

has ANGER got the best of you?

by Florence MacKenzie

Anger tends to have a bad press. It is generally perceived as being destructive, damaging, and detrimental to those involved and often this is the case. After all, it's only one letter short of danger. However, anger is not necessarily something that we would always want to avoid. There are times when our anger is justifiable. For example, when we are indignant at those things in our world that grieve the heart of God, where evil, malice, cruelty, injustice and exploitation seem to know no bounds, we have every right to be angry.

Other times, however, the reason for our anger might be less honourable and all too easily we find ourselves coming under the control of this powerful emotion. Perhaps we get angry when things don't turn out the way we would like, we feel slighted when a friend appears to ignore us, or we misinterpret what someone says to us. Such faulty thinking often lies behind our feelings of anger. For example, when we think about someone, "*She makes me mad!*" we give power to that person to influence how we feel when, really, no one can make us mad unless we let them. Other people may often be the source of our anger, but I reckon it's in our own interests to take control of our angry feelings. One way we can do so is by responding positively to two biblical instructions regarding anger.

The first of these is "*In your anger do not sin...*" (Ps.4:4; Eph.4:26a). This indicates it's possible to be angry without sinning. Take Jesus, for example. On one occasion His anger was directed against temptation when He responded to a comment by one of His disciples that He wouldn't be killed (Matt.16:23); He was angry at those with hard hearts (Mk.3:5); and His anger was focused on people who misused the place of worship (Jn.2:16-17). In all these instances, Jesus' anger was controlled and appropriately directed.

Sadly, this can't always be said of us. Our anger isn't always for the right reasons and, even when it is, we're in danger of dealing with it in the wrong way. Perhaps we harbour anger by clamming up, where we internalize or suppress our angry feelings. A major downside of this is that the anger might surface at a later date and be redirected onto someone who has nothing to do with its initial cause. We can also demonstrate anger by blowing up, where we vent or explode. According to Prov.29:11, this is how a foolish person behaves, but a wise person exercises self-control and keeps anger in check. This is



such an encouraging statement because it suggests that an angry response to an unpleasant or provocative situation is not inevitable. The decision to respond in anger or with self-control lies with us – it's our choice.

The second biblical instruction is "*Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry*" (Eph.4:26b). Sometimes, we can get so mad at someone that we go to bed angry and upset. The result might be we don't sleep well and wake up feeling totally out of sorts. But what if we made a conscious decision to deal with the source of our anger before we settled down for the night? This might involve eating humble pie, where we go to the person we've been angry with and admit that our response was out of order. Other times, perhaps it will mean telling ourselves we over-reacted and deliberately letting go of our angry feelings. Maybe the appropriate course of action will be to offer a heartfelt prayer of repentance. Whatever way we choose to deal with our anger, let's do so before the day is over. It might be okay to get angry under some circumstances, but it's not okay to stay angry!

When anger threatens to engulf you, 'take five':

1. Take deep breaths to relieve the tension associated with your angry feelings.
2. Take a walk in the fresh air to clear your mind and relax your body.
3. Take time to identify the reasons why you are angry and try to discover a solution.
4. Take the opportunity to confide in a trusted friend. She may suggest a way forward that you hadn't thought of.
5. Take on board suggestions on managing your anger from books and articles that reflect biblical principles.

Many things are outside our control, but keeping our anger in check is not one of them. Isn't it good to know that anger doesn't need to get the best of us?
