



## ANGER: DEFILED FROM WITHIN

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*counsel • self-study • teaching • cell group • life*

### SCREAM, BREATHE, AND BEAT A PILLOW

Screaming into pillows, breathing deeply, counting to ten, beating an object with a baseball bat, and stomping your feet until intense feelings subside: these are but a few of the remedies historically offered by counselors to address anger. As is the case with most secular methods of counseling, these techniques flow from a worldview of anger that is not necessarily consistent with the Bible. In many instances, anger is conceptualized as an amoral emotion that simply builds up inside a person. Therefore, the means to control this pressure is to find a productive and socially acceptable way to relieve it (i.e., screaming, breathing, beating pillows, etc.). While these methods may offer a temporary relief or outlet, they do not address the root issues of anger, nor do they account for the moral element that is always a factor as it relates to this powerful emotion.

Biblically, all anger is not necessarily considered wrong. However, in most cases, what a person feels is "righteous anger" is simply his or her way to justify sin. As such, you need to be equipped to address sinful anger in a way that honors God and brings repentant change within your heart.

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Step one of addressing sinful anger may be the most difficult: choosing to take

responsibility for your own emotions. You may have heard at one time or another, the phrase, "You make me angry." The implication being that the cause of one's anger resides on the offender not the one expressing the anger. If you use this statement it ultimately exhibits a refusal to own up to your responsibility over your own attitude, thinking, and behavior. If this is not addressed, then ultimately the cure for your anger resides in the offender changing, leaving you hopeless and forcing you to accept a very dismal conclusion: "If the other person doesn't change, I cannot change." Fortunately, however, the Bible views anger and its origin very differently. As such, it may be helpful to consider the words of Jesus at this point.

Jesus said in Mark 7:20-23, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." Paul declares later in Galatians 5:19-21, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these."



### DEFILED FROM WITHIN (CONT)

Both Jesus and Paul pinpoint with divine accuracy the origin of sin and evil (including sinful anger). According to them the origin of sinful anger does not reside with a critical spouse, a distant husband, a disobedient child, an unjust boss, a difficult employee, or the guy who is driving recklessly in traffic. No, Christ and the apostle point to the heart as the root of the problem. Their proclamation reveals the inaccuracy of the statement cited earlier: "You make me angry." According to scripture, the proper way to look at your anger is to say, "I make myself angry" or "My anger flows from my own heart and is my responsibility." With such a view in place, you are free to work towards godly transformation even if those in your life that you consider troublesome never choose to change (i.e., critical wife, distant husband, disobedient child, etc.). Additionally, by adopting a biblical worldview, you will begin to operate from a foundation that will facilitate true and lasting change in your life, and the means to do so will be very different than those cited earlier (e.g., pillows and breathing).

All the breathing techniques, counting techniques, and beating of pillows will not suffice to cure the sinful ill of anger. To effectively gain control over your anger is to recognize and adopt a biblical worldview on the issue. Once responsibility is accepted, then the process of repentance and change can begin. As is always the case, training yourself in biblical disciplines while urging a deeper dependence on God and His grace for the

strength to change will ultimately be key in the process.

### ANGER QUICK LIST: DEFILED FROM WITHIN

1. **Read Mark 7:20-23 and Galatians 5:19-23:** From where do Jesus and Paul say that evil and fits of rage emerge. Seek to acknowledge that your anger is 100% your responsibility, and commit to change.
2. **Read James 4:1-4 and Ephesians 4:22-23:** Notice that both James and Paul highlight the influence of desire on one's attitude and behavior. Identify your desires. What desires do you demand from others that contribute to your anger? Consider these: justice, power, control, respect, love, and perfection.
3. **Read James 4:5-8:** Submit yourself and your desires to God, and enter into a mindset of repentance from your pride.
4. **Read Romans 12:1-3; 12:14-21:** What principles can you pull from these passages when tempted towards anger? Develop a plan. Implement it.
5. **Read Romans 13:8:** What do you owe others, even when frustrated? The answer: LOVE
6. **Read Ephesians 2:1-5:** What do you deserve from God? What has He chosen to give you (out of his own goodness) instead? How can you offer this mercy to others when angry?



## PRAYER FOR ANGER

Oh God, how often we rage against others when we do not get our way. How often we allow our wrath to be carried out on those who offend us. All the while You have chosen to grant us mercy instead of what we truly deserve, Your righteous anger. Humble us as we view others in the context of how You view us, Your children. As we are so humbled, bring about a new desire to honor You when others offend. It is only by your grace we can overcome our struggles with sin. As such, help us to trust you for change and refuse the prideful demeanor of foolishly trusting ourselves, and the desires that so easily deceive us. May it be so by the mighty power of Jesus Christ, in whose name we humbly pray. Amen.

## RESOURCES FOR ANGER

- Adams, J. (1979). *More than redemption: A theology of Christian counseling*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Fitzpatrick, E. (2001). *Overcoming fear, worry, and anxiety*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House.
- Jones, R. (2005). *Uprooting anger: Biblical help for a common problem*. Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.
- Powlison, D. (1997). Getting to the heart of conflict: Anger part 3. *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, 16(1), 32-42.
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Priolo, L. (1997). *The heart of anger: Practical help for the prevention and cure of anger in children*. New York: Calvary Press.

Welch, E. (1998). *Blame it on the brain?* Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press.

Welch, E. (1997). *When people are big and god is small: Overcoming peer pressure, codependency, and the fear of man*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press.

Books May Be Found At:

[www.christiancounseling.com](http://www.christiancounseling.com)

Articles May Be Found At:

[www.ccef.org](http://www.ccef.org)

"Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly."

Proverbs 15:29