HOW TO HANDLE YOUR EMOTIONS

JUNE HUNT

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The day begins like any other day, but ends like no other—for on this day, he gives full vent to his anger...and, as a result, finds himself running for his life.

He is part of a mistreated minority—grievously persecuted, not for doing something wrong, but for being perceived as a threat. Raised with privilege in the palace of a king, he had been spared the heartless treatment inflicted on his kinsmen. But watching the injustice day after day and year after year finally becomes too much for him to bear.

When he sees one of his own people suffering an inhumane beating at the hands of an Egyptian, Moses is filled with rage. He snaps. In an instant he kills the Egyptian and hides the body in the sand. But his angry, impetuous act is not committed in secret. When news of the murder reaches Pharaoh, Moses fears for his life and flees (see Exodus chapter 2).

When you look at the life of Moses, you can see both the power and the potential problems inherent in anger. Has anger ever clouded your judgment to the point that you acted rashly, and later regretted it? Ultimately, you have the choice to act wisely or to react foolishly. In his lifetime, Moses did both. And like him, you can learn to keep your anger under control. You can learn how to act rather than react! In doing so, you will demonstrate wisdom.

“A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control”

(Proverbs 29:11).
I. DEFINITIONS OF ANGER

Understandably, Moses felt anger over the unjust treatment of his Hebrew brothers, but what he did with that anger got him into trouble. Moses allowed his emotions to overpower him. He committed an impulsive crime, and a serious one at that—murder.

Although Moses was right about the injustice, his reaction was wrong. His hotblooded volatility revealed how unprepared he was for the task God had planned for him. Consequently, God kept Moses on the back side of a desert for the next 40 years so he would realize that rescuing his own people in his own way would ultimately fail.

Moses needed to learn this vital lesson well before God could turn him into the leader through whom God would accomplish His will in His supernatural way. In truth, Moses had tried to earn the Israelites’ respect by coming to their rescue. Instead, his murderous rage earned only their scorn.

“Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not”

(Acts 7:25).

A. What Is the Meaning of Anger?

What began as a smoldering ember in the heart of Moses quickly burst into deadly flames. Perhaps no one noticed the angry sparks flying from his eyes, but his spirit was consumed with the heat of anger. What do you do when you’re inflamed with angry thoughts and feelings?

Firefighters know the danger of letting a flame get out of control. They are trained to respond quickly. You must respond quickly also in order to control the flame of anger before it consumes your life and destroys your relationships. How true it is that

“a quick-tempered man does foolish things”

(Proverbs 14:17).

* Anger is a strong emotion of irritation or agitation that occurs when a need or expectation is not met.¹

“An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins”

(Proverbs 29:22).
Angry people in the Bible are often described as hot-tempered and quick-tempered.

“A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel”

(Proverbs 15:18).

Anger, in the Old Testament, is most frequently the Hebrew word *aph*, which literally means “nose” or “nostrils” and figuratively depicts nostrils flaring with anger. Later, *aph* came to represent the entire face as seen in two ancient Hebrew idioms:

—“Long of face” (or nose) meaning “slow to anger.”

“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love”

(Psalm 145:8).

—“Short of face” (or nose) meaning “quick to anger.”

“Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered”

(Proverbs 22:24).

In the New Testament, the Greek word *orge* originally meant any “natural impulse or desire,” but later came to signify “anger as the strongest of all passions.” It is often translated as “wrath” because of its powerful, lasting nature.

“For those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger”

(Romans 2:8).

B. What Is the Magnitude of Anger?

Anger, like heat, can be measured in varying degrees. It ranges from mild, controlled irritations to hot, uncontrolled explosions. In fact, anger is a wide umbrella word that covers many levels of the emotion.

“For those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger”

(Romans 2:8).
me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstrung oxen as they pleased. Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel”  (Genesis 49:5-7).

• **Indignation** is simmering anger provoked by something appearing unjust or unworthy and often perceived as justified. Jesus became “indignant” when the disciples prevented parents from bringing their children to Jesus so He might touch and bless them.

  “When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these’”  (Mark 10:14).

• **Wrath** is burning anger accompanied by a desire to avenge. Wrath often moves from the emotion of anger to the outward expression of anger. In Romans 1:18, God expresses His wrath as divine judgment on those who commit willful sin.

