

Cooling Down a Hot-temper

*He who is slow to anger has great understanding,
But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.*

Proverbs 14:29

Introduction

In my studies this week I discovered a rare, ancient proverb:

“When mama ain’t happy, ain’t nobody happy.”

How true, yes?

To be fair, I actually don’t think that’s saying as much about mama as it is about the social effects of strong emotions, particularly anger.

When someone is angry-whether daddy, brother, sister, or the boss- you know it, feel it, have to work around it. It’s like a fire, you have to be careful or someone’s going to get burned.

That’s why Proverbs warns:

14:16 *The fool is hot-headed and reckless, a quick-tempered man does foolish things.*

Anger can be explosive and lead you to places you otherwise shouldn’t go: murder, jealousy, depression, all kinds of personal and social ills. It can get us close to the heart of God or quench the Spirit in a heartbeat.

Can you tell when someone is irritated? Of course! Anger is very hard to hide.

It’s one of the most visible emotions: red-faced, nostrils flare, fists clench, voice raised.

14:17 *He who is quick-tempered exalts folly.*

The Bible assumes we all get angry, but anger is a potential area of life for significant stumbling:

29:11 *A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back.*

14:29 *He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.*

17:27 *He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding*

Outwardly we can usually tell the difference: one is hot and the other is cool.

One is primed and ready for a fight, the other is calm and collect.

I know people who seem ready for a fight, and they’re stinky to be around.

Inwardly, what is the difference between the fool and the wise person?

It isn’t *whether* they get angry, but *how* they get angry.

See the contrast: the fool is *quick-tempered*, the wise is *slow* to anger.

Controlled anger defines moral strength:

16:32 *He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty*

The question for you today is, therefore, how do you become a *slow-to-anger* person?

These verses give us the answer: you have *great understanding*.

The pathway out of destructive anger is knowledge, perspective, the truth, living a Biblical worldview.

What four things does wisdom teach us we need to understand about anger in order to become a slow-to-anger kind of person?

1. The history of anger

a. STAGE 1: Anger is natural to God's good creation.

How so? Anger is a part of God's character, though His is never capricious or ill-humored.

Ps.7:11 The Lord is angry with the wicked all day long.

When he looks at evil his anger does not turn away:

Jn.3:36 The wrath of God abides on all who do not obey the Son of God.

God wouldn't be good if He wasn't angry with wickedness or injustice, whatever harms innocent, good things. People often hear of God's anger and want to impugn it. But consider the alternatives; no good person was ever indifferent to or condoning of evil.

If God has righteous, appropriate anger, then Adam and Eve, as God's image-bearers, had it before they fell. When Satan came into the Garden lying about God, life and death, offering sin as an acceptable lifestyle, they should have been furious with righteous indignation and clubbed the serpent to death. They should have reacted with perfect anger- strong emotions, clear arguments, and violent action.

b. STAGE 2: Our capacity for righteous anger became seriously spoiled at the fall.

Humans fell under the dominion of Satan, the angriest person in the universe. His anger stems from his hatred of God and malice toward those who bear his image and serve him. The essence of anger is:

“I want my way, not God's, and because I can't have my way, I rage.”

The result of sin entering the world means we are fundamentally angry at the wrong person; we should be angry at the destroyer of God's good creation, Satan, instead we're mad at God.

19:3 The foolishness of man subverts his way, and his heart rages against the Lord.

14:2 He who walks in his uprightness fears the Lord, but he who is crooked in his ways despises Him.

So anger is part of our fallen character. Much of human anger is sinful. If you don't believe it, have children. There they are in all their sweetness until they don't get their way. Then what? A “hissy fit”, a burst of anger, you most certainly didn't teach them.

To compound that sad reality, we also learn anger. If you don't believe it, have children. As they get older they begin to imitate the ways in which their parents get angry. So:
22:24 Do not associate with a man given to anger, or go with a hot-tempered man, lest you learn his ways and find a snare for yourself.

Paul concurs in 1 Cor15:33: *Bad company corrupts good morals*

2. The price of anger

It's an emotion affecting the whole person- our bodies, mind, motives-with consequences

a. Further strife

It leads rapidly to relational meltdown:

29:22 *An angry man stirs up strife*

30:33 *The churning of anger produces strife*

b. More sin

Anger sticks with us until its grip is decisively broken:

19:19 *A man of great anger shall bear the penalty, for if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again.*

29:22 *a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression*

c. Others are alienated

14:17 *A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated.*

Why don't angry people have many friends? They aren't pleasant to be around.

The cost? Others lose the blessing of benefiting from their gifts.

d. Penalty

19:19 *A man of great anger shall bear the penalty*

When you go to purchase a major item- a car, house, appliance, investment- you typically ask a lot of questions.

Proverbs says the wise man stops and considers what his anger is worth. What does it achieve? Is the value of the outburst worth what you pay for it?

Your kids won't open their hearts to you because they fear you.

