

# Controlling Anger

Responding Constructively  
When Life Goes Wrong



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 CCEF

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What makes you angry? Sometimes small things make us angry: traffic jams, lines at the grocery store, not being able to find a shoe, a waiter's mistake, or a friend's inattention. And sometimes big things make us angry: betrayal, injustice, meanness, violence, oppression, selfishness, and lying. When we see and experience such things firsthand, we get angry.

How do you deal with your anger? Do you explode? Does everyone around you know when and why you are angry? Or are you more subtle? Do you get irritated and short with those around you? Do you gossip and complain about your spouse, children, coworkers, and friends? Or maybe you just turn your anger in on yourself and become depressed and bitter.

You might have noticed that you can't avoid dealing with your anger. Anger is an inevitable response to living in a troubled world where things can and do go wrong all the time. God does care about what makes you angry, but he also cares about how you express anger. If you don't learn how to deal with your anger, you will become bitter and estranged from God and people.

### **Venting? Calming? Or God's Way?**

Some counselors notice that people get tied up in knots when they stuff their anger. They will tell you to deal

with your anger by getting in touch with how you feel and then expressing it. “Get it off your chest. Say exactly what you think. Give ‘em a piece of your mind.”

Other counselors notice how destructive people become when they express anger. They will counsel you to control your anger. Psychotherapy, medication, exercise, and meditation are just some of the different ways they recommend for defusing your anger and calming yourself down.

So which is it, venting or calming? God has a different way for you to deal with your anger. God knows well that stuffing your anger deep inside is destructive. And learning tricks for keeping calm never discovers the purpose for which God designed anger. Anger needs to be acknowledged and expressed in a positive way, as a form of doing what is good and right.

At the same time, God knows that venting your anger is destructive. Anger needs to be expressed constructively. Instead of expressing your anger destructively, God’s way is for you to express your anger in a way that actually redeems difficult situations and relationships. How does this happen? It starts with understanding what anger is, where it comes from, and how a right relationship with God will actually change the way you view and express your anger.

## What Is Anger?

Anger always expresses two things: It identifies something in your world that *matters* to you, and it proclaims that you believe that something is *wrong*. This could be something as minor as being served a cold cup of coffee at a restaurant. It could be something as major as your spouse running off with your best friend. Anger is our God-given capacity to respond to a wrong that we think is important. God also gets angry at things that are wrong in this world. Your capacity to be angry is an expression of being made in his image. So when you get angry, you are not necessarily wrong. But often our anger does go wrong. What are some ways that anger goes wrong?

## Ways That Anger Goes Wrong

*Anger goes wrong when we get angry about things that don't matter.* God's anger is always holy and pure because what he says is wrong *is* wrong, and what he says matters *does* matter. God is rightly displeased when people are harmed and hurt by others. "Love does no harm to its neighbor" (Romans 13:10). God says, "Never pay back evil for evil" (Romans 12:17, NASB). Two wrongs never make a right, and our anger often simply doubles the wrong. But God's anger makes right what is wrong (Romans 12:19).