

## The Devastation of Unresolved Anger

### Part 3: General Steps to Resolve Anger I

*“And it is perfectly evident what the old nature does. It expresses itself in sexual immorality, impurity and indecency; involvement with the occult and with drugs; in feuding, fighting, becoming jealous and **getting angry**; in selfish ambition, factionalism, intrigue and envy; in drunkenness, **orgies** and things like these. I warn you now as I have warned you before: those who do such things will have no share in the Kingdom of G-d!” (Gal. 5:19-21)*

### Review

The Bible is replete with examples that illustrate that the key to anger is tension, and tension is cumulative. Five examples come to mind: *Ya’akov, Sha’ul, Kayin, Bil’am, and David.*

#### Jacob’s Anger Toward His Wife Rachel

Rachel was the favorite wife of Jacob. He had worked fourteen years to win the right to marry her. Thus, it is surprising that one day his anger was kindled against her. This occurred during a discussion in which Rachel begged Jacob for children. Jacob became angry and asked if she thought he was God. What accumulated tension caused Jacob’s anger? Children are a blessing from the Lord. In earlier years, Jacob stole his brother’s blessing by deceiving his father into thinking he was Esau. Tension was created by the guilt of that theft and followed Jacob into his marriage relationship. When Rachel asked Jacob for the blessing of children, he was not free emotionally to comfort her but reacted angrily because of unresolved past tension and guilt.

#### Saul’s Anger Against David and His Son Jonathan

Jonathan was the son of King Saul. He was a courageous, skilled, and trusted warrior. His bravery had won a great victory for his father. Similarly, David’s courage against Goliath had won a decisive victory for the king and the nation. After the battle, the young maidens led a victory parade and sang “...*Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands*” (1 Samuel 18:7). When Saul heard this saying, he became extremely angry. His anger turned to wrath, bitterness, and hatred, until he tried to kill David. When Jonathan tried to defend David, Saul became violently angry at his son. What accumulated tension caused Saul’s anger? Saul was chosen by God to be king over Israel because he was little in his own estimation. Why then would he become so jealous of David for getting more praise than he received? A clue is contained in Saul’s angry outburst to his son Jonathan. He exclaimed, “*Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman...*” (1 Samuel 20:30). To refer to his wife in such harsh terms clearly indicates that long before the women praised David, Saul had had serious conflicts with his wife. The tension and guilt from these conflicts exploded in anger against David and Jonathan.

#### Cain’s Anger Against His Brother Abel

Cain and Abel were brothers. They were the first descendants of Adam and Eve. Cain was a farmer, and Abel was a shepherd. One day Cain talked with Abel. Following that conversation, an angry Cain murdered his brother in the field. What accumulated tension caused Cain’s anger? Prior to that conversation, Cain had tried to present an acceptable offering to the Lord. He had given the fruit of the field, which he had worked long hours to produce. God rejected this offering because it failed to fulfill the requirements of a sacrificial animal. “*Without shedding of blood is no remission*” (Hebrews 9:22). On the other hand, Abel offered a lamb, and when Cain saw that God accepted Abel’s offering, he became angry. God spoke with Cain about his anger and pointed out that there was sin and guilt in Cain’s life. Rather than dealing with the sin, Cain allowed the anger to turn into wrath that exploded in murderous passion.

#### Balaam’s Anger Against His Donkey

When the king of Moab saw the huge host of Israelites coming out of Egypt, he tried to hire a prophet named Balaam to curse them. As Balaam was traveling, his donkey suddenly stopped and refused to go

forward. Balaam became furious and began beating his donkey with a rod. What accumulated tension caused Balaam's anger? When Balaam first asked permission to go curse Israel, God forbade him. However, when a more impressive delegation was sent by King Balak, Balaam again asked the Lord if he could go. In this case, God gave Balaam the desire of his heart but sent leanness to his soul. The leanness produced guilt, and this guilt was expressed in the beating of his donkey.