The unresolved resentment you hold against your spouse, is it worth the fruit of it- lack of intimacy, joy, experience of kindness and oneness? No wonder Paul warns,

Eph. 4:26: *Be angry and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your anger.*

3. The cause of anger

We often entertain two misunderstandings of the source of anger:

1. We tend to think anger is like a radiator inside us, that given enough provocation builds up and releases under pressure. It's better to see anger as something you do, a judgment you make against a perceived wrong, that plays out in the mind like this:

Suppose you're in a traffic jam, or running late for a very important meeting and the person in front of you on a winding single-lane road is going 6 miles under the speed limit:

You become investigator—prosecuting attorney---witness—judge—jury—jailor—hangman.

Anger is an attitude of judgment: “I don’t approve of this slow driver”
A condemnation: “cursed be the idiot causing me inconvenience”
And displeasure: “and I rage as a result”

So anger is something you do:

Feeling → intense thinking → vivid imagining → clear judgments → behavior (usually tongue first)

2. A second misunderstanding is the source of anger is out there:

The problem is my spouse, roommate, professor, neighbor’s incessantly barking dog, child, putter, boss, car... whatever.

It’s better to see anger in terms of goals and beliefs.

When you’re angry, ask yourself, What is it I want so badly?

What am I demanding right now that I think I so desperately need to be happy?

What goal am I pursuing that is being blocked?

/

ME-----/-----GOAL

/ (blocked)

You need to ask the Spirit to show you what selfish cravings are ruling your heart, what you’ve enthroned as a must have: control, approval, mastery, peace, leisure, success... Back to driving behind a slowpoke... Is your goal to not be late? Superficially it is. But what’s driving that goal (excuse the pun)? Deeper goals, such as being late makes you look bad. You don’t want to look bad because then people may not like you. See the real goal? You need approval to feel intact as a human being.

Your demands reveal what you believe. Sinful anger always believes lies about God.

God exists to give me what I want.

God’s not fixing this because He doesn’t love me.

Is that the limit of your understanding?

Why haven’t you considered that God is trying to teach you something?

Maybe God is giving you an opportunity to become a different kind of person.

Maybe God is exposing your self-dependence so you can learn to pray, or lean on others.

Maybe your children are frustrating you so God can picture the way He sees your heart.

Maybe your life isn’t as calm as you want it so God can forge true faith in you, and get you closer to the heart of Jesus, who didn’t have a calm life.

If you want to control your anger you need to learn to distinguish between desires and needs. Often we get angry when we turn our desires into our needs.

It’s one thing to desire your children obey you, but you don’t need that to be whole spiritually.

It’s one thing to desire respect from another person, but you don’t need that to be whole spiritually.

What you need to be whole spiritually, you already have, the riches of Christ, the benefits of the gospel. And what wisdom you may lack God will give to you, when you depend on Him.

So you desire to look competent, be heard, valued, seen as knowledgeable, skilled, or mature in front of others?

Why do you need to be valued, heard, seen as important?

Don't make that a goal- something you must have to feel complete as a person.

Why not a goal? It isn't something God says you must have to be happy or peaceful.

It might be nice to have it but you don't need it to be godly.

Plus, achieving that goal requires the cooperation of others, and you simply can't control that.

But you maintain that it's wrong for others to insult you!

That's their problem. God hasn't called any of us to an insult-free life. You're called to give blessings, not expect them or receive them.

So how do you respond to insults or neglect?

Sinful anger answers with pride: How dare you! You're the jerk! I demand respect!

Godly anger enthrones Jesus. Jesus says, *Forgive them, they know not what they do.*

19:11 *A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression.*

12:16 *A fool shows his annoyance at once, but a prudent man overlooks an insult.*

How do you overlook, look beyond an insult?

Put the cross between you and the insulter.

The cross has already criticized you- far worse than any human being could.

Next time say, "If you really knew me you'd say worse!"

Godly anger never needs to win, to be proven right. Paul says, *why not rather be wronged.* (1 Cor.6:7)

You will gain understanding by talking less and listening more, lest you become angry before you know the whole story. Set your opinions aside and open your mind.

James 1:19 *Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.*

4. God's anger

You are ultimately powerless to become a slow-to-anger person until you experience God's anger. How?

- a. You experience God's anger in mercy.

The wrath your sins deserved fell upon Jesus on the cross. The bow of His anger was drawn back on you, but released into the heart of righteous Jesus. He took it all, there's none left for you. God forgives and changes angry people by revealing to them that His anger is now for them.

b. You experience God's anger in deliverance.

Through the gospel God has poured out His Spirit into our hearts to be a burning fire against our sinful anger because He knows how bad it is for us and for the unity of the body. He won't tolerate sin in us, and helps us hate our sin. Instead of being mad as hell, be mad at hell, turn your anger on the devil and your own sin. Do you hate it more than other's sin?

The evidence you don't is how long you entertain negative thoughts about others. You pray for yourself the way you would pray for others frailties. Humility throws water on the fire of anger.

c. You experience God's anger in hope

Our sure confidence, future certainty, God-sworn expectation, is that at the day of the Lord-Judgment Day- God in His anger will fulfill His promises to alleviate all injustice, suffering, sickness, pain, sorrow, loss, and destroy his enemies, including death and the powers of evil.

The larger you magnify God's mercy, deliverance and hope, the smaller your reasons for anger become.