

MODULE 5: ANGER

SESSION 4: MANAGING YOUR ANGER

Key Ideas for This Session:

- Lies we tell ourselves can trigger our anger.
- When we can identify lies and thinking distortions in how we are perceiving a situation, we have a better chance of avoiding angry episodes.
- Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, prayer, wisdom, forgiveness and grace—help us guard against and manage anger.
- Key verse: 1 Corinthians 13:5-6:
[Love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

Our anger often begins with a lie we tell ourselves about something that is happening. Consider the scenario below:

SCENARIO 1

You are driving along the highway. A car behind you is tailgating you, driving much too close behind you. You see the driver of the other car in your rear-view mirror, and it seems that he is really agitated and in a hurry. You slow down and pull onto the shoulder in order to let him get past you. As he passes you, he looks over at you and gives you the middle finger. He mouths words that you can't hear but you know what he means.

Your primary feelings in that moment might be a sense of hurt and humiliation, and you may feel disrespected. You were only trying to be helpful, and he gives you the finger.

That primary emotion of hurt feelings leads to a secondary emotion of feeling angry in response to him. How dare he! At this point you feel very angry, and

you feel like giving him the finger back and sitting on his tail. After all, you were driving the speed limit, obeying the law, and making an effort to get out of the impatient driver's way. To top it all off, the other driver was endangering you by tailgating you. You feel that you have every right to be angry.

What is your initial reaction to this scenario, and why do you feel this way?

As we look at this scenario, let's identify what is actually true and what might be a lie:

Truths:

- The person in the other vehicle is endangering others by tailgating.
- I need to do something to make this situation safer, like slow down and let him pass.
- This person is taking their impatience and frustration out on me.
- His anger is not about me.
- This person has anger issues that are going to cause someone to get hurt.
- This person is behaving irresponsibly.
- I need to steer clear of someone who is obviously a danger.

Lies:

- This person is endangering my safety, and someone needs to teach him a lesson.
- I can't stand someone disrespecting me this way.
- Who does this person think he is, treating me this way?
- I can't let him get away with treating me this way.
- He's mad?! I'll show him mad. Maybe he should pull over and we'll see who the bigger person is.

In this example there are two different scripts being played out—two ways of understanding and responding to the same situation and two different sets of emotions involved.

By identifying the lies you have a better chance of managing the situation and detaching before anger develops. Why?

In each of the following scenarios list some lies and some truths that you think could help someone manage the situation without getting angry.

SCENARIO 2

It is 7:50 a.m. and you are on your way for a job interview. You are nervous because you have been out of work for several months and are behind on your bills. This has created a lot of stress in your life. Your job interview is at 8:00 a.m. Traffic is bad. It is worse than it normally is at this time of the morning. You are looking at your watch and getting progressively more stressed as you realize you probably won't make it to the interview on time. You feel yourself getting angry, because slower traffic won't move out of the left lane.

You start honking your horn trying to get people to move or get out of the way. Traffic doesn't seem to be responding to your need to have them let you by. Now you really feel yourself getting really steamed and angry.

It figures, nothing ever works out for you. No matter what you do in life, you never seem to catch a break. You start swearing at the traffic and honking your horn even more. The person in front of you shrugs his shoulders gesturing that there is nothing he can do. You make a gesture back. They make another gesture back to you. Now you can't take it any longer. Traffic is stopped. You get out of your car to let the person know how inconsiderate and stupid they are. You bang on the window of the driver's car, swearing at him, challenging him to come out of the car. A police officer spots you and runs over to confront the situation. You swear at the officer. You also notice there are several other police on the scene and only then you realize that a bad accident has blocked part of the intersection and that is why traffic is moving so slowly. Meanwhile you are arrested and handcuffed by the police officer.

Identify the Lies:

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Identify the Truths:

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SCENARIO 3

Your life is pretty stressful with three kids. Both you and your partner are working full time. It is a juggling act trying to keep everything going. Both of you always seem to be tired and tense. The job market is not great. You'd like

to get a better job but a few of your friends have been laid off. Who knows? If things keep going the way they are, you might be next to lose your job. You've just picked up your four-year old from day care.

The two older kids are in the back seat fighting over a video game. You have to get some groceries before you get home because there's nothing in the refrigerator for supper. You get all three kids out of the car and into the grocery store. Prices of food are getting ridiculously high. It's irritating that the harder you work, the further behind you seem to be.

You are shopping when you lose track of the two older kids. Meanwhile the little one is in the grocery cart crying. He doesn't look good, and a few of the other kids at day care have been sick recently. Now you hear a noise and see the other two kids, they have just knocked over a display of cereal boxes. You grab them both by the arms and give them the "parent" look. Sufficiently warned, they behave better as you go through the checkout. The four-year old is still crying.

Finally, you get back to the car and get everyone in. It's getting late and you are still half an hour from home. The kids are hungry and are whining, begging you to get them something from a drive thru. You wait through the long line, finally get your order, and get back on the road. The kids grab food out of the bag. There are three hamburgers, but all of them have mustard. The middle child starts throwing a fit. She would rather eat dirt than a hamburger with mustard. She throws the hamburger at her brother who is laughing at her. Then she punches him. He knows better than to punch his sister but irritating her is somehow more satisfying. You know it's a lost cause. You decide that the best course of action is to go back and get a hamburger without mustard. It really might not be the best option, but you are just too tired from all of the drama. You get back to the hamburger place and park and go inside. There is a long line at the counter, but you go up to the front to ask for a manager. Someone in line says something to you about waiting your turn. The cashier says the manager is not in, and you'll have to wait for a minute for help. This is the last straw...

