

# OBU COUNSELING SERVICES

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city. -King Solomon (Prov. 16:32)



## What to do with your **Anger** Part I

### **“Never go to bed mad. Stay up and fight,”**

comedian and actress Phyllis Diller once said. Unfortunately, too many of us have tried this - and regretted it.

Best Selling authors and research psychologists at the University of Denver, Scott Stanley, Howard Markman, and Susan Blumberg concluded that the two most common causes of decay or breakdown in human relationships are these-

- **When positive feelings between persons are [gradually or abruptly] replaced by negative or adversarial feelings, and**
- **An unpleasant or destructive style of handling conflict or disagreement.**

It's what we say and do when we disagree, feel offended or angry that determines, to a large extent, the depth, security & trust, duration, and mutual satisfaction we enjoy within our most important relationships. The trouble is that angry feelings are rarely paired with a plentiful supply of helpful thoughts, or fruitful & wise words. Not often do I experience a rush of brilliant, constructive ideas, and a benevolent sense of good will towards men when I'm "good 'n angry"! But maybe that's just me? I don't think so.

Our angry reactions tend to be more corrosive than constructive. That's why Benjamin Franklin wrote, "Whatever begins in anger, ends in shame." Solomon

observed that, "A quick tempered man acts foolishly." Prov. 14:17 Well-known Christian psychotherapist, educator and writer, H. Norman Wright has proposed that one of our most important life skills is our ability to manage or control our emotions. This is true, in part, because some intense negative emotions tend to diminish our problem solving abilities, and press us to take action, even though action (particularly the defensively oriented action we're considering) may not be prudent.

Once a person begins to give himself permission to lie, gossip, malign others, or vent his negative thoughts or feelings without restraint, it takes little time for his behavior to become ossified, and his remaining friends are only those who share a reckless tongue. What's peculiar is the fact that so many don't seem to recognize that their so-called friends are sometimes speaking just as disparagingly about them when they aren't around!

So, is it then inherently wrong or sinful to be angry? No. Scripture records for our observation when Jesus was angry. Simply put, sinful anger usually involves our choice to behave or speak in a way that violates God's word. For example, if I respond too harshly by yelling, mocking, or humiliating my children in anger when they have been disobedient, I have acted contrary to Eph. 4:29, which says, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."



So, why do we do react too harshly, say regrettable things, and damage our relationships or reputations? As much as you might like to believe otherwise (or as some may argue - reflecting their poor theology), the answer is **not** because **the Devil made you do it**. No, **YOU DID IT BECAUSE IN THE BRIEF MOMENTS, OR EVEN SECONDS BEFORE YOU ACTED, YOU GAVE YOURSELF PERMISSION TO DO SO**. You justified your response. For example, you may have said to yourself, "You're not going to get away with treating me that way!" Whatever the message, you then decided that your harsh reaction wasn't over the top at all. It was not only fitting, but maybe even essential, you tell yourself. In reality, however, you decided that you wanted so much to "put her in her place", "teach him a lesson", demand compliance, or make it clear that you won't tolerate that kind of disrespect or maltreatment, that you were willing to **sin** in order to get what you wanted!

"It's never  
what people do that makes us angry;  
it's what we tell ourselves  
about what they did."  
- Marshall Rosenberg

Habitual problems develop when we continue to justify our behavior. Once a behavior becomes a matter of practice it's much tougher to quit. Why, because we've also habituated our internal dialogue surrounding the behavior, quietly justifying our actions every time it occurs. Solomon explained that only when we come to truly hate our wrong behavior can we turn away from it. (To examine this fact further - carefully consider Proverbs 16:6b and 8:13.) Many feel awful, and full of regret after a blow-up or harsh word. Some don't feel any shame at all, as they again rehearse how it was "actually the other person's fault." And, as long as the blame falls on another's shoulders, you'll forever remain doomed to repeat your behavior. Whoever you are, if you keep giving yourself permission to vent your destructive words or behavior, you'll be unable to stop. Your regrets afterward won't bring you to kick the habit, because you actually "love it" more than you hate it! "They won't listen to anything else!", you may think, assuring yourself that what you're doing is just plain necessary. You can't really repent from something you have reasoned to be "not so bad."

Another truth to remember is that **you cannot** really change or control another person. You may try. You

may use intense expressions of anger in an effort to force change, and others may acquiesce as long as you or your threat is present, but no internal and lasting transformation has necessarily occurred. And, in the end, this approach doesn't work very well if your aim is also to maintain a positive influence in their lives. Floods of anger can impair our judgement and erroneously legitimize a plethora of responses that only escalate our situation. When anger becomes a frequent element in a relationship, "trouble is a comin'."

### Defusing Anger:

1. Pause, calm yourself, wait to respond. Don't escalate things. Get more information, if necessary.
2. Be slow to take it personally. Don't rush to assume others' intentions. Are you awfulizing a bit?
3. Don't justify an angry reaction.
4. State your concern/feelings using the ABC format.

Also, when you routinely unleash your anger towards others, they will tend to pay MORE attention to how your fury makes them **feel** and give decreasing focus to the matter of their misbehavior. In a sense, you've made the thing you want into an idol (to be treated fairly, given respect, to be heard, compliance/obedience in a child or subordinate, etc.). You've placed your desire above all else.

Frequently, it is our **PREMATURE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE OTHER PERSON'S INTENTIONS** that inflame conflict. "She's doing that just because she doesn't really care about \_\_\_\_." Unfortunately this tendency is a ubiquitous problem! We actually know less of others' motives than we think. When a person becomes frequently engaged in this practice, they are destined to experience remarkably more perceived hurt or offense within their relationships. What can contribute to or make one more inclined to do this? The repeated emotional wounds of others in the past, a history of abuse, difficulties with anxiety, and just plain habit, to name a few. People with these life experiences are not, by default, necessarily more prone to anger. But, they may be more plagued by fears and suspicions about the intentions of others, and these can give way assumptions that fuel emotional reactions.

More on escalation, awfulizing, and the A-B-C response format when we continue next time with *Part II*.

#### Need to talk?

- phone: 245-5591
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