  “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness”  (Romans 1:18).

• **Fury** is fiery anger so fierce that it destroys common sense. The word fury suggests a powerful force compelled to harm or destroy. Some members of the Sanhedrin were so angry with Peter and the other apostles for proclaiming Jesus was God that “they were furious and wanted to put them to death”  (Acts 5:33). That is why the Bible says,

  “Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming”  (Proverbs 27:4).

• **Rage** is blazing anger resulting in loss of self-control, often to the extreme of violence and temporary insanity. After an
outburst of rage, a cry of remorseful regret or disbelief is often expressed: “I can’t believe I did that!” Yet those who continue to vent their rage toward others, including God, find themselves defeated by their own destructive decisions and ruined relationships.

“A man’s own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord”

(Proverbs 19:3).

A Father and His Fury

All the feuding between them fueled his fiery vengeance… and it exploded all over their little boy.

This six-year-old was caught in a tug-of-war between his divorced parents, who continually battled over visitation rights. Marie Rothenberg had custody of young David. However, angry words, slammed phones, and smashed doors characterized the relationship with her ex-husband, Charles, as they argued over drop-off and pick-up times, and who got to spend Christmas morning with David.

Every argument stoked the inner flames of fury in Charles—until one day his anger raged wildly for all the world to see. It was February 1983. Marie reported that David had not been returned at the proper time following a visit with his father. Not until several days later did Charles contact Marie, informing her that he had taken the boy to California.

Incensed by his unauthorized actions, Marie likened the illegal trip to a kidnapping and threatened to keep Charles from ever seeing David again. Uncontrollable rage consumed Charles. All the strain and struggle, the resentment and rage, became like two sticks rubbing together, ready to ignite at any moment. And in March 1983, they did.

Charles turned his eyes to his sleeping son in the small motel room. Vengeful fury warped his reasoning. If I can’t have him, nobody’s going to have him! Propelled by rage, Charles picked up
a can of kerosene and poured it over defenseless David, saturating his sheets and pajamas. Charles then struck a match, set the bed ablaze, and fled the scene.

The boy, the bed, and the motel room were all quickly engulfed in flames. Miraculously, David’s life was not snuffed out that night. Due to the heroic efforts of guests in nearby rooms, David was snatched from the flames. He was alive…but heartache would forever hover over the horrific scene.

Although David survived the inferno, severe burns covered 90 percent of his body, leaving him permanently disfigured. From head to toe he would become a lasting picture of how one hot-tempered moment can change a life forever.

Among the many repercussions of burning anger are the countless lives permanently scarred with pain—the pain of devastated hope—the pain of destroyed dreams. Psalm 37:8 tells us, “Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil.”

These words were certainly prophetic for Charles Rothenberg. That’s precisely where his wrath led. His rage led him to be a “baby burner”—his rage ruined his life.

C. What Are Some Misconceptions about Anger?

Do you always view anger as negative and sinful? Do you seek to hide your anger from others, even from yourself? Misunderstandings about anger give this powerful emotion a less than positive reputation! If you are blind to God’s purposes for anger and you are afraid of revealing your true feelings, you may be in bondage to undefined or false guilt. The Bible says,

“Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place”

(Psalm 51:6).

Question: “Is it a sin for me to be angry?”

Answer: No. The initial feeling of anger can be a God-given emotion. It is the way you respond and express this emotion that determines whether or not you allow your anger to become sin. The Bible says,
"In your anger do not sin"
(Ephesians 4:26).

Question: “How can I keep from feeling guilty when I’m angry?”

Answer: Your anger is a signal something is wrong—like the red warning light on the dashboard of a car. The purpose of the light is to propel you to action—to cause you to stop, to evaluate what is wrong, and then to take appropriate action. Jesus became angry at the hypocritical religious leaders who interpreted “resting on the Sabbath” to excess—even to the extent that, in their eyes, healing the sick on the Sabbath was an offense worthy of the death penalty. In sharp contrast, Jesus intentionally fully restored a man’s crippled hand on the Sabbath.

“He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored”
(Mark 3:5).

Question: “How can a God of love be a God of wrath at the same time?”

