



Part 5: Anger | Pastor Matt Clark | May 17, 2009

A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat. Perhaps offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray (or invite someone to pray) to open the discussion.

B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes)

As we dive into this fifth deadly sin of anger, it's important that we understand this issue goes deeper than guarding our behavior—it's about the condition of our heart. Jesus says, "...out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). And Solomon attests, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23). Here are four assumptions on the subject of anger that will help us understand it: 1. **All of us get angry.** And if we're honest, most of us would say we handle our anger inappropriately at times. 2. **Anger is a God-given emotion intended for good.** The desires and emotions we have, at the core, are good. It's the misapplication of our emotions that gets us into trouble. 3. **Anger is a physical, mental, and emotional reaction.** We're reacting to an imminent threat. When something happens to us, anger is a natural human response. It's intended to help us know that *action* is needed. Unfortunately, it's poor *reaction* that becomes sin many times. 4. **Anger is always a secondary emotion.** Anger is typically triggered by hurt, selfishness or unmet expectations. In other words, there's something behind our anger.

1. Check yourself before you react.

Anger is an emotion that indicates something is wrong and needs attention. But sometimes we need to step back and do a little self-check! **James 1:19-20** says, "*My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.*" Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Oftentimes our anger comes out of in words, so we need to pray **Psalm 141:3**: "*Set a guard over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch over the door of my lips.*" Even Jesus, when the cross and His accusers, was silent. **1 Peter 2:23** records, "*When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*" In this passage Jesus' silence didn't represent acceptance or hopelessness. It was Jesus' way of communicating His trust in God. When we're angry, we need to be slow to speak. John Ortberg writes, "Spiritual disciplines are any activity that I can do by my direct effort that can help me do what I cannot do by my own direct effort." Some **spiritual disciplines** that will help us slow down and check ourselves before speaking are **silence, meditation, and a daily quiet time** with the Lord.

2. Ask for and offer forgiveness.

The root of anger is often found in the perception that someone took something from us, so someone owes us; a debt/debtor relationship is established. It's easy to believe that the only remedy for our anger is payback. The irony is that in most cases, the perceived debt can never be paid. For instance, how does one pay back years and years of ignoring a child? So the opportunity to make things right is long gone, but the anger remains. Forgiveness is the decision to cancel that debt. **Ephesians 4:31-32** says, "*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³²Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*" This Scripture implies that forgiveness is the means by which we are to do away with our bitterness, rage and anger. **Romans 12:19** reads, "*Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, 'I will take revenge; I will pay them back,' says the LORD.*" The **spiritual disciplines** we can apply here are **submission and surrender**, which are about giving up our control and letting God do His thing, His way.

3. Seek assistance when necessary

If we want to get a handle on our anger, it's important that we seek help. First, go to God. Incorporate the **spiritual discipline of confession**. Next, ask the people closest to you. Practice the **spiritual discipline of humility**. **Proverbs 27:17** and **Proverbs 15:22** speak to the disciplines of humility and confession: "*As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another,*" and, "*Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.*" Developing these disciplines may be as basic as getting with a friend or Life Group member and asking for advice and accountability. Or it may mean going to a professional Christian counselor.

4. Be willing to look below the surface

Proverbs 21:29 says, "*A wicked man puts up a bold front, but an upright man gives thought to his ways.*" If we practice humility and are willing to open up and be vulnerable, then we can get beneath the surface and deal with the cause of our anger. A couple of great spiritual disciplines to apply here are **humility** (again) and **vulnerability**.

5. Trust God for patience

The corresponding virtue to the deadly sin of anger is **patience**. Paul says in **Colossians 3:12**, "*. . . clothe yourselves with patience.*" When we're clothed with patience, we can absorb life's frustrations. **Galatians 5** talks about the Fruit of the Spirit, and patience is on that list. We can't force spiritual fruit, such as patience, to come forth. It comes from being filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus says in **Matthew 11:28-30**, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*" God is our peace and He wants to give us rest. Some of the best **spiritual disciplines** for fostering patience are ones related to those already mentioned: **slowing**, **solitude**, and **silence**: wait upon the Lord. Let Him teach you how to use manage this emotion of anger and use it for good, not for evil.

C. **Life Group Questions** (select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes)

1. What do you think of when the topic of "anger" comes up? Read **Ephesians 4:26-27** and **James 1:19-20** again (above). What is God's instruction regarding our anger?
2. When do you find you're most susceptible to anger? What are the underlying feelings you have that provoke that anger?
3. Discuss as you are comfortable areas life where you've seen your own anger affect your most treasured relationships, including your relationship with God. In retrospect, how could you have handled your anger differently? Is there anything you still need to forgive?
4. What helps you slow down, step back, and get perspective before you *react* in anger?
5. Of all the spiritual practices discussed for getting a handle on anger—*silence, slowing, solitude, meditation, daily quiet time, submission, surrender, confession, humility, and vulnerability*—which do you already practice, and which are you going to start practicing? How will you incorporate the new ones and/or beef up your present ones?
6. Since anger is a God given emotion intended for good, in what ways have you used anger for good or seen it used for good? What do you sense you should be angry about and do something about with God's help in your own current sphere of influence?

D. **Personal Application** (1-3 Minutes)

- Practice being quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry this week.
- Ask forgiveness, give forgiveness and receive forgiveness.
- Beef up your current spiritual disciplines and practice some new ones!

E. **Prayer Time** (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4: 10-15 Minutes)

- Pray for God to help you if anger has affected your key relationships.
- Pray for patience and perspective; pray for others who may have "sinned in anger."
- Ask God to transform you as you make space for Him through spiritual disciplines.
- Offer any other praises or requests that arose during the discussion.