgiveness, we must respond to God's call with repentance and faith in Christ." God's forgiveness relieves the person from God's judgment. "The Scriptures say we are to forgive one another, 'just as in Christ God forgave you' (Ephesians 4:34). In this divine model, there are two essential elements - confession and repentance on the part of the sinner and forgiveness on the part of the one sinned against. In Scripture, these two are never separated." (109) The person who has sinned must repent and then we are to forgive the person, receive the individual into a restored relationship and begin rebuilding trust. However, forgiveness does not remove all the effects of the sin, nor does it remove all the painful emotions. We must ask God for the power to focus on the future and not allow our minds to be obsessed with the past. Forgiveness is not a one-way street. It is a gift, but it cannot be opened until the guilty person admits his/her need and desire for it. (114)

What if the offender does not repent? "First, commit or release the person who has sinned against you to God ... "Second, confess any of your own sin. (116-17) The biblical challenge is to rid ourselves of anger, malice, slander, etc. "When we sin against others, it is our responsibility to confess and repent of our own sins." (120) Love and uncontrolled anger cannot coexist. Love seeks the well-being of the other, while uncontrolled anger seeks to hurt and destroy." (124)

Most of us learn how to manage anger by observing our parents. Typically, we identify with the parent whose personality is most like ours. (143) Children can't handle anger in a mature way unless they are taught. "If your child is screaming at you in anger, listen! Calmly ask questions and let the anger be expressed. The more questions you ask and the more intently you listen, the more likely his/her intensity will decrease. Concentrate on the reason your child is angry, not on the way he/she is expressing it." (146) "As parents become better listeners, their children feel more understood." (147) Focus on the anger first and behavior second. It doesn't help for the parent to respond in a destructive manner. When we learn to handle our anger in a healthy way, we can effectively guide our children in processing their anger.

### Anger toward God

"When we look at Job and other biblical examples of people who were angry with God, it is clear that God did not condemn such anger. Rather, he entered into conversation with these people and helped them work through their anger. However, this does not mean that he always gave a full explanation of why bad things happened to good people ... He reminded Job that he is the all-powerful Creator and Sustainer of all that is, and that in the final analysis, he is a God of justice who can be trusted." (156-7) "The call of God is that we will trust Him in the darkness as we trusted Him in the light." (159)

"The problem with our anger toward God is not the anger itself but how we handle the anger. God has done you no wrong, but your feeling is still real anger ... Anger is the normal human response when we encounter what we perceive to be injustice. The first step in responsibly handling our anger toward God is to take the anger to God." (159) "Having expressed our honest concerns to God, we are now in a position to listen to His 'quiet whisper' to us ...

In the final analysis, we must accept what has happened in our lives, choosing to believe that though we do not understand it, God will use it to accomplish His good purposes." (161)

When confronted by an angry person, listen, listen, listen. Listen long enough to understand the pain. Ask for clarification to get more details, and let the person cool down by knowing he/she is being heard and respected. Try to understand the person's situation and feelings, and express your understanding of their anger. Share additional information that may help (*after* the first five steps). Temporarily overlook their intensity and focus on the heart of the matter. Refrain from responding in anger. "A fire will burn out faster if you don't throw gasoline on it." (191)