Today we are taking a look at what the Bible says about anger.

We all have gotten angry. We know what it’s like so we think we know what anger is. But let’s take a look at how the Bible defines anger.

The predominant Hebrew used in the Bible for anger is the tiny word af in English. You’ll never guess what it means. It means nose or nostril. Apparently the idea of anger comes from the vibrating of the nostrils when one is really upset. Think of a horse exhaling on a cold day. It looks like steam coming from the horse’s nostrils. Some people look like that when they are really, really angry.

In the New Testament, the most frequently used word for anger is orge (or-gay). It means agitation of the soul, impulse or indignation.

Okay, here’s the picture. Someone does something that irks you. You think about it and think about it. It begins to boil inside of you. You’re like a boiler that is about to blow. You are experiencing agitation in your soul. It’s as if the steam begins to escape through your nostrils. You become flushed. Your nostrils begin to vibrate slightly. You are angry and you are about to blow your top. In the process you say something to your spouse or children that as soon as it slips out of your mouth you wish you had it back. That’s what anger looks like.

In his book Poems, C. S. Lewis said that “Anger’s the anesthetic of the mind.” Anger causes us to do and say things we regret. Anger drives our life if we don’t deal with it. Someone has said, “He who angers you, controls you!” That’s true.

Have you heard the story about the boy, his anger and the nails in the fence? It goes like this. There once was a little boy who had a very bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he had to hammer a nail into the fence.

Amazingly, at the end of the first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails he hammered gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to pound those nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when the boy didn’t lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and his dad suggested the boy could now pull out one nail for each day he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone.

The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, “You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one.”

Anger can be deadly and that’s why we need to learn how to get a hold of our anger. It not only disturbs our spirit and messes with our mind, it does a lot of damage to the people we vent our anger on.
All Anger Is Not Sinful Anger

Before we talk about the anger that bothers us because it spills over into the lives of people around us, let me say that all anger is not sin. There are two kinds of anger prevalent in the Bible, but one of them is far less prevalent in life today.

There is a type of anger of which the Bible approves, often called “righteous indignation.” Frequently the Bible speaks of God getting angry. Psalm 7:11 says, “God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.” As Christ-followers we are actually commanded to be angry in Ephesians 4:26, “Be angry and do not sin.” You’ll remember that when Paul had to confront Peter to his face because he was not living as one who had experienced freedom in Christ, one apostle was angry at another apostle. That’s found in Galatians 2:11-14.

And think of the story of David when Nathan the prophet told him that story about a rich man with many sheep killing the one little lamb of a poor man. David was incensed at the news, until Nathan said, “You are that man.” You’ll find that story in 2 Samuel 12. And, of course, there’s Jesus’ anger over the money changers defiling God’s temple in Jerusalem (John 2:13-18). That was a major eruption of anger—and from the meek and lowly Savior too.

But there is a very important feature of each of these examples that we often miss. In each case, the anger was directed toward another for the wrong-doing of the other person. In no case did the anger come because the person was defending his own actions. Righteous anger is when we respond to an unjust situation caused by another person. Rarely is righteous anger due to wrong-doing on our part. When we get angry in defense of our own actions, usually that’s just plain anger, the bad kind.

So how are we to tell when we are righteously indignant about some injustice and when we are just plain angry, sinfully angry? Here are five keys. See if any of them is true in your life.

1. Anger becomes sinful when whatever drives us to get angry is a selfish motivation.

James 1:20, “the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

2. Anger becomes sinful when we allow our anger to detract from our giving glory to God.

1 Corinthians 10:31, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

3. Anger becomes sinful when we don’t deal with it properly and allow it to linger in our lives.

Ephesians 4:26-27, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.” Anger turns to sin when it is allowed to boil over without any restraint, often causing irreparable consequences.

4. Anger becomes sinful when it is the lead-off emotion, or should I say reaction, to everything that threatens our pride.

Most anger is based on our self-righteousness. We get angry because someone aggravates us or says something unkind about us. This kind of anger is based purely on our own self-interest without any consideration of our Holy God, our selfless Savior, or our testimony before a watching world.
5. Anger also becomes sin when you will not permit your anger to be pacified, or when you keep it all inside.

