

A PRACTICAL TEST

During the next week, if you find yourself becoming angry, take a few moments and think about what's going on. Why are you angry? What is it that is not happening the way you want it to? Where does this expose a lack of faith in God?

Then pray and ask God to give you more faith. Meditate on God's patient love for you and thank him for the riches of His grace.

A FINAL WARNING

If you experience anger in your life on a consistent basis, please take this warning to heart. *Getting angry is like playing with fire, sooner or later you will get burned.*

When Moses was called by God, he wasn't called to simply lead his people out of Egypt, he was called to lead them into the promised land (Exodus 3). In Numbers 20, we see the reason that Moses was not allowed to fulfill this calling – a seemingly insignificant outburst of anger.

Anger brings hurt. When we are angry, we hurt others. And we also hurt our relationship with God. This is why Paul says, "In your anger do not sin...and do not give the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26, 27). Anger is a foothold for the devil because in it we are asserting our independence from God.

Don't let habitual anger rule your life any longer. Turn back now, before you say or do something that can never be overcome.

Repent, come back to the cross – experience the love and forgiveness of Christ. Pray that He will grant you faith to live in the light of His peace.

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Where Anger Comes From

David Delk

You've felt it. It's that rush of emotion that seems to flood through your veins. It's that volcanic eruption that screams for release. It's the pot whose lid begins to rattle as the contents boil over.

Perhaps it comes when a car cuts you off in traffic and then slows down because he doesn't know where he is going. Maybe you feel it when you step on the toy car with a bare foot. Perhaps it's when your wife just can't seem to see things from your perspective. What is it that makes you angry?

In Numbers 20, Moses got mad at the people of Israel. They were tired of wandering in the desert and complained to Moses about the lack of water.

The Lord told Moses to take his staff and speak to the rock, then water would come forth for the people.

So Moses took the staff from the Lord's presence, just as he commanded him. He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. (Numbers 20:9-11)

Where does anger come from? And how can we overcome it? Consider the following four insights...

FOUR INSIGHTS INTO ANGER

1. Anger usually comes as a result of unmet expectations.

I most often get angry when something unexpected deflects me from my agenda. When I have to wait 3 minutes in a fast food line in a noisy car and I thought it would only be 45 seconds, impatience can easily turn to anger.

Anger is what we feel when things don't turn out the way we want.

The Bible does speak of a righteous anger or indignation, but we probably experience this much less than we might think. God is angry when things are not the way they should be. We are usually angry when things are not the way we want them to be.

2. *Anger usually comes when we feel most out of control.*

The other night I was at home with the kids. My seven-year-old asked me to look at a loose tooth, so I sat down at the kitchen table as he leaned his head back and opened his mouth. Before checking on the tooth, I happened to glance over his shoulder into the kitchen.

My two-year-old had a half-gallon of orange juice and was getting ready to pour it into a paper cup on the kitchen floor. At the same moment, my five-year-old strained on her tiptoes in the pantry to reach an already opened bag of pretzels.

In my mind's eye, I immediately pictured the kids stomping and dancing on a kitchen floor covered with orange juice and pretzels. How did I react? I got angry.

Any one of those things by itself would not have made me angry. I have helped the two-year-old pour juice many times. My five-year-old gets things out of the pantry every day with hardly an accident. So what was the difference?

All these things happening at the same time gave me the feeling of losing control, and the quickest way to regain control was to get angry.

While the scriptures do not tell us for sure, I believe the same thing happened to Moses. After all, Moses had been angry before...

I pictured the kids stomping and dancing on a floor covered with orange juice and pretzels.

In Exodus 32, when Moses came down the mountain with the Ten Commandments, he found the people worshipping the golden calf. He became so angry at their rebellion that he ended up washing their mouths out with gold dust (see Exodus 32:19-20). And Moses also found out why anger was dangerous.

WHY ANGER IS SO DANGEROUS

There are two main reasons that anger is so dangerous.

3. *Anger takes you farther than you really want to go.*

When Moses came off the mountain and saw the people, he threw the Ten Commandments on the ground and broke the tablets. This was the sacred law of God, and God was not pleased. In Numbers, Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it, as God had commanded him. In both cases, anger carried Moses into disobedience against God.

When I flew over Southern California recently, I saw storm drainage canals crisscrossing the city. They were empty and peaceful on that sunny day, but during a storm they turn into raging rivers in a matter of minutes. It seems that every few weeks someone else is dramatically rescued.

Getting angry is a little like putting a foot into a raging torrent. It may feel good at first, but if you are not careful you will find yourself a mile downstream. How many times has anger led you to say or do something that you regretted later? Anger is also dangerous because...

4. *At its root, all unrighteous anger is anger against God.*

This may seem strong, but I believe the scriptures support this claim.

Consider how God responds to Moses' angry disobedience in Numbers 20. "But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them'" (Numbers 20:12, emphasis added).

God said that Moses' anger came from a lack of trust. How are trust and faith related to our anger?

When I become angry, it is because I don't like the way things are going. But who is in control of the circumstances and situations of my life? The Bible makes it clear that God is in control, and he brings things in and out of our lives for our good and His glory.

So my anger at the "situation" or another person is really only thinly veiled anger at God. I am mad at Him because he is not giving me what I want. Not only that, I am expressing a desire to wrest control of my life from Him and take matters into my own hands. In effect, I'm telling God, "I don't like the way you're handling this, I need to take care of it myself."

It is an issue of control. Am I living by faith, willing to allow God to be the Lord of my life? Or am I trusting in my own abilities and trying to make my own way? If you experience anger on a consistent basis, that is a sure sign of a self-reliant attitude and a lack of faith in God.

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OVERCOMING ANGER

How can we overcome anger?

Dealing with anger is not simply a matter of will power. We can't simply decide to not get angry anymore. If you have enough self-discipline, you may be able to hide anger or internalize it, but you can never deal with the root.

In James 1:19-21, James says we should be "slow to become angry." And then he tells us to "humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."

Dealing with anger requires a humble acceptance of God's lordship over our lives. As he told Moses, it requires that we trust Him and have the faith to believe that he is working all things for our good (Romans 8:28). A vibrant, daily trust in God can help us to react to situations not from self-interest, but by seeing things through the eyes of faith.