

The Gospel & Mental Health: Anger & Bitterness

Anger: An emotion characterized by antagonism toward someone or something you feel has deliberately done you wrong (American Psychological Association)

Bitterness: unprocessed anger that settles into; anger matured

Anger is something we do. It is a moral act

Anger reveals something about us

“This matters to me” “I am against that”

“Anger is the fluid that love bleeds when you cut it.” – C. S. Lewis

⁹ God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry for the plant?” And he said, “Yes, I do well to be angry, angry enough to die.” ¹⁰ And the LORD said, “You pity the plant... ¹¹ And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left...?” (Jonah 4:9-11)

Diagnostic questions

- What do I want? Why does that thing matter so much to me?
- What do I believe about the significance of what happened to me?
- What am I afraid of? What do I not want happen to me?
- What intentions guided the interaction?

Good anger

Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. (Psalm 4:4)

²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil... ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:26-27, 31-32)

“He that is angry without cause sins, but he who is *not* angry when there *is* cause sins. For unreasonable patience is the hotbed of many vices.” - John Chrysostom

Our anger is a reflection of God’s character

God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day. (Psalm 7:11)

⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, for your people... ⁸ They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them... ⁹ And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.” (Exodus 32:7-10)

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping... he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled [*indignant*]... ³⁵ Jesus wept... ³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved [*indignant*] again, came to the tomb. (John 11:33,35,38)

¹ Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. ² And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.” ⁴ And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. ⁵ And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. (Mark 3:1-5)

Bad anger

But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. (Colossians 3:8)

²¹ “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ ²² But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:21-24)

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention. (Proverbs 15:18)

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? (James 4:1)

Our motives operate in godlike mode.

Destroys relationships

“Stepping out of anger means you are surrendering your will to God. It means you have accepted that you don’t have to have your way.” - Dallas Willard

Be slow to anger

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city. (Proverbs 16:32)

Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools. (Ecclesiastes 7:9)

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. (Proverbs 14:29)

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. (James 1:19-20)

The Gospel heals our anger

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (James 3:13-18)

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Prv 15:1)

If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you. (Proverbs 25:21-22)

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

“...the wrath of God is finished.” (Revelation 15:1)