Answer: Because of God’s great love for you, He directs His anger toward anyone or anything that thwarts His perfect plan for you. God’s anger never operates independently of His love. He expresses anger on your behalf and for your ultimate good.

“His anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime”
(Psalm 30:5).

Question: “Can people be really angry even when they don’t look or sound angry?”

Answer: Yes. Many have difficulty expressing or even recognizing their emotions. Instead, they have learned to deny, ignore, or repress their anger by burying it deep within their hearts. However, the anger is not hidden from God, who sees it and understands it.

“The Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord
How to Handle Your Emotions

does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”
(1 Samuel 16:7).

D. What Is the Misuse of Anger?
Periodically, everyone feels the heat of anger, but how you handle the heat determines whether you are misusing it. The small flame that lights a cozy campfire, if left unchecked, can quickly become a fierce forest fire. Conversely, the initial spark of anger that can be used for good, if snuffed out, can keep anger from accomplishing its designated purpose. Evaluate whether you are mishandling your anger.8

“Mockers stir up a city, but wise men turn away anger”
(Proverbs 29:8).

Prolonged anger—the “simmering stew”
This kind of anger is held in for a long time. This anger results from an unforgiving heart toward some past offense and offender. Unforgiveness eventually results in resentment and deep bitterness that harms other relationships.
Example: “I’ll never forgive the way he talked to me years ago.”

“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many”
(Hebrews 12:15).

Pressed down anger—the “pressure cooker”
This is denied or hidden anger. Usually resulting from a fear of facing negative emotions, this kind of anger can create a deceitful heart and lead to untruthfulness with others. Failure to honestly confront and resolve angry feelings can result in self-pity, self-contempt, and self-doubt—ultimately sabotaging most relationships.
Example: “I never get angry…maybe just a little irritated at times.”

“Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech”
(1 Peter 3:10).
Provoked anger—the “short fuse”
This anger is quick and impatient, instantly irritated or incensed. A testy temper is often expressed with criticism or sarcasm under the guise of teasing.
Example: “I can’t believe you said that! You’re so childish!”

“Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools”
(Ecclesiastes 7:9).

Profuse anger—the “volatile volcano”
This anger is powerful, destructive, hard to control. This way of releasing anger is characterized by contempt, violence, and abuse toward others.
Example: “You stupid fool—if you ever do that again, you’ll wish you’d never been born!”
Jesus gives an ominous warning toward those who demean others:

“I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment…But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell”
(Matthew 5:22).

Holdout Harry and the Volcano
He was cautioned, counseled, commanded. He was warned, and well aware of the danger. He received repeated instructions to leave as Mount St. Helens quivered and quaked. But 84-year-old Harry Truman stood his ground near the volatile volcano.

As shifts beneath the surface were regularly recorded—seismic activity logged day after day—Harry became infamous for holding out and ignoring orders to evacuate. This former rebellious bootlegger had left his life of running Canadian whiskey to California during the Prohibition years, but he wasn’t about to budge from his lodge near Spirit Lake in Washington state. In 1929, he staked a 40-acre claim—and in the spring of 1980, he staked his life.

Known as a cantankerous guide—as rough and rugged as the surrounding wilderness—Harry had already withstood
100-mile-an-hour windstorms, a fire that engulfed his house, and numerous earthquakes. If lava should start pouring out of the crater, Harry expected the lava to travel slow enough for him to escape into an old mine shaft he had discovered and stocked with food and whiskey.

Ignoring the early earthquakes and avalanches of ash, Harry stubbornly refused to budge…despite ongoing steam eruptions, harmonic tremors, and even a summit explosion. Although the number of eruptions lessened through March and April, the might of their magnitude marched on.

Harry had a tenacious streak, much like his presidential namesake who quipped, “If you can’t stand the heat, you better get out of the kitchen!” As conditions worsened in the vicinity of the volcano, most in proximity “did get out of the kitchen”—but not ole Harry.

Amidst all the media notoriety, a national news show visited Harry via helicopter and a Portland television station did the same. Both were ready to rescue him. Harry remained unwilling to leave.

