

# youthESource Bible Study

## Let's Talk: Anger

by Jim McConnell

### INTRODUCTION

In Titus 3:3, St. Paul offers a tragic description of human nature: "At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another."

Anyone watching the news, listening to the radio or reading the newspaper with any regularity will realize that the apostle Paul's depiction of the nature of humanity is just as true today as when he wrote it. We live in an angry world filled with angry people. Anger seems to surround us. Anger surfaces in our schools, our work places, our homes and even in our churches.

But what about those of us who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ? Have we put the problem of anger behind us? If you are at all honest with yourself, you will have to admit that feelings of anger and hatred are things that believers have to cope with nearly every day. In this discussion we want to think about the issue of anger and how to cope with it as Christians.

Participants will understand that anger is a normal, healthy reaction to certain situations of attack, shame and frustration, but they always have a choice in the way they express their angry feelings—either destructively or constructively. Be aware that youth attitudes about anger range from viewing it as always sinful to using it as a weapon at every opportunity. This study can be helpful to both extremes and may lead to much discussion.

### SUGGESTED USES FOR THIS RESOURCE

- Use for Sunday morning Bible study.
- Plan a youth night around the topic of anger, with this as the focus.
- Discuss anger during a lock-in or weekend retreat.
- Make a copy of the questions page for a youth who has concerns or questions.

## Leader's Notes

For most of these activities it is suggested to have the youth pair off with a friend. Triads will also be used for role-plays. The following notes on specific sections of the study may prove helpful. Questions in bold-faced print appear on the handout.

### GETTING STARTED

Ask youth the following: To begin to think about anger as an emotion, try to bring to mind one incident in the last two weeks that has made you really angry. It could be something in your personal life or something in the news. Share this with a partner and answer the following questions:

1. What made you angry?
2. How did you feel? Choose any of the following words, or come up with words of your own to describe your feelings:

furious	frustrated	depressed
hateful	vengeful	sad
bitter	spiteful	confused
helpless	out of control	afraid
3. How did you deal with your anger?

After giving each pair time to discuss, you may ask for a volunteer to share with the group.

### LOOKING INTO THE WORD

Have youth work in groups of two or three. Have each group look up one or more of the following stories in the Bible and answer these questions. Youth should be ready to share the answers with the rest of the group.

Mark 11:15-18

Genesis 4:3-12

Acts 15:36-41

1 Samuel 18:6-11

Galatians 2:11-14

2 Samuel 12:1-7, 13

After reading the passage, answer these questions:

1. Who was angry in this story?
2. What made this person angry?
3. Was this person's anger justified? Why or why not?
4. How did the person deal with the anger?

Mark 11:15-17—Jesus was rightfully angry over the misuse of the temple and took prompt action with His authority as God's Son to correct the situation. The chief priests were wrong to be angry at Jesus and made sinful plans to kill Him.

Genesis 4:3-12—Cain was wrong to be angry with Abel. His own sin made his sacrifice unacceptable to God. He dealt with his anger sinfully by murdering Abel.

1 Samuel 18:6-11—Saul was sinfully angry with David because of his jealousy and attempted to kill him.

Galatians 2:11-14—Paul was rightfully angry with Peter because of his hypocrisy and was correct to rebuke Peter publicly for having withdrawn from the Gentiles when the Jews arrived.

Acts 15:36-41—Paul and Barnabas were both angry with each other over the choice of a travel companion. Their sharp dispute was probably an example of sinful anger and caused their efforts for the Lord to be divided.

2 Samuel 12:1-7, 13—God was rightfully angry with David because of his sin and pronounced judgment on David through the prophet Nathan. David was rightfully angry with himself when he realized he was the one being condemned. His anger over his own sin led him to repentance, an appropriate response.

### WHEN IT'S RIGHT TO BE ANGRY

Ask students: Based on what you just heard and read in the Bible references, is it always wrong for a person to be angry? Are there certain things that should make us angry? Give some examples that come to mind.

Righteous anger is not in itself wrong. The Bible tells us that God's wrath goes out against all the evil and wickedness of all people, who because of their sinful nature continually rebel against Him. God's wrath is His righteous anger toward all who despise His will.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- Christians have forgotten how to hate strongly and rightfully the things that God hates.
- Christians have been guilty of a passive acceptance of all kinds of evil in our world which they should have opposed with all their might.
- A Christian can be rightfully angry over some sin which another person has committed against him or her.
- We have a tendency to think that whenever we are angry, it is rightfully so.

Discuss: How can you tell when righteous or rightful anger has become sinful anger? What are some indications you might look for to tell when you have crossed the line?

There is some truth in all four of the discussion points. Righteous anger should be expressed over evils in our world such as injustice, abortion, prejudice, etc. It should take the form of positive action to correct such evils. However, rightful anger over personal wrongs or causes can quickly become sinful if not handled properly. We must be on guard against this at all times. The following tests can be used to distinguish between rightful and sinful anger.

1. Is it excessive or out of proportion to the cause?
2. Does it cause us to lose control of ourselves?
3. Does it create in us a desire for revenge, or some other sinful response?

### **ANGER IN THE FAMILY**

Ask youth where they most often become angry. Where do they most often see others get angry?

