

Admitting and Analyzing My Anger

Dr. Jerry Nelson
www.soundliving.org

Proverbs 22:24 “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered.”

Proverbs 29:11 “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.”

Proverbs 29:22 “An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins.”

Proverbs 30:33 “For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife.”

Ecclesiastes 7:9 “Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.”

Ephesians 4:26-27,31-32 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

The Bible speaks of God’s holy anger, which is a righteous anger. And while there might be a righteous anger coming from a true defense of the holy character of God, we must be honest that 99.9% of our anger is not in defense of God’s holiness but wholly self-centered.

So much so that James words are accurate:

James 1:19-20 “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

What does my anger look like?

Stuff it
Smolder
Explode

Illustration:

Four men: Frank, Craig, Mike and Bob.

Typical men wherein success and security in their jobs are important.

Threats to their jobs creates frustration, insecurity and anger.

President announces the company is folding and in 30 days they will all be out of work.

- Frank explodes immediately – “They can’t do that to me” he yells and head off for the president’s office where he pushes past secretaries to yell and swear at the CEO before being hustled out by security guards.
- Craig paces around his desk, wringing his hands and after muttering expletives about the president, reaches into his desk and pulls out a bottle of vodka.
He slips down the hall to privacy and drinks as he continues to mutter to himself about the unfairness of it.
- Mike hears the news while at his work bench but you can’t tell he even hears the announcement much less feels anything about it.
A friend tries to engage him on his plans but Mike is in another world. He feels a major headache coming on but he bends over his bench and keeps working, while inside his anger is boiling.
- Bob is just as upset as the others are but he picks up the phone and calls his wife and tells her the news and tells her how frightened it makes him feel. They agree to talk more that night .

How do I express my anger?

Anger that leads to rage and broken relationships and even broken bones.

The avenging angel – they use words or physical strength to take revenge.

The Critic – blamers, angry joker, fault-finder (looking for flaws in another), cannibals (they go for the jugular).

Anger that leads to addictions – drinking, pornography,

Anger that goes underground – being eaten alive.

The Passive-Aggressive – Uses subtle ways to frustrate others (to avenge his anger): procrastination, sarcasm,

Anger that gets expressed in constructive ways.

Q. How do I most often express my anger?

Causes of Anger:

Sometimes men know exactly why they are angry and we will talk of that in a minute.

But sometimes we are angry without knowing why.

Illustration from my own life: I walk in at 6:00 the counter is a mess (a pet peeve of mine), Barbara is on the computer doing e-mail, I haven't eaten all day but apparently nothing has been started, and I have a meeting at 7:00. Barbara doesn't work outside the home and Paris was in school most of the day – so what's the excuse? And I feel myself getting instantly angry. But it is not reasonable because I haven't even asked what is going on in her life. Why am I so instantly angry?

“Men who are angry without knowing why almost always express it in ways that are unhealthy and destructive to themselves and others. It is called “free-floating” anger because the victim is on the brink of anger much of the time without an obvious cause.” (Stoop/Atterburn, 66)

Questions men must answer or they will tend to be angry

(Stoop/Atterburn, 109ff):

Am I a man? (age 18-25)

Am I competent? (age 26-40)

Do I have worth beyond my paycheck? (age 41-50)

Can I accept my limitations? (age 51-65)

Do I have meaning beyond my accomplishments? (age 65+)

Q. What evidence is there in your life that you are experiencing “free-floating” anger?

Causes:

- A learned response from childhood – temper gets me what I want.

- Physical fatigue and poor health.
- Fear – a child hides and we fear they have been abducted.

But there are two other major causes of anger:

Frustration and Hurt – we will deal with one (frustration) this morning and the other (hurt) tonight.

Frustration:

(Have three men act this out)

It's early evening. The TV is on. The kitchen is hot and full of oven smells. James and his mother, Sarah, begin the opening round of a familiar conflict:

Sarah: "Is your homework done yet?"

James: "It's only six o'clock. I have all night to do it."

Sarah: "Everybody has a job to do. This is my job right here, making dinner. You think I like standing in this hot kitchen? Your job is schoolwork, and I don't see you doing it."

James: "Look, I'm cooling out from school. Leave me alone."

Sarah: "I want you to turn off the television and do your schoolwork. I'm sick of telling you. Just do your job like everybody else."

James: "You think your job is to be the field marshal around her. Leave me alone. Go hassle Dad when he comes in."

Sarah (starting to shout): "I'm sick of your mouth. Turn off the television, I said. Your lazy, you let your work go to the end, and then it's slipshod crap."

James (shouting): "Stuff it, just stuff it. And you know where. You can't stand it when I relax; you never let me relax for a second. I guess you want everybody to be as crazy and screwed up as you are."

At this point a key is heard turning in the front door. James' father, Tom, walks the short way to the kitchen. He leans against the counter and begins speaking in a quiet, compressed voice:

Tom: "What's going on in here? What's the matter with you? I'm walking up to the house thinking, 'finally I can relax,' and I hear you screaming like banshees in here."

(His voice grows louder) “James did I hear you calling your mother crazy? Is that a way to talk? Do you want to shout? Why don’t you shout at me?”

(He moves toward James) “Why don’t you shout at me, huh? Why don’t you try it? See how it feels.

(He pushes James backward) “Nothing? You don’t want to shout?”