“I’m gonna stay right here…I stuck it out 54 years and I can stick it out another 54,” he declared defiantly. Harry thought he could “stand the heat” and wouldn’t get hurt. But on May 18, a 5.0 magnitude earthquake sent lava shooting in a searing pyroclastic blast—timed at 300 miles per hour! This powerful eruption triggered an avalanche of devastating debris—one of the largest landslides ever recorded. That fateful day, 57 people lost their lives—including Harry, who was buried deep under a massive flow of ash and lava.

Like volatile volcanoes, the angry people in our lives simmer and stew beneath the surface. Those who are angry have a mounting pressure within them threatening to spew out. Eventually they release their molten rage on those standing nearby, venting volcanic wrath with its exploding heat…causing devastating harm.
The biblical warning is understandable and unmistakable: “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered” (Proverbs 22:24). God’s Word instructs us to leave the presence of a hot-tempered person—someone with volcanic anger. Otherwise like Harry, we will be hurt, we will be harmed, we will be burned! Proverbs 27:4 says “Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming.”

Only because Harry ignored the warning of the volatile rumblings did he experience destruction and death and he did so needlessly. Harry thought he could escape unharmed—he was dead wrong.

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF ANGER

Betrayal by any person is bruising, but betrayal by a friend cuts especially deep, wounding the soul. Everyone expects opposition from those on the outside, but what do you do when opposition comes from within—from among your own circle, your closest confidants, your trusted few?

One national leader knew the hurt of such betrayal. He had led wisely, demonstrated courage, and won the confidence of his people. He was there for them—and they knew it.

However, a leader under him—an enemy in the camp—undermined the chief leader’s authority. He created such dissension that this man stole the loyalty of 250 of his other leaders. Those whom he had trusted throughout the years—those who knew him the best, those who should have been most loyal to him—turned against him. In response, however, Moses did not express his anger by taking personal revenge, but rather appealed to the Lord to act on his behalf.

“Moses became very angry and said to the LORD, ‘Do not accept their offering. I have not...wronged any of them’” (Numbers 16:15).

Although justifiably angry, Moses had learned how to act rather than react. He restrained his rage, poured out his heart, and pleaded with the Lord to deal with His offenders. In turn, God took up Moses’ cause, destroyed his betrayers, and defended his honor. Moses refused to take revenge, but rather allowed the Lord to be his avenger because God had given this promise:
“It is mine to avenge; I will repay”  
(Deuteronomy 32:35).

A. What Are Your Anger Cues?

The human body has a physical reaction when it experiences anger. These “anger cues” can alert you when you are beginning to feel angry. Discerning your anger cues can help you avoid trouble. Likewise, being aware of the signs of anger in others can alert you of the need to appropriately defend yourself, if necessary.

A biblical example of an anger cue is Jonathan’s loss of appetite when he was hurt and grieved over his father’s unjust, shameful treatment toward his close friend David.

“Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the month he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father’s shameful treatment of David”  
(1 Samuel 20:34).

Your Anger Cues

In seeking to identify your anger cues, answer the following questions:

• Do you have a decreased appetite?
• Do you have tense muscles?

• Do you feel unusually hot or cold?
• Do you have increased perspiration?

• Do you find that you are breathing faster and harder?
• Do you practice silence (shutting down verbally)?

• Do you feel flushed?
• Do you use loud, rapid, or high-pitched speech?

• Do you clench your fists?
• Do you experience an upset or churning stomach?
• Do you feel your heart racing or pounding?

• Do you use language that is inappropriate, harsh, or coarse (sarcasm, gossip, profanity)?

• Does your mouth get dry?

• Do you clench your teeth?

• Do you twitch or exhibit anxious behaviors (tapping pencil, shaking foot)?

• Do you walk hard and fast or pace back and forth?

Once you have identified your anger cues, you will be in a position to quickly identify when you are angry. Then you can direct your energies toward producing a positive outcome.

“See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter” (2 Corinthians 7:11).

B. Do You Act or React When You Are Angry?

When you are angry, does reason rule your mind, or do tense emotions take control? Do you allow the mind of Christ within you to determine how you should act—a choice that leads to appropriate action? Or do you have a knee-jerk reaction that leads to inappropriate reaction?

If you have never evaluated what happens when you feel angry...if you lack insight as to how others perceive you when you are angry...seek God’s wisdom and understanding.

“If you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:3-6).