One of the most common places to get angry is in the family. Have youth get back into the groups of two or three. Have each group think of a situation which answers either of these two questions:

1. What is the one thing parents do that makes teenagers really angry?
2. What is the one thing teens do that makes parents really angry?

Give youth a few minutes to brainstorm with their group and to role-play one of situations they thought of. Work out your role-play in two ways—one which represents a negative way of dealing with that anger, and a second which represents a positive way of dealing with it. Remind youth to be ready to share role-plays with the whole group.

Be sure that this time does not become a complaint session about parents. Discuss the underlying reasons for anger in those situations. For example, a parent who is angry about a missed curfew may actually be reacting to their own worry or fear that something bad had happened to their son or daughter. If a youth discloses that a parent becomes angry when he/she drinks heavily or that a parent abuses them, be sure to follow up appropriately!

### **DEALING WITH ANGER**

Read the following story to the group: A group of sailors in the South Pacific wanted to get some coconuts from the trees for their enjoyment. The coconuts were far overhead, well out of the reach of the sailors, who didn't have the skills of the natives to climb the trees and cut down the coconuts. The sailors noticed that there were monkeys in the trees overhead and came up with a plan. They began to throw rocks at the monkeys. The monkeys soon became so angry that they began to throw coconuts at the sailors. The sailors used the monkeys' anger to get exactly what they wanted.

If we don't learn how to control and deal with our anger positively, our enemies (including the devil) will use it to get exactly what they want.

1. With your small group members try to think of one or two negative ways in which people often deal with anger.

Here are some negative ways of dealing with anger:

- a. Letting it linger.
- b. Internalizing it, or turning it inward.
- c. Using anger to justify other sinful actions, such as hurting others emotionally or physically.
- d. Hurting one's self because of anger (punching a wall, kicking a locker at school, hurting one's self with eating disorders).

2. As a large group, discuss these negative ways of dealing with anger and come up with a list of ways we should avoid dealing with our anger.

Use newsprint to generate a list from discussion. Possible answers may include:

- a. Express anger in a proper way while you remain in control of yourself.
- b. Hard work or play, good physical exercise, can sometimes be an effective way to work out your anger.
- c. God told Cain, "You must master it." We can do so only by the power of the Holy Spirit. When we do not master our anger we grieve the Holy Spirit. When we conquer it we please the Holy Spirit.
- d. Forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven you—freely, unconditionally, completely. Rely on the Holy Spirit to live a life of love, just as Christ loved us. Demonstrate a desire to perform acts of kindness toward the person with whom you have had a quarrel. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).
- e. Pray for the person with whom you are angry. Bring the situation to God in prayer and ask Him to help you work through your angry feelings. He promises to help you carry and work through the burden you bear.
- f. Speak to the person who has caused you anger. Even when your anger is not proper, but the result of a misunderstanding you may have created, you need to speak to the other person involved.

3. Again with your small group members, look up one of the following Bible passages and try to develop a positive strategy for dealing with anger.

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Matthew 5:43-44

Genesis 4:7

Romans 12:17-21

Matthew 5:21-16

4. Discuss these strategies as a large group and come up with a list of as many positive ways of dealing with anger as possible.

## A PERSONAL EXHORTATION

To close this study, have the participants sit in a circle holding hands with heads bowed in silence. Read aloud Psalm 4. After the reading, repeat the phrase in verse 4, "In your anger, do not sin." Say to the person on your left: (*Name*), *in your anger do not sin*. Participants continue this exhortation around the circle. Then close the session with a brief prayer for God's strength to handle anger in His way.

## MORE

These activities can be used to supplement the discussion piece or can be used as an extension at a future meeting.

- Use the following litany to confess those times we have been angry.

LEADER: Heavenly Father, when You speak to us about Yourself, You tell us that You are "slow to anger, abounding in love." David tells us to "sing to the Lord...for His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime."

GROUP: Why are we so different from you, Father?

LEADER: It is because we are children of Adam and Eve, and like their first child, Cain, we hold on to our anger and even feed it.

GROUP: But this is not Your will for us, dear Lord, and so we confess to You our angry sins and seek Your forgiveness for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ.

LEADER: We thank You that by Your Holy Spirit You have made us Your own dear children, with a new nature which enables us to love others as You have loved us.

GROUP: Help us, Father, for Jesus' sake, to use Your Spirit's power to overcome our anger and replace it with love and forgiveness.

LEADER: In Jesus' name, and because He bore God's anger for you, I assure you that God has forgiven your angry sins.

- Use segments from television and movies to show people who are angry. (For example, the coach in the movie *Hoosiers* is very angry at his team when they do not follow his instructions in a basketball game early in the season.) Discuss: Why was the individual angry? How could this situation be avoided?
- Discuss how anger changes relationships. Have you ever been so angry with a friend that it ended your friendship? What can be done to repair relationships that have been broken or damaged by anger?

*("Anger: Right and Wrong," originally written by Robert Nordlie, published in Youth Ministry Quarterly 90:1. Rewritten and updated by Jim McConnell in 1999.*

*Updated for youthESource April 2015*

youthESource is published on the Web by the LCMS Office of National Mission—Youth Ministry. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1333 South Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295; 1-800-248-1930; [www.youthesource.com](http://www.youthesource.com). Editor: Sherrah Holobaugh Behrens. VOL. 12 NO. 4. April 2015.

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