

I Don't Want to Be An

B y K a t h r y n L a y

I TOOK A DEEP breath when the salesperson explained my order had been lost. I struggled to repeat my verse for the week: "In your anger do not sin; . . . search your hearts and be silent" (Psalm 4:4).

Each day has been a step-by-step movement toward change since I've made a commitment not to be an angry person.

Facing My Anger

When I realized that, like my father and my brother, I had lost control of my anger, I knew I had to change. With change came a need for understanding. With understanding came a need to admit it—to face the fact that the way I handle my anger is a problem and a poor witness of my life in Christ.

I wasn't an angry person as a child. But as the years went by, my anger came more swiftly and I dealt with it in unhealthy and un-Christlike ways.

My father did not express his pride in his children for living a godly life, building a good marriage, or for hard-earned accomplishments and unselfish deeds.

I had lost control of my anger.

Instead, he praised us for how we stood up to others and demanded immediate satisfaction or revenge.

I knew it was happening. I felt the rising anger inside, the flood of emotions that came when I felt wronged by a person, object, or situation. I learned to hide it around those I loved, showing it to strangers—waitresses, salespeople, and others who made mistakes.

I protested at my brother who was three times arrested because of his angry reactions, warning him that he was becoming like our father. I tried to push aside the feeling that I would soon cross the line if I didn't change.

When an automated teller machine didn't work properly, or a department store was out of a sale item, or the car broke down, and I flew into rages that far surpassed the situation, I knew I couldn't let it go on.

Occasionally, I slipped and my husband was near as I vented my anger at an automotive shop, restaurant, or department store.

But after a third confrontation at our bank, the



Angry Anymore, Lord!

manager called my husband and threatened to cancel our account. Then everything came out in a flood of tears and embarrassment.

My husband's reassurance of love and support only made me feel worse. We prayed. I knew God had brought it into the open to help me destroy this thing inside me that turned an otherwise loving, caring woman into an angry, sharp-tongued person.

The Road to Recovery

Once I accepted that I had become an angry person and it wasn't something God desired for my life, I found six ways to begin the road to recovery.

(1) *I went to my church family and asked for prayer.* It wasn't easy to admit my anger, to ask for their prayer and support. But it was a first step and I suddenly had others who told me they battled the same problem. I found many supportive friends.

(2) *I studied verses in the Bible that dealt with anger.* I began to see how anger affects my life as a Christian, how God feels about it, and the peace that can replace it.

There were more Scriptures dealing with anger than I had imagined. After writing these verses in a journal, I rewrote them, adding my insights into what they meant for my life.

In Proverbs 12:18, I saw that the one who speaks rashly is compared to the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. How often I used my anger to jab at others, cutting bits at a time until I had humiliated them. I determined instead to use my tongue to bring healing to others when they were suffering, in pain, or in need of comfort, kindness, and wisdom.

Overworked waitresses and salespeople benefit much more from an understanding customer than one who harasses them. While in college I found it frustrating to witness to my fellow waitresses at the restaurant where we worked. They talked about church groups who came to the restaurant, demanded perfect service, complained, and then left Christian tracts instead of a tip.

Proverbs 15:28 says, "The heart of the righteous weighs its answers." The verse continues, "The mouth of the wicked gushes evil." When I am angry, it seems all my irritation pours out in a flood and I don't stop it or think about it before I let it loose.

Paul writes, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit . . . Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:30-32).

I went to my church family and asked for prayer.

I read and took to heart Colossians 4:5, 6 as I dealt with controlling my anger. "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

(3) *I found a friend I could call and talk to when losing my battle with anger.* This meant finding someone who would be honest and understand without belittling—someone who would listen, pray, and support me in my recovery. Opening up kept me honest with myself and the Lord.

I made a pact that if my anger went unchecked and uncontrolled, I would apologize. Like a child returning stolen candy, I found myself holding my temper to keep from having to make such apologies.

(4) *I wrote out Scripture verses on anger and memorized one each week.* I kept the verse in my heart and remembered it when anger bubbled up. I often wondered what the clerk at the grocery store or the postal worker thought as I mumbled to myself.

(5) *I made a list of the people and situations that made me angry.* I found that often, after dealing with my father, my mother-in-law, or my grandmother, I was quick to resort to an angry word or action the next time someone upset, hurt, or inconvenienced me. I learned it was necessary to stay away from these people for periods of time, and when confrontations or their actions overwhelmed me, to call my friend, read my verses, and pray for God's peace.

(6) *I learned to recognize the signs of my anger.* Anger in itself is not wrong. Jesus became angry at unrighteousness and mistreatment of others.

But the wild, vengeful anger that results in hatred rather than change is the kind of anger I must stop before I lose control.

When this happens, I now choose to remove myself from the situation, and come back to it when I can deal with it in a calm, reasonable way.

It may be that some struggle with anger must also follow a seventh step. When anger results in threats, violence, or abuse, counseling may be necessary.

For so long, I was afraid to admit my anger, fearing others would despise me for it, and hoping it wasn't really a problem. But now peace has replaced the anger. I see how a situation can be handled calmly with better results, and I know that my words are not a bad witness to my Lord. Freedom from unhealthy anger has given me a new outlook on life. ■

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