(He turns to Sarah) “What’s the matter with the two of you? What’s wrong in this house?”

(He shouts) “Why don’t you learn to talk to each other? Bickering, bickering. This place is like an asylum!” (From When Anger Hurts, 42,43)

Q. What is going on inside Tom?

Three major **feeders of frustration** (Oliver and Wright):

1. Unfulfilled expectations.

We want something, we expect something, and we don’t get it and so we get angry.

Gary Oliver wrote that, “control seems to be at the heart of stress and anger for a majority of men.” (Oliver and Wright, 133)

- We are trained to be in control.

“The autonomous male, the independent strong achiever who can be counted on to be always in control, is still essentially the preferred male image. Success in the working world is predicated on the repression of self and the display of a controlled, deliberate, calculated, manipulative responsiveness. To become a leader requires that one be totally goal-oriented, undistracted by personal factors, wand able to tune out extraneous “noise” human or otherwise, which is unrelated tot he end goal and which might impede forward motion. The man who “feels” becomes inefficient and effective because he gets emotionally involved and this inevitably slows him down and distracts him. His more dehumanized competitor will then surely pass him by.” Herb Goldberg The Hazards of Being Male p43,44

- And when we aren’t in control we are fearful.
- And when we are fearful we react, usually in anger.

Q.

When I’m not in control I feel _____.

When someone else is controlling me I feel _____.

When someone else is controlling me I want to _____.

In order to stay in control I usually _____.

Others can tell I am out of control when I _____.

I cover up my fear of being out of control by _____.

(From Oliver and Wright, 139)

Six steps in getting mad:

(Actually only two: 1.) I want my way and 2.) I must therefore have it!)

1. I want something
2. I didn't get what I wanted and I am frustrated.
3. It is awful that I didn't get what I wanted. (we get angry not by what others do or don't do but by what we think.)
4. You shouldn't frustrate me. I must have my way. (The wish becomes a demand.)
5. You are bad for frustrating me. (I not only reject your behavior, I reject you, unless you change.)
6. Bad people ought to be punished and I will punish you. (Hauck, Overcoming Frustration and Anger,)

And in our anger we punish:

Forcing it – brute strength or intimidation.

Manipulating it by pouting, passive-aggressive behavior.

Ask the men to illustrate this for me

Power levers: attention, affection, sex, money or approval.

Withholding one or more of these may be the way we express our anger.

Sometimes what we want is quite apparent but sometimes it is hidden even from us because we aren't very self-aware.

This is going back to "causes" for our anger, but I put it here because I want us to see how some events are simply "triggers" to other expectations that are being frustrated.

And getting a handle on some of those needs might help us better cope with what we are feeling.

Bob Biehl has written of our dominant emotional need.
From the following eight, which is your dominant need?

Worksheet on "dominant emotional need"

Loved unconditionally, just as I am?
 Significant and making a lasting difference?
 Admired by the group?
 Recognized not ignored?
 Appreciated for a job well done?
 Secure and in control?
 Respected as an adult, equal to other adults?
 Accepted socially, included and invited by others? (Biehl 64-68)

Jerry's: Respected as an adult, equal to other adults.

Refer to worksheet on "Backup style"

Dominant backup style I use when my dominant emotional style isn't being met:

- Perfectionism – performing perfectly to feel worthy of love?
- Manipulating people emotionally by intellectual intimidation?
- Cutting corners – going around rules and structures to get what I want?
- Extreme behavior – demanding attention by actions or appearance?
- Workaholism – working harder and longer ... emotionally hiding in our work where it is emotionally safer?
- Overcontrolling by insisting people follow the rules... becoming rigid and demanding... forcing people?
- Withdrawing from or avoiding situations when I feel intimidated?
- Withdrawing from people before they withdraw from me? Biehl 116-120

Frustration is also caused by something deeper than simply unmet expectations.

2. Feelings of entitlement – "entitlement says the degree of your need justifies the demand that others meet that need." (Oliver & Wright, 113)

Selfishness is a major cause of "out-of-bounds" anger. "A demand that demands that others meet your demands." Augsburger in Caring Enough to Confront

The Fallacy of Entitlement

"The entitlement fallacy is based on this simple belief: because I want something very much, I ought to have it. The basic idea is that the degree of your need justifies the demand that someone else provides it. The feeling is that there are certain things you are entitled to... The entitlement confuses desire with obligation. It says, 'When I want something this much, you have no right to say no.' Strong feelings of entitlement deny

others the freedom to choose. And this is now entitlement damages relationships. It demands that the other person give up his or her limits and boundaries for you. It says your need and your pain must come first, that the function of the relationship is to serve you.” (McKay, et al, When Anger Hurts p85)

I have the right to be married.

I have the right to have a job that meets my expectations.

I have the right to exciting sex.

I have the right to peace and quiet and time to do what I want to do.

I have the right to.... **Ask the men to help me complete the list.**

“Realize that it is 100 percent okay not to have your needs met 100 percent of the time. (Biehl, Why I do what I do, 162)

In fact, I actually have no rights!

Consistent with the second, a third contributor to frustration is:

3. Thinking that life should be fair.

The Fallacy of Fairness that there is an objective standard that everyone should know (a standard made up by you from your perspective). (McKay et al,)

“You are God’s student, not life’s victim.” (Biehl, Why I do..., 165)