

## **The Nature of Anger**

Anger is something that most households, if not most individuals, deal with everyday. Its prevalency was illustrated in a recent survey of 150 9-12 year olds when asked, among other questions, "What do you dislike most about your mother?" "The surveyors reported, 'Almost every child used the phrase "her screaming." Over and over again we read, "I can't stand it when she screams."' " Certainly mothers are not the only screamers, or the only angry ones. Anger is as common as mankind itself. For when God made us He made us with the intended design for the capacity to be angry. Here are some of the characteristics of our God-given capacity for anger.

First, anger is an instinctive survival response. Whenever something or someone or a circumstance threatens us with pain, whether physical, emotional or relational pain, or threatens us with frustration by blocking the meeting of our needs, rights, desires, goals, hopes or dreams, or threatens us with some fear of loss or injury, we instinctively react physically. Here is a description of our physiological reaction: "Respiration deepens; the heart beats more rapidly; the arterial pressure rises; the blood is shifted away from the stomach and intestines to the heart and central nervous system and the muscles; the processes in the alimentary canal ease; sugar is freed from the reserves in the liver; the spleen contracts and discharges its content of concentrated corpuscles, and adrenal is secreted from the adrenal medulla." This physiological response then elicits one of two emotional responses: anger or fear. In the moment that we perceive a threat our instinctive response takes over to prepare us either in anger to attack the threat or in fear to flee from it. Note, it is instinctive because it happens faster than we can think about it. It happens automatically. We don't have to consciously tell our adrenal glands to start their secretions, or our blood vessels to contract themselves. The body instinctively takes over.

Second, once our bodies have been instinctively "preped" the decision of what to do about this threat is then turned over to our minds. We must decide what action is to be taken. Never forget our actions are in control of our minds. Our instinctive reaction has empowered and focused our bodies, emotions, and minds to take action upon a threat, so when our minds are engaged in this process it like handing over a loaded and cocked gun with the implied instruction to aim and fire--thus to end this threat. But it is our minds, which decides what action to take.

Third, anger is also a learned reaction. From infancy we have been learning how to express anger and to use anger to get what we want. Thus, we have learned to express our anger in covert and overt ways and everything in between. Some of us have learned to express our anger by yelling and fuming. Others have been taught anger is bad, therefore you are not to get angry, though in fact we do; but we have learned to act as though we are not angry. Others have learned to express their anger by silence and withdrawal. Some have learned control; others were taught to "let it all out."

Fourth, anger can take one of two basic forms: 1) it can become "outward-directed" which focuses our displeasure or rage on something other than ourselves (e.g. Cain, Gen. 4:2-16); or 2) it can become "inward-directed" which focuses our displeasure or rage upon ourselves which manifests itself as depression (e.g. Jonah, Jon. 4:1-11).

Fifth, sin is easily corrupted by our "flesh" to become a foothold of Satanic work. (Eph. 4:26). Scripture gives us another perspective on the nature of anger, and it is this insight of Scripture which points out the gravity and the devastating danger of our anger. The Bible teaches that we were born with a sinful nature. It is called the "flesh" (cf. Rom. 7:18, 23; 8:3 ff; Gal. 5:16-21). The flesh was inherited as the consequence of Adam's sin. With Eve he ate of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" with the desire to be like God, and so they did what God commanded them not to do (Gen. 3:1 ff). The result was the inbred inclination that in all of us to be center stage; we want our needs to be met; we want to be the center of the universe; we want to be like God--adored and worshipped by all. This desire of the flesh corrupts all that we do for our motivation is to serve "me" directly or indirectly, to do the things that make me feel good. This curse of sin has been implanted in our hearts where that deepest place and purest expression of who we are exists (Mt. 15:18-19), so that all manner of sin flows from our hearts.

The point is this--when any anger is stirred up by some threat which would frustrate my plans, needs, rights, or expectations. I will turn all that energy which has been instinctively generated and relationally educated over to my fleshly mind. That loaded gun is given to a mind which has been corrupted with the stain of selfishness. So what happens? Anger. Ugly, destructive anger. What can we do? We will look at what Scripture in the next segment of our study.