That generally leads to you holding a grudge and that only intensifies your anger. You holding a grudge against another person never, never hurts that other person. They may not even know, or if they know, they probably don't care. But holding a grudge certainly hurts you. It can cause you to become depressed and almost everyone knows of your anger because it makes you irritable and cranky. You've seen that in yourself; we all have. That's why we must deal with our anger.

Okay, let's stop for a moment, take a deep breath and think about something. Ready? Give this some thought. “For every minute you are angry, you lose sixty seconds of happiness.” Your anger hurts no one but you, and while you may think you enjoy being angry because of what someone said about you, the evidence points otherwise. Anger, wrath, bitterness—all those sour attitudes that are so common in our lives—are like acid in a paper cup. They will destroy what holds them before they will do damage to anything or anyone else.

Anger is one of Satan’s best weapons that we use on ourselves.

There's an old Chinese proverb that says, "If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow."

Dealing with Anger

So, that leaves the big question. We know that our anger is usually not righteous anger, so we have to learn to take care of our flashes of anger or we will rob ourselves of the joy of our salvation. How do we do it? How do we deal with our anger? I have some suggestions.

There is a classic passage in the Bible that I find very helpful when dealing with my anger. It is Ephesians 4, verses 25 to the end of the chapter. Here are five things the apostle Paul is telling us in this passage about anger.

1. If you are angry about something, you cannot deal with it by keeping your anger bottled up.

You have to let it out; you have to talk about it; you have to say something. None of us is a mind reader. We need to hear from you what's bothering you. But the caution is that you have to be civil about the way your get your anger out there. You must be honest about exactly what it is that has wounded you or angered you; you have to speak the truth but you have to speak the truth in love, not in anger. Your purpose in talking about your anger isn't to vent, it's to clear the air and that is best accomplished when love and level-headedness are present. No one can be reasonable and angry at the same time. So, spit it out. Tell the person who has angered you what it is that you see they have done. They may not even know. But be loving to them. This won't work if your motives are not pure.

2. Don’t let your anger build up; deal with it as soon as possible.

“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger” (v.26). We must not allow what is bothering us to build up until we lose control. Dealing with and sharing what is bothering us before it gets to that point is important.

3. Attack the problem within you, not the person who angered you.

“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all
malice” (vv.29,31). Interesting, isn’t it, that the verses in the Bible that deal with anger focus on the person who is angry, not the person who makes you angry? Do you suppose there’s a reason for that?

4. Don’t do what comes naturally: do what is supernatural.

When someone wrongs you or says something unkind about you, because of our fallen, sinful nature, our first reaction is to attack them, spew out unkind things against them. That’s only natural. But the Christ-follower is to do what is unnatural, supernatural even. “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” (vv. 31-32).

5. Finally, we must act to solve the problem through forgiveness, not angry retaliation.

Again, verse 32, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” We cannot control how others act or respond to, but we can control our reactions to them.

Here’s a little advice. The more time you spend becoming intimate with God in prayer, daily engaging the Bible, asking the Holy Spirit to help you—the better chance you will respond to people who anger you in a way that will please God, satisfy you and maybe even surprise the person who angered you.

The newspaper carried a story about a tragic incident of violence in a country of South America. It seems a peasant killed his best friend while they were arguing about their political differences. A retired chief of the army, one of the country’s finest intellectuals, had occasion to question the killer. He asked, “Why did you do it? You fought about politics, but why did you kill him?” In chilling words, the peasant answered, “We began peacefully, and we argued. I killed him when I ran out of words.”

Don’t let your anger control you. Do what the Bible says and turn anger into forgiveness and joy. Everybody will be happier.
A BAKER’S DOZEN OF VERSES ABOUT ANGER

Psalm 37:8 “Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.”

Proverbs 14:29 “Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.”

Ephesians 4:31 “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”

Proverbs 19:11 “Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.”

James 1:19-20 “Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

Ecclesiastes 7:9 “Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.”

Proverbs 16:32 “Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”

Proverbs 29:11 “A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.”

Ephesians 4:26 - 27 “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”

Proverbs 15:18 “A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.”

Colossians 3:8 “But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.”

Proverbs 22:24 “Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man.”

Galatians 5:19 - 21 “Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”