

# GOOD AND ANGRY

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Dr. David Banner was a scientist. Most of the time he was a nice guy. But when pressed or mistreated he would say, “Don’t make me angry. You wouldn’t like me when I am angry.” Exposed to massive amounts of radiation in an experiment-gone-wrong, his anger had become a trigger to transformation: he became “The Incredible Hulk.”

Dr. Banner didn’t like what anger did to him and wanted to stop it from happening again. But he couldn’t, and it happened again and again and again (maybe you know the story). The long-running TV series revolved around his search for a cure.

## Roots

Anger is a normal human emotion. Anger naturally results from frustration. Not getting what you want or simply having to wait are two common stimulants of aggression. Aggression also has a chemical, hormonal basis. Anger hormones are similar to methamphetamine, and are equally intoxicating and addictive. Other factors now known to contribute to irritability and aggression are hotter temperatures, hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), high testosterone levels (male sex hormone), and brain damage or dysfunction. (About half of our society believe that high testosterone levels and brain dysfunction are one and the same.) There is also clear evidence that drug abuse and alcohol consumption can release aggression.

The Hulk’s message was plain: anger is volatile and can turn a normal person into a monster; anger is bad. Accordingly, many people have concluded that the best way to deal with anger is to stuff it, to never express it.

However in his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul presents anger in a different light. Instead of dismissing anger as evil, Paul writes that anger is a good and healthy emotion.

*Ephesians 4:26 And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry,<sup>27</sup> for anger gives a foothold to the devil.*

*<sup>28</sup> If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. <sup>29</sup> Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.*

*<sup>30</sup> And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.*

*<sup>31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.*

*<sup>32</sup> Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*

When handled in a positive way, anger can help people stand up for themselves and fight injustices. On the other hand, anger can also lead to unnecessary violence and injury.

Here are three biblical ways to look at anger.

## **1. Anger is a Normal Emotion.**

<sup>26</sup> *When angry, do not sin. (AMP)*

The point is it is possible to be angry without sinning. Anger in and of itself is not bad. God created anger for a good purpose – to resist injustice.

On one visit to the Temple, Jesus became angry with what He saw there. People had filled its porches with sheep and doves to sell for sacrifices. Others had set up tables for exchanging money for the special, required Temple coins for offerings. It resembled a marketplace, with its accompanying congestion and noise and mess and stink; hardly the atmosphere for introspective reflection and worship.

Jesus' anger was not aimed at hurting people but at undoing the ways in which they had violated God's House. He expressed God's anger at their spiritual insensitivity. Jesus demonstrated that it is possible to be angry and not sin. There is such a thing as good or godly anger.

Why was it good?

First, focus. Second, control.

Jesus was concerned for God's honor, and His grief and anger did not take His focus off of God. He limited His anger's expression to dealing with the issue, not injuring people or building a grudge. He kept God in view even when He was angry.

Our problem is we seldom become angry for the right reasons. Human anger tends to be self-centered rather than God-centered. We become angry when someone does something that hurts us or hurts someone we love. Human anger is generally an offensive weapon we use to defend our pride.

And, when angry, we seldom control our anger's expression; we just let loose.

Anger is like a fire. If it is controlled, it can be helpful and productive, but if it gets out of control it can be harmful and deadly. Anger may be a natural emotion, but we must be careful how we use it, because it can have devastating effects.

Aristotle said: "Anybody can become angry... But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—this is not within everybody's power...."

## **2. Anger is a Warning.**

<sup>26</sup> *In your anger...do not sin. (NIV)*

We can get into trouble if we ignore anger's warning light.

As a young driver I developed a bad habit. Instead of filling up when the gas light came on, I would ignore the warning to see how far I could get. Occasionally, the car stopped running before I could reach a gas station. One young man ignored the warning sign until it was too late. As a result, he walked the last mile to his wedding in his tuxedo!

How well do you respond when anger flashes its warning? Are you familiar with the anger-triggers in your life? Can you keep your anger from getting out of control?

God designed anger to be a warning light that says to us, "Proceed with caution. Be aware. Know that trouble is near." So, when the light comes on, don't ignore it. Don't imagine it will just go away eventually.