### **David's Anger Against the Thief**

One day David was sitting on his throne. Nathan the prophet came to him and told him of a wealthy man who had numerous sheep. However, when a friend came, the wealthy man took his poor neighbor's cherished lamb and killed it for the meal. When David heard this, he became angry and declared that this man must die. What accumulated tension caused David's anger? David knew the Law of God, which clearly states that if a man steals and eats a sheep, he is to pay back fourfold. (See Exodus 22) Why then would David give such a harsh punishment for this transgression? About a year earlier David had committed sin with Bathsheba. In so doing, he stole the wife of his faithful warrior Uriah and then arranged to have Uriah killed. Tremendous tension and guilt followed this great sin and were expressed in David's harsh judgment toward the man who had stolen the lamb.

### **Types of Guilt and Tension in These Accounts**

1. Jacob: Guilt from deception and unjust gain earlier in his life
2. King Saul: Tension from bitterness against his wife transferred to others
3. Cain: Tension from a conflict over the standards of God that he rejected
4. Balaam: Tension from willfulness in demanding his own way
5. King David: Tension from the guilt of having committed the same type of sin

### **General Steps to Resolve Anger**

When anger turns to wrath and bitterness, we are dealing with a problem that is bigger than we are. We can purpose with our minds and wills that we will not get angry, and we can feel remorseful after an outburst of anger; however, these inward struggles only prove that we must appeal to the power of God for the control that is needed to resolve anger. Here are the steps to do that.

#### **1 Accept Personal Responsibility for Your Anger**

Anger will never be conquered as long as we justify it, explain it away, or blame others for it. It is true that fathers are commanded not to provoke their children to wrath; however, children are given extra ability (grace) to forgive their offenders. In the final analysis, anger is more than a problem in the mind, will, and emotions. It is a spiritual problem, and as such, it brings us face to face with God's requirements to control our thoughts, words, and actions since we must give an account to Him for each of them.

Accepting personal responsibility for anger also requires that we agree with God that anger is wrong. Anger is not a good way to get our point across, nor is it the right way to establish our authority or to let people know when they offend us or to release emotional pressure. The law of God states that the wrath of man does not produce His righteousness (see James 1:20) and that we are to put away all wrath, anger, and malice. (See Ephesians 4.)

#### **2 See Your Anger Through Those It Damaged**

Who are the ones in your family or among your friends whom you have damaged by anger? At first you may not think you have hurt anyone; however, it would be very important to ask those in your immediate family if they can recall times when you got angry at them and how they felt about it.

As you listen to their accounts, do not justify what you did or try to explain your real intentions. Simply listen with your heart to the emotional hurts which they experienced through your raised voice, sharp words, and most of all, your spirit of rejection. If you feel this is the appropriate time, ask each one to forgive you for the hurts you brought to them because of your anger.

### **3 Recognize Anger as an “Alarm” From Past Guilt**

When the emotion of anger first occurs, it is not sin; it is a signal to correct a wrong response in the past. The present situation that triggered the anger is similar to the past situation or else is related to it. For example, a father might feel anger when his son does not obey him. However, that emotion may be coming from his own bitterness toward and disobedience to his father when he was younger. By using the anger from the present situation to remind him of his past disobedience and then by going back to his father and asking forgiveness for his wrong actions and attitudes, he is turning anger into a special “alarm.” However, if this father fails to see anger as an alarm of his wrong response in the past, he will either try to “control” his anger, which will still communicate reaction to his son, or he will express his anger in damaging words or actions.

This new approach to anger is described in the Biblical instruction: “*Be ye angry, and sin not...*” (Ephesians 4:26), which means that if you are angry over a situation, do not let the anger stir you up to do something that would be wrong. The Bible also gives a time limit to responding properly to the initial feelings of anger: “*Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*” No anger should be allowed to continue overnight. If it does, it will turn into wrath and give “ground,” or jurisdiction, in an area of your soul to Satan. For this reason we have the triple warning: “*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil*” (Ephesians 4:26-27). The word place actually means an area of control or jurisdiction.

When we let anger turn into wrath, Satan is given an area of influence in our minds, wills, and emotions. With this new authority, he implants wrong thoughts, emotions, and decisions such as: “*Your parents are evil; they will never change. The way to treat them is to tell them off or to leave home and move in with somebody who will appreciate you.*”

### **4 Act Quickly in Correcting Past Offenses**

Anger is the emotional explosion that results from a buildup of past tension. Based on the testimonies of Scripture, we experience tension whenever we do that which we know is wrong. This tension is cumulative. As it builds up, it expresses itself in angry responses when similar situations are present. One of the common causes of anger is stealing by other people. If someone steals our money, our clothes, our time by keeping us waiting, or our reputation by saying things about us that are not true or that are only partially true, we get angry.

Such anger is a special signal for us to ask: “Did I ever steal from anyone in the past? Have I ever borrowed something and never returned it? Have I failed to give my parents the honor and respect due them regardless of what they have done, or not done, for me? Have I given my employers a full day’s work for a full day’s wage? Have I cheated on my income tax? Have I robbed God of time and tithes that rightfully belong to Him?”

These and other questions must be quickly acted upon when they bring to our memory past offenses. Think through how you can contact the person you wronged. Determine ahead of time what you are going to say. Be sure you confess your wrong actions and also any wrong attitudes such as selfishness, laziness, irresponsibility, resentment, jealousy, envy, greed, etc. After briefly explaining how you offended the person and the wrong attitudes or thoughts that prompted the offense, ask the person if he or she would forgive you. Then wait for their response.

#### **Example: Asking Forgiveness of Parents**

“When I was younger, I did not give you the respect or the honor that you deserve as my parents. I did not see you as God’s protectors and instructors over me. I lied to you, stole things from you, and talked bad about you to others. I was wrong in all of this. I realize now how deeply I hurt you. Would you forgive me?” (Make sure you confess everything that you did to wrong them.)

Before going to the one you offended, it would be wise to first ask God to forgive you, since whatever we do against another person, we also do against God. We have broken His commandments to not steal, to honor father and mother, to speak evil of no man, etc. When you clear your conscience of past offenses, you will experience two wonderful results. First, you will enjoy freedom from past guilt. Second, you will have a loving desire to help other people follow your example when you see them offending in a similar way. This desire will be one of the most powerful ways to dissolve anger when somebody offends you in a way that you have offended others in the past.

## **5 Acknowledge the Anger of Your Forefathers**

In order to fully resolve our anger, we must realize that some of it may be coming from the anger of our forefathers. It is a proven medical fact that our parents pass on to us their tendencies toward heart attacks, diabetes, and other diseases. It is quite obvious that we inherit their physical features. They also pass on to us the tendency to do what is wrong from our first parents, Adam and Eve. It is not unusual, therefore, to expect that the particular types of character flaws that our parents had will be passed on to us as a greater tendency to fail in the same way. If our parents had a problem with immorality, we will have a greater proneness to lustful thoughts and desires. If they gave way to anger, we will experience unexplained surges of anger.

This situation is described in the Biblical statement: “...*For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments*” (Exodus 20:5—6).

“Iniquity” is an expression of self-will. It is doing things our way rather than God’s way. Iniquity is a wrong desire that, if allowed to express itself, will result in sinful words, attitudes, and actions. This information is by no means an excuse to blame our parents for our anger, because if our parents have passed on a particular tendency to do wrong, God compensates by giving us a greater ability to overcome this tendency and do right. For this to work, however, we must establish personal disciplines that will act as guards and barriers against doing wrong.

It is vital that we acknowledge to God that the moral failures of our parents are wrong and that we want God to free us from any and all influence that they might have passed on to our lives. It is amazing how parents tend to publicly excuse the wrong actions of their children and how children tend to justify their wrong behavior because of what their parents have done.

There are several examples of acknowledging the iniquity of the forefathers in the Bible. Daniel prayed, “*We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments... Because for our sins, and for the iniquity of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach...*” (Daniel 9:5, 16; see also vv. 1-19).

Nehemiah’s prayer included a similar statement: “...*We have sinned against thee: Both I and my father’s house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commanded thy servant Moses*” (Nehemiah 1:6-7; see also vv. 5-11).

### **Next Time**

Regain Surrendered Ground

Learn How to See Benefits from Anger-Causing Events

Establish A Structure of Accountability

Fully Forgive Your Offenders

Exchange Your Personal Rights for God’s Control