

# I'M ANGRY! HOW CAN I PROCESS IT?

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In this brief document, we are going to consider what the Bible teaches us about anger and how to process it. It may surprise you to learn that anger can be legitimate, even righteous, but it can also reveal sinful desires or false beliefs.

## WHAT IS ANGER?

**i** We need to be clear about what anger is from a biblical perspective. A definition: Anger is an active whole-person (bodily, emotional, mental, behavioural) response to a perceived wrong.

Consider four points that help us think biblically about the experience of anger, grumpiness and irritability.

- **God gets angry.** Anger is an attribute of God; His righteous anger is provoked by wickedness. In His anger, God evaluates the situation truthfully and responds righteously and proportionately. “You can’t understand God’s love if you don’t understand His anger. Because He loves, He’s angry at what harms.”<sup>1</sup> God’s love and anger are entirely consistent expressions of His holiness.
- **Anger is a moral emotion.** Anger is provoked by a perceived wrong.<sup>2</sup> Anger evaluates a situation and essentially says: *I am against this*. God’s perception is always accurate, and thus His angry responses are always righteous. Our human responses to perceived wrongs are sometimes righteous, and sometimes (often!) sinful.
- **Distinguish righteous anger from sinful anger.** Righteous anger has three criteria:<sup>3</sup>
  - Righteous anger reacts against actual sin (it accurately perceives genuine wickedness).
  - Righteous anger focuses on God and the wellbeing of others (it isn’t selfish).
    - *Test yourself: Do you get angry about the right things?*
  - Righteous anger is expressed in a godly manner (it is proportional and self-controlled).
    - *Test yourself: Do you express anger in the right way?*
- **Anger comes out of our hearts.** The simplest question to ask about what underlies anger is, “*What do I really want?*”<sup>4</sup> The link between anger and motive is generally easily identified. The events and experiences that tend to provoke my angry typically reveal the motives, desires and beliefs of my heart. Understanding what angers us, therefore, helps us grow in self-awareness.

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<sup>1</sup> David Powlison, *Anger Part 1: Understanding Anger* (The Journal of Biblical Counseling, 14:1, 1995). My thinking in this worksheet have been significantly shaped by Powlison and Jones.

<sup>2</sup> Powlison: “Anger by its very nature takes a moral position; it judges.”

<sup>3</sup> These three criteria come from Robert Jones, *Uprooting Anger* (P&R Publishing, 2005)

<sup>4</sup> Again, this insight comes from Powlison (JBC 14:1, 1995)

## HOW CAN I PROCESS ANGER?

**i** *The questions below will help you understand and manage your anger wisely*

The process below, based on the work of David Powlison,<sup>5</sup> provides you with a pathway out of anger. The first four questions help assess anger, the second four lead to resolution. Please work through this thoughtfully, making personal notes and engaging in authentic prayer.

Question	Description	Personal notes
<b>What is the situation?</b>	What is the situation that provokes your anger? What is the trigger? What's happening to you?	
<b>How do I react?</b>	What are the specific ways I express my anger? What am I thinking? My body, emotions and actions – what am I doing?	
<b>What are my motives?</b>	What do I concretely want in this situation? What do I really believe and desire?	
<b>What are the consequences?</b>	What are the consequences? What are the negative feedback loops my anger creates?	
<b>Who is God? What does He say?</b>	What is true? Who is God, and what does He say to me in this situation? What biblical themes and truths are relevant to me?	
<b>How can I turn to God for help?</b>	Answering the previous question helped me make sense of my situation and anger. Now I must seek God personally. I must engage with Him through confession, gratitude, etc.	
<b>How should I respond in this situation to glorify God?</b>	Repentance and faith lead to concrete changes in behaviour, emotion, thoughts. What is that for me? What is a righteous response? I must do it.	
<b>What are the consequences of faith and obedience?</b>	Righteous responses, while not guaranteed to change the original situation, often create positive feedback loops.	

These eight questions help you move out of the fog of anger. Worked through carefully and prayerfully, with a wise friend, they can teach us to think clearly about our situation, ourselves, our God – and how to live. May God bless you as you seek to trust Him amid life's challenges.

<sup>5</sup> David Powlison, *Anger Part 2: Three Lies About Anger and the Transforming Truth* (The Journal of Biblical Counseling, 14:2, 1995).