### **3. Anger Must be Resolved.**

<sup>26</sup> *Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry.*

Anger may be a healthy emotion, but you're not designed to carry it endlessly. The release of stimulating hormones may excite at first, but, if continued, the accumulation of those same chemicals becomes debilitating.

When Jesus became angry in the temple and turned over the tables of the money changers, He did not remain angry. After He acted, He didn't dwell on what happened. He didn't allow His momentary anger with people to impact His enduring love for people. How do we know this?

Look at Matthew's record of the event:

*Matthew 21:12* **Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out all the people buying and selling animals for sacrifice. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves.** <sup>13</sup> *He said to them, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves!"*

<sup>14</sup> *The blind and the lame came to him in the Temple, and he healed them.*

As soon as Jesus cleared the Temple of the "thieves," the needy sought Him out and were healed. Jesus' anger cleared a way for God's mercy!

When you get angry, do you have a hard time letting go? When anger gets the best of you, it can ruin your entire day. Anger can cause me to become a person I don't want to be; it can cause me to say things I didn't want to say.

One study found that anger causes the average female's blood pressure to rise 6 points and the average male's blood pressure to rise 14 points. It also indicated that unresolved anger is the number one cause for psychological depression.

But when Jesus became angry He remained the same person, He did not lose control. His anger did not impact His character negatively or cause Him to speak inappropriately. He went from anger to mercy in the same day. His anger was motivated by His love for God and God's people and never became a vehicle for harboring resentment. Anger must be resolved.

What happens if anger remains unresolved? Three things:

#### **1. An Open Invitation for Evil.**

*Ephesians 4:27* **Anger gives a foothold to the devil.**

<sup>28</sup> *If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need.*

When anger gets a foothold in your life, you are more susceptible to doing things you would not normally do—even stealing. People who are angry at each other stop caring and start stealing—emotionally and even materially. Anger causes us to lose our concern for the community and to focus instead on ourselves.

Unresolved anger causes us to ask: What is best for me? Anger makes us more aware of what we want or need and less concerned about what is right or best for others.

*Proverbs 14:17 A quick-tempered man does foolish things.*

*Proverbs 29:22 A hot-tempered person starts fights and gets into all kinds of sin.*

Although Alexander the Great conquered the world, he was unable to control his anger. Alexander had a friend and a general in his army named Cletus. On one occasion Cletus became drunk and ridiculed the emperor in front of his men. Blinded by his anger Alexander snatched a spear and threw it at Cletus. Though he had intended to scare him, the spear took the life of his childhood friend. As a result, Alexander was overcome with guilt and attempted to take his own life. History records that Alexander fell into a deep depression and laid in bed for days calling for his friend.

When anger gets a hold on your life you are prone to doing things you will later regret.

## 2. Can be Destructive.

*Ephesians 4:29* *Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.*

Quick and careless words cause more damage to people than any other known force in the world. When we allow unresolved anger to build within us it is likely to explode eventually in harmful words.

Every year many people are killed all over the world by unexploded bombs. Hundreds of pounds of explosives are recovered every year in France alone. Many of these bombs, which were dropped during the first two World Wars, are now being discovered all across Europe. They once fell harmlessly from the sky, but after many years of exposure to the elements their cases have corroded and they have become volatile; even a slight movement could set them off.

Many people are like those aging land mines. Lingering anger in the heart may be triggered by a small problem, resulting in lethal words: words that destroy relationships and damage lives.

## 3. Distances Us from God.

*Ephesians 4:30* *And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.*

If you have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit lives in you. But if you allow anger to build up in your life, it hinders the influence of the Spirit. God's Spirit still lives in you, but your anger minimizes His power and work in your life. Anger limits how God can use us and prevents us from becoming the person God designed us to be.

In summation, anger is a normal emotion. God designed anger for a good purpose. Anger serves as a warning light. Anger must be resolved. When anger is not resolved, we may do things we normally would not do, say things we normally would not say, and experience broken fellowship with God.

You can learn to avoid these negatives and experience the benefits of good anger. Let me share with you three ways to be "good and angry."

### 1. Examine Yourself.

The only way you will know if anger is a problem in your life is to stop and do a self examination. Doctors recommend that we regularly examine ourselves physically to detect any abnormalities before they become a problem. Likewise God wants us to examine ourselves spiritually to detect any feelings of bitterness or unresolved anger before they get the best of us.

### How do you express your anger?

Psychologists identify four basic ways that we learn to express anger.

#### a. Maniac (exploder)

A well-known golfer was out on the links instructing his son when some reporters approached. The reporters asked the young boy about his father's game: "What has your father taught you when you hit your ball into the rough?" The boy was hesitant to answer the question, but his father urged him,

“Go ahead Son! Show them exactly what I do when I hit the ball into the trees.” The boy glanced again at his father, then picked up his club and threw it into the water.

You see, his father was an exploder. When things didn’t go his way, he would overreact and take his aggression out on whatever was at hand. Some of us are exploders.

### **b. Mute (imploder)**

This person is determined never to get angry. Instead of expressing anger in a healthy manner, he or she bottles it up inside and pretends to be unperturbed.

Someone once said, “When I learned to swallow my anger, I later realized my stomach kept count.” Some of us are imploders.

### **c. Martyr (inflictor)**

This person excels at throwing pity parties. He or she secretly enjoys being disappointed and feels uncomfortable when things are going well—always a victim. Their anger is repressed and eventually manifests as depression.

### **d. Manipulator (exploiter)**

Here is the passive-aggressive personality, like Lee Iacocca, who, when fired from Ford Motor Company, said, “I don’t get mad, I just get even.”

Identify how you express your anger. Then, ask yourself: What kind of person do I *want* to be? What kind of person does *God* want me to be?

When you gain a vision of the kind of person you want to become, you will be more motivated to make the necessary changes. You will have a better idea of what needs to change, once you see where your present character is headed.

Once you have identified how you tend to express your anger...

## **2. Stop and Think.**

When you find yourself in a situation that tempts you to lose your temper, ask yourself three questions:

First, ask: Why am I angry?

Sometime the reason is not obvious but lies deep below the surface. Anger is not always the root problem; it could be a symptom of a deeper problem. When petty issues cause you to overreact, you might be dealing with deep-seated residual anger. The pain and frustration of past events could be causing you to flare up over trivial issues. At this point, it is important to seek the guidance of a trained counselor, who can guide you to the core issue and encourage you to find healing in Christ.

Second, ask: Is it worth getting angry about?

Not everything that bothers you is worth expressing. You will never fix everything that is broken or right every wrong. You only have so much emotional energy available; learn to pick your battles carefully.

Third, ask: What do I really want out of this encounter?

When you think through it logically, where do you want the situation to go? What would you like to achieve?

Here is one of the great benefits of email. When I am frustrated by someone or some situation, I sit down and write an email describing the problem and my feelings and proposing a solution. Then I save it in my "Drafts" folder. I leave it there for a day or two and then read it again. Nine times out of ten I do not send the email. Just writing things down and reviewing them the next day may be all you need to gain a fresh perspective and resolve your emotions.

Now, once you have identified how you express anger and thought about why you are angry...

### **3. Overcome Your Anger.**

*Ephesians 4:31* **Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.** <sup>32</sup> **Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.**

When you are sick with a virus, you try to get rid of it. You may drink lots of fluids, get extra rest or take medications to combat the illness. Paul says, when you discover secret anger in your life, do everything you can to get rid of it. Like a virus, anger threatens to take over your life, so you need to do all you can to overcome your anger with something more powerful.

What is the one force in this world that can overcome anger? FORGIVENESS!

Learn to forgive.

Forgiveness releases the person who has hurt you from your judgment and puts them in the hands of God (where they belong). Forgiveness gives your pain to God who can heal you. Forgiving may not be forgetting, but it is letting go of the person or event that caused you pain so you can move on with your life.

How can you learn to overcome anger with forgiveness?

First, recognize that anger is a normal emotion, but its expression is a rational choice! People may provoke your anger, but only you decide how to express your anger or to stay angry. In the end, anger becomes *your* choice. So, choose to express your anger appropriately, without losing your focus on God.

Second, look to the Holy Spirit to empower you. Only God can give the power to forgive. Confess to God the different times when you have allowed your anger to take control and ask God to forgive you. When you have agreed with God about where you need to change, the Holy Spirit will work mightily within you to make those changes.

Finally, remember: Jesus forgave *you*! *"Just as God through Christ forgave you."* Rejoice often in His mercies, so you may become *"merciful, as He is merciful."*