Identify the Lies:

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Identify the Truths:

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Anger often arises from our internal thoughts and feelings that create a distorted picture of reality and lead to an irrational response. These internal conversations we have happen quickly, fueled by our feelings as well as past experiences, stress, expectations, as well as our sense of pride and well-being (or not).

Thinking Errors:

Thinking errors are patterns of thinking that are twisted or false. People may

find their way to thinking errors to avoid or escape painful feelings, or when they do not want to take responsibility for mistakes. Sometimes thinking errors are the result of inexperience, trauma, or lack of maturity. Thinking errors are always self-defeating and occur when a thought does not match up to a reality. It is important to recognize when thinking distortions are occurring and eliminate them, to have good relationships and healthy personal functioning.

Thinking Errors Frequently Cause Anger:

Here are some common thinking errors:

Labeling: You jump to a conclusion about a person without considering facts or evidence that might lead to a different conclusion. Example: That person can't be trusted. They don't like me.

Magnification: You "blow up" or magnify something to be bigger than it really is. Example: Nothing ever goes right for me.

Personalization: You make every situation about you when it probably isn't. Example: That officer is never friendly to me. He has it out for me.

Tunnel Vision: You consider only your narrow and limited viewpoint of a situation. Example: My boss is worthless. She can't do anything right.

All-or-Nothing Thinking: Things are either all good or all bad—there's no "in-between." Example: If I don't win first place, I'm a failure.

Consider this scenario and answer the questions below.

SCENARIO 4

A friend of yours was supposed to come by your house at 7:00 p.m. to pick you up for a baseball game. It is 7:30 p.m. and they haven't arrived. You start entertaining thoughts such as: "I can't trust anyone. This person is inconsiderate and irresponsible. They are not letting me know, because they don't care about the fact I am waiting. They must be upset with me about something. Who do they think they are, being upset with me? I'm the one who should be upset."

By now you have made a lot of statements in your head about this person. Most of them are probably false. In fact, they may all be false. It's too late, however, because now you are mad. You finally get a call at 7:45 p.m. and find out they are at the emergency room with their child who fell and broke his arm. Your anger goes away when you discover all the things you were thinking are false.

Identify the thinking errors in this scenario:

The Bible states that we should focus our mind on positive things. In Philippians 4:8 we read, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

Describe this same scenario but with grace and truth—consider how you might give your friend the benefit of the doubt:

What are some of the thinking errors you have experienced in your life (either someone to you, or you to someone)? What was the outcome?

Tools to Guard Against Anger:

This passage from the Bible’s New Testament describes the use of the “fruits of the spirit” to avoid inappropriate, impulsive, and explosive anger.

Galatians 5:19-25

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Think about being in a situation that would typically make you angry. Below, list different ways in which each “fruit” can help.

Fruit	Guard Against Anger
Love	
Joy	
Peace	
Patience	
Kindness	
Goodness	
Faithfulness	
Gentleness	
Self-Control	

Scriptures describe other foundational ways to live that help us avoid or guard against an angry response. They are listed here:

Grace:

Grace is a response of generosity—an undeserved lack of retaliation—a forgiveness of a wrong. Grace is not about “equal.” The giver is voluntarily choosing an act of love and abundance that is far more than the receiver would ever deserve. Grace comes out of a heart of compassion. The father’s forgiveness of his runaway son in Luke 15:11-32 demonstrates grace as a choice over a negative reaction like anger.

Why do you think grace is so powerful?

Romans 5:20b
But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.

Forgiveness:

In Philip Yancey’s book *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*, he observes: “When we genuinely forgive we set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner we set free was us.” Where there is a heart of forgiveness, there is peace and not anger. There is no room left for anger, when forgiveness is the chosen response.

Neil T. Anderson, author of *The Bondage Breaker*, writes that “unforgiveness is the major reason people remain in bondage to the past.”

Do you believe there is freedom in forgiveness and if yes, what might hold a person back?

Colossians 3:3

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

What does it mean to have a forgiving attitude?

Wisdom:

How would you describe wisdom and how does it differ from knowledge?

The good news about wisdom, is that if you feel you don't have it, God has promised to provide it to anyone who asks.

James 1:5

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

There are concrete ways that you can apply knowledge, through wisdom, to help you manage the onset of anger—for example, being able to identify and then correct thinking errors, identifying lies and identifying the primary emotion that has triggered the anger.

Prayer:

James 5:16

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

There are promises that can be claimed in the Bible and this is one. In your own words, what do you think this verse is saying?

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

- *In the space provided, summarize what you have learned that you believe will be helpful in overcoming destructive anger (implosive and/or explosive) in your life.*

- *What are your favourite Scriptures in these sessions that inspire you in managing anger? Consider memorizing them so you can bring them to mind when you need them most.*
- *Write out a recent situation where you became angry. Using the thinking distortions and “truth/lie” exercise in this session, analyse it for a better approach next time.*
- *Pray for an ability to discern and know the truth. Meditate on Psalm 25:5: Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.*