

MODULE 5: ANGER

In this module, we will improve self-awareness around anger and then discuss self-control strategies to manage or prevent it. We will focus on what the Bible describes as “Fruits of the Spirit.” These positive principles for living are achievable when we seek to follow God and gain power through the Holy Spirit.

SESSION 1: WHAT IS ANGER?

Key Ideas for This Session:

- Anger has a range of intensity and expression.
- Explosive and implosive anger hurt those around us and ourselves. Expressing anger is not a way of getting rid of it.
- Anger is a secondary emotion. Your immediate response to an action is your primary emotion. For example, a friend mocks you and you are embarrassed. Embarrassment is your primary emotion. Anger then follows in response to your embarrassment.
- Key verse: Romans 12:18:
If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Anger Is a Complex Emotion:

A simple answer to the question “what is anger,” might be that anger is when we get mad. But anger is far from simple. Everyone gets angry at times, but not everyone has the same triggers for anger nor the same way of demonstrating it. Anger has a range of degrees and can manifest itself in many ways. Examples of the range could include minor irritations all the way to fits of rage, violence and abuse.

There are many different opinions on anger. Someone might think that anger is actually a healthy emotion and that it is natural. Someone else might point out that sometimes anger is justifiable or that it can be “righteous” anger. Some people point to the Gospel story about Jesus overturning the tables of the moneychangers and chasing them out of the temple courts. We really don’t know if Jesus was angry or not when He did that, because the story doesn’t tell us.

In James 1:20, we read:

Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

What do you interpret from this verse?

Most of us can remember times in our lives when our anger got the best of us, and we said or did something that we regretted afterwards. Many people have been hurt or even killed by someone who later said, “They made me really, really angry,” to explain why they reacted violently.

Our anger can hurt others, and it can also hurt us. You might be a person who never, or rarely, shows outward signs of “explosive” anger, but you might be keeping your anger inside. This can sometimes build up to be “implosive” anger. If you have ever been deeply frustrated and resentful, you have likely experienced internalized anger. Brooding resentment is anger turned inward that eats away at your thoughts and feelings. Sometimes this inward or “implosive” anger results in physical and mental health issues like ulcers or depression.

A common misunderstanding about anger is that by expressing it we can get rid of it—we unload it. The truth is that even when a person punches a hole in the wall, or kicks in a door, they will not lose their anger. The good news is that there are ways of managing anger that are more helpful.

Here are some quotes about anger. Read each quote and explain what you think it means:

If you kick a stone in anger, you’ll hurt your own foot. (Korean proverb)

Not even the fastest horse can catch a word spoken in anger. (Chinese proverb)

Anger is one letter short of danger. (anonymous)

Fire in the heart sends smoke into the head. (German proverb)

You can't shake hands with a clenched fist. (Indira Gandhi)

Anger is a Secondary Emotion:

Anger is not the first emotion we experience when something unpleasant happens. The first emotion, or primary emotion is often one of shame, frustration, fear, embarrassment, jealousy, etc. For example, if someone says something negative about you in front of other people you might first feel hurt and humiliated or disrespected. The decision you have at this point is what to do with the feeling of humiliation. People react differently and at different levels of intensity. One person might be able to laugh it off or dismiss the insult altogether. Someone else might become a little angry and then decide it is not worth the trouble to remain angry. A third person may become very angry or fly into a fit of rage and say something terrible about the other person. A fourth person might actually become physical and attack the person who made the comment. The initial feeling or primary emotion was humiliation, but the secondary emotion is one of anger. How you handle the feeling of humiliation, or the primary emotion will determine whether or not you will react by becoming angry. This is a key point especially regarding anger management and the hope for positive change.

Read the story of Cain and Abel in the Bible.

Genesis 4:3-8

In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. ⁴And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from

some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favour on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering He did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.⁶ Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

What primary emotions do you think Cain was feeling towards the situation and/or Abel?

Why does God warn that "sin is crouching at your door"? (Verse 7)

How could Cain have responded in another way to the situation?

Think about the following situations and how you might respond:

SCENARIO 1

You are working on your car. Although you've tried everything you can think of to fix it, it won't start. You get angry, curse, and throw a wrench across the yard.

What is the first feeling you have or your primary emotion when the car doesn't start for you?

How do you think some people might be able to handle the above situation without getting angry?

SCENARIO 2

You are walking down the street and don't notice the bicycle that someone has left lying on the sidewalk. You walk right into it, trip and fall over it. Someone behind you thinks it's funny and laughs, making a stupid comment about you being "blind."

How would you react and why?

In the above situation what is the primary emotion you experience?

If your first reaction is anger, how could you react instead?

Doctor Henry Brandt, author of *The Heart of the Problem*, describes a scene in which one roommate gets angry at another for doing something he finds irritating. Brandt says, "It's not your roommate who is making you angry. God is using your roommate to show you that you are an angry person." What do you think about this idea?

Why do you think some people are angrier than others?

How has becoming angry impacted your life so far?

Adults model behaviour for children. Give three examples from your childhood of how someone modeled positive ways of dealing with anger. Then give three negative examples.

Positive:

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

Negative:

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

If you want to control your anger, it is essential to be honest about your anger. Consider the questions below:

On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the angriest) how would you rate your anger?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
I have physically hurt someone who made me angry (circle one).	YES NO

I have physically hurt or scared someone smaller than myself (E.g., a child) when I was angry.	YES NO
My family or friends would say that I have an anger problem.	YES NO
I believe that anger has been a significant problem in my life.	YES NO
Growing up, there was a lot of anger in my house at times, including violence.	YES NO
In Luke 6:29, Jesus teaches, "If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also." Is this realistic for you?	YES NO

Explain why you think Jesus' statement is or is not realistic.

Paul's encouragement in the Bible is to strive for a mindset and perspective where anger "simply" does not come into the picture.

1 Corinthians 13:1-7

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Do you agree that love is not easily angered? Why or why not?

Romans 12:17-18

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Do you believe that peace has the power to conquer the root causes of anger?
If yes, how might that be put into action?

Proverbs 22:24-25

Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn their ways and get yourself ensnared.

Do you agree with this advice from Proverbs in the Bible?

Break into small groups and discuss the following if there is time, or consider these topics this week:

- *List any eight primary emotions that are negative and could trigger an angry response.*
- *If anger is a secondary emotion, can you think of alternate positive ways you can react to the primary emotion? Think of different examples with different primary emotions (E.g., hurt, embarrassment, fear).*
- *Are there things you can do when you are calm to prepare yourself for future angry episodes? Consider Ephesians 4:20-32 in your Bible to answer this question.*