



"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jer. 29:11)

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ANGER, RESENTMENT, RAGE AND BITTERNESS

Anger is perhaps one of the most lethal and confusing of all emotions. There are numerous scriptures teaching how destructive and harmful this emotion, when out of control, can be. It leads to all types of sin such as resentment, which leads to unforgiveness and physical and mental illness, rage, which results in shattered marriages and destroyed families, and bitterness, which leads to hardened hearts and separation from God. However, we also learn from scripture that anger is not sin: *Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and do not give the devil a foothold* (Eph. 4:26-27). We have numerous illustrations of God's anger. And since we know that we were created in the image of God, we too will experience anger. But... will we take it to sinful proportions?

In my counseling, I am confronted with different manifestations of anger daily. In fact, seldom is anger ever absent in human suffering. It is always a side effect of something else; it is never the core issue. It seems to me that the most common form that anger takes in our lives is that of bitterness, which can be defined as an attitude of prolonged, intense anger and animosity, often accompanied by cynicism and a closed mind. The bitter person may have been wronged by a spouse, child, or even an institution. Many have believed that God has even wronged them. The person dwells on the individual or event that caused the anger. The anger builds in the mind and gives root to obsession. Bitterness starts with anger, which is the natural and even healthy response to frustration, insult or injustice. Anger can be aroused by circumstances and events that are real or imagined, intentional or accidental.

In the Old Testament, the book of Esther gives a sobering example of a man destroyed by his own pride and bitterness. Haman was a government official who was enraged when he did not get homage from a Jewish exile named Mordecai. Haman's bitterness led to plans of mass murder, and

he even built a huge gallows on which to have Mordecai hanged. But the plans backfired, and Mordecai was given a place of honor in the kingdom while the bitter Haman was hanged on the gallows that he had built for another man.

In the Bible, bitterness is always described negatively. The person who persists in bitterness will find the cost to be heavy and self defeating. Most often you don't destroy others by bitterness; you begin to ravage yourself and all of your relationships.

There are essentially four things we will do with our anger: We will *suppress* it, *repress* it, *express* it, or *confess* it. To *suppress* anger is to deny it and pretend it isn't there. So it is held in resulting in a passive aggressive explosion of enraged hostility (not good)! To *repress* our anger is to be well aware of it but choose to hold it in. Here we are not surprised when we finally let it go and throw a brick through our neighbor's window. There are two ways to *express* anger. One is to release the built up adrenaline in our systems through physical activity and exertion, the second is to rage at someone and physically and/or verbally accost them. Both of these get rid of the excess adrenalin but the latter transfers your garbage to someone else, usually someone you love. The fourth way of dealing with anger is through *confession*, which literally means to speak forth. It is interesting that our subconscious does not know whether we are talking about our anger (confession) or yelling at someone (unhealthy expression). All it knows is that pent up feelings are getting released. I counsel individuals to use healthy expression for short term coping and on-going confession for long term coping. It can sometimes take months or even years, and the help of others, to break the sinful habit of anger and bitterness, but it is